

“This book is truly a treasure. For the past decade, Sandra Schneiders has been sharing her profound insights into the Gospel of John with disparate groups through various lectures and articles. Here she gathers this wisdom into one volume, providing an indispensable resource for preachers, teachers, scholars, and students of the Bible. She leads her readers to a profound understanding of the bodiliness of the resurrection and how Jesus continues to be present to his disciples, as depicted in John 20–21. She invites us into a transformative encounter with the Risen One who commissioned his disciples to continue his mission throughout time.”

Barbara E. Reid, O.P.
Vice President and Academic Dean
Catholic Theological Union, Chicago

“Condensing and enriching a great range of scholarship, Sandra Schneiders’ work belongs to a new wave of writing on the Resurrection. . . . In vigorous, clear language, this book serves to sharpen the focus of faith and spirituality on the event that shapes and sustains the hope of Christians. Further, by grounding Christian faith in the bodily character of the Risen One, these essays underscore the bodily dimension of our redemption and enlarge the meaning of spirituality itself. There is something for everyone in this book: no one working to defend, commend, and illuminate the meaning of faith in Christ can afford to miss it.”

Anthony J. Kelly, CSsR
Professor of Theology
Australian Catholic University

“Sandra Schneiders’ new book brings together a number of her essays on the Resurrection Narrative in John’s gospel written since 2005, plus an earlier essay whose focus is more on the implications of the Resurrection for Christian living. These essays go beyond questions of ‘what happened’ to ‘what does it mean for me today?’ While Christian faith is rooted in the Resurrection, for many it remains simply a creedal statement or theological doctrine. Schneiders’ essays offer the chance to critically and seriously engage with one gospel account of the Resurrection and also to be challenged to integrate this into a vibrant spirituality of ‘presence.’ The dynamic proclamation, ‘He is risen,’ can still resonate in Christian lives today.”

Dr. Mary Coloe, PBVM
MCD University of Divinity
Melbourne, Australia

“Sandra Schneiders’ reading of John 20 clarifies the importance of the bodily presence of the glorified Jesus for an understanding of the Christian Church as *Jesus Risen in Our Midst* [and] . . . reflects profoundly on the Johannine understanding of Jesus’ death as taking away the sins of the world and the commissioning of the Spirit-filled Church to continue Jesus’ mission by forgiving sin and by embracing those who have been forgiven. Again: to be *Jesus Risen in Our Midst*.”

Francis J. Moloney, SDB, AM, FAHA
Senior Professorial Fellow
Australian Catholic University
Melbourne, Australia

“Sandra Schneiders’ lifetime of work with the Gospel of John, intersecting her deep engagement with the field of hermeneutics, has produced a volume of insight into the challenges of the Resurrection of Jesus. These essays, gathered from the past few years, are freshly situated for the consideration of those interested in the crucial matter of the Resurrection of Jesus. Schneiders has anticipated the challenges of contemporaries and presented the issues to us in most provocative and helpful terms. This book is a must-read for any Christian seeking postmodern engagement with this most central mystery of Christianity.”

Barbara Green, OP
Professor of Biblical Studies
Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology
at the Graduate Theological Union

“*Jesus Risen in Our Midst* is a feast of skilled exegesis and creative theological reflection. With the clarity and command that readers of Schneiders’ work have come to expect, this collection of essays delivers consistently fresh perspectives on Jesus’ Resurrection in the Gospel of John as it explores hermeneutics, embodiment, spirituality, and salvation throughout. Whether new to theology or a longtime student, this readable volume will challenge and delight.”

Brian Robinette
Associate Professor of Theology
Boston College

Jesus Risen in Our Midst

Essays on the Resurrection of Jesus
in the Fourth Gospel

Sandra M. Schneiders



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Introduction

The Relation of the Essays to One Another

This book is a collection of essays on the Resurrection of Jesus as it is presented in the Gospel of John. All of them, with the exception of the first chapter, which was published earlier, appeared between 2005 and 2011. Because they were published in academic journals or books, some outside the United States, they are not easily available to the nonspecialist reader. I have been asked on a number of occasions when I have been teaching or lecturing on this topic for copies of these articles or written access to their content, so I thought it would be worthwhile to bring them together in a single, easily accessible volume.

The first essay, a public lecture originally given to a mixed university and general audience at Trinity College, Dublin, and published in 1995, is an effort to articulate and respond to the situation of many contemporary believers when they confront the claim that Jesus of Nazareth, who really died at the hands of the Roman Empire in Palestine in the mid-first century of our era and was buried in a securely sealed tomb, rose bodily from the dead and is alive among us, the paradigm of the ultimate destiny of his followers. Borrowing a phrase from John Henry Newman, I have called the difficulty that this claim raises a problem of “imaginative implausibility.” How is the believer, even one who sincerely professes faith in the Resurrection, to understand or conceptualize the extraordinary event proclaimed in the narratives of Jesus’ bodily Resurrection from the dead that we find in the gospels? These narratives have no analogues in the rest of the New Testament, and their subject matter has no analogues in our ordinary historical experience. No other religion professes faith in the bodily resurrection (as opposed to resuscitation) of a historical (as distinct from a mythical) human being, much less bases

itself on such faith, and promises its adherents that they will share in that experience. This first essay, therefore, attempts to provide a framework for the rest of the essays by situating the Christian profession of faith in the Resurrection of Jesus in the context of the challenge to contemporary faith of this *sui generis* Christian datum.

The other essays are all concerned with interpretation of the Resurrection as it is presented in chapter 20 of the Gospel according to John. As will be clear, this is not a haphazard choice among the available New Testament texts on resurrection. John 20 is not a collection of disconnected or interchangeable episodes but a single narrative, composed of a number of "scenes" or "acts," which together present a coherent and integrated interpretation of the Resurrection. Although these essays are not sequential in the sense of commenting on John 20 from the first verse to the last verse and there is no necessity to read the essays in the order they are presented here, they do offer, if read together, a comprehensive (although far from exhaustive) interpretation of John's theology and spirituality of the Resurrection.

Since each essay was originally presented as a freestanding lecture or article, each can be read on its own without reference to the others. This independence of the essays, however, results in some repetition. Certain themes and presuppositions occur in more than one essay, in some cases developed in detail and in others briefly summarized. I have not attempted to excise this repetition because the essays will probably be more useful if each remains independent of the others, able to be understood on its own terms. Teachers, for example, might want to use one essay in a class, and it is helpful to have all the material necessary for understanding that essay in the essay itself. Or a reader may be studying one topic or theme that is treated in one of the essays, and it will be more convenient not to have to refer to other essays for material intrinsic to the project in hand. Someone reading the whole book can easily skip material with which she or he is familiar from a previous essay or may find the repeated material more illuminating as it is seen in more than one context.

The material that appears in more than one essay can be summarized as follows:

1. It is presupposed that the Johannine Resurrection Narrative is *a single literary entity*, not a collection of separate or unrelated episodes. Each "scene" is integrated into the whole narrative the way acts are integrated into a play, and so understanding the structure of the whole

is important for understanding the parts and vice versa. Therefore, the appendix contains some diagrams of various ways of structuring chapter 20 as a whole, which should help illuminate the unity and diversity in the chapter.

2. The Resurrection Narrative is *integrated into the Fourth Gospel as a whole by means of two sets of texts*: (1) the “temple texts,” namely, John 2:13-21 on the body of Jesus as the New Temple; John 7:37-39 on Jesus as the source of the living water as was the temple described in Ezekiel 47; and John 19:33-37 on the blood and water flowing from the pierced side of Jesus as the water flowed from the side of the temple; and (2) the “taking away of sin(s) texts” in John 1:29 and 20:19-23, which form an “inclusio” or literary “bookends” for the gospel as a whole.

3. The fundamental overall interpretation of the Resurrection in John’s gospel as the *establishment of the New Covenant*, particularly as promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 37:23-28, is in the background of each of the pericopes and in the foreground in the central pericope, John 20:19-23, the appearance to the disciples on Easter evening.

4. Basic to understanding what the Resurrection means in John is an understanding of *Semitic anthropology and sapiential eschatology*. In other words, the way the Evangelist understands the human person (anthropology) is essentially the way the Old Testament presents the human being, that is, as an indivisible whole in relation to God, rather than the way we moderns understand humans as composed of separable elements such as body and soul, flesh and blood, and able to be understood apart from any relation to the divine. Similarly, the way the Evangelist understands the “last things,” or the final state of humanity and creation (eschatology), is more like the understanding of these matters that we find in the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament than the understanding that is more characteristic of the so-called historical books of the Bible and the prophetic books. John presents Jesus as operating more in terms of what biblical theologians call “realized eschatology” than the final eschatology characteristic of the Synoptic Gospels.

These two differences, in anthropology, or the understanding of the human being, and in eschatology, or the understanding of the end of history, both personal and universal, make John’s gospel as a whole, and especially his interpretation of the Resurrection, quite different from that of the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). This difference is not a matter of contradiction but of mutually enriching complementarity. But

if one tries to read John through Synoptic lenses or vice versa the result can be distorted and even erroneous interpretation.

5. A final point concerns *the distinction* that emerges in John (but not in the Synoptics) *between the Resurrection and the Glorification of Jesus*. What happened to Jesus on the cross is presented in John as his Glorification, or his return to God from whom he came forth into the world in the Incarnation. His return on Easter to his disciples from whom he had departed in death, a return that becomes the experience of all of his post-Easter disciples, is what John presents as Jesus' Resurrection. This is an important distinction because it emphasizes that there are two aspects to the mystery we normally refer to as the Resurrection, namely, what happened to *Jesus* at the end of his earthly life, which is the foundation of what is now true of his *disciples*. If Jesus himself is not glorified, there is no basis for the hope of his disciples to finally overcome death. But if Jesus, personally glorified in God, had not returned to his own, we would neither know nor be able to participate in Jesus' victory over death.

These basic theological themes are at least in the background, if not in the foreground, in virtually all the essays, each of which deals with one or more of the five "scenes" or "acts" in John's Resurrection Narrative, namely, the discovery of the empty tomb by Mary Magdalene and its examination by Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple on Easter morning (John 20:1-10); the appearance in the garden of the glorified Jesus to Mary Magdalene on Easter morning (John 20:11-18); Jesus' appearance to the disciples in a closed room in Jerusalem on Easter night (John 20:19-23); the appearance of Jesus in the same place one week later in which Thomas, who was not present at the Easter evening appearance, is converted to Easter faith by Jesus (John 20:24-29); and the finale of the chapter in which the Evangelist includes in the mystery of the Resurrection all later disciples of the risen Jesus, those who have not seen and have believed (John 20:30-31).

The Approach to Scripture in These Essays

Operative in all the essays in this volume are certain presuppositions about the nature of the Bible as Christian Scripture and certain methodological, theological, and hermeneutical approaches to interpretation that flow from these presuppositions. Because these presuppositions

influence the interpretations in a significant way and are not explained in detail in the essays as such, it might be useful to spell them out explicitly in advance.

The Canon of Scripture and Intertextuality

First, regardless of when or where or by whom or for what purpose different parts of the Bible were composed, they now form what Christians consider the “canon” of Scripture, that is, an authoritative theological whole rather than isolated literary pieces assembled extrinsically within the covers of a book. This canonicity generates the theological dimension of the literary feature of “intertextuality,” or the mutual relationship of the parts to each other, the parts to the whole, and the whole to the parts. Regardless of how the texts were related to each other historically or in the minds of the biblical authors (which are both important), all the texts of the Bible are now related to each other in the light of faith in the messianic identity and mission of Jesus. This does not mean that the Jewish Scriptures do not have their own integrity that requires them to be treated on their own terms in relation to Jewish history and faith. But, for the Christian reader, the Jewish Bible is the Old (or First) Testament. It is a constant and active background and resource for the interpretation of the New (or Second) Testament, and the New Testament functions actively in the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament.

Sometimes in the New Testament there is explicit reference to, citation of, evocation of, or allusion to Old Testament persons, themes, actions, history, and so on. But often the influence of the Old Testament on the New is like the musical score of a film that is subtly educating the perceptions and emotions of the reader, making her or him sensitive to insights that may not become completely explicit but that influence interpretation. And, of course, intertextuality also works the other way around as the New Testament sheds a different light on the Old Testament that would not be seen by someone unfamiliar with the New. For example, only in the light of the Genesis creation account is Jesus seen as the “last Adam,” but conversely, the Christian reads the story of Adam and Eve as the “fall” of the original ancestors because of the interpretation of the paschal mystery of Jesus as universal salvation.

This continual, sometimes explicit but very often implicit, influence of the Old Testament on John’s gospel is one of the latter’s most striking

features. But, characteristic of John is that this influence is rarely explicit in the form of direct citations of the Old Testament such as we find very frequently in Matthew. The Old Testament is omnipresent in the Fourth Gospel but more in its “lighting” or its “sound effects,” its characterizations, its resonances, its allusions, its evocations than in the form of explicit word-for-word quotations.

Much less characteristic of John’s gospel is the kind of New Testament intertextuality one finds in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which are clearly often citing one another or a shared source such as the hypothetical document scholars call “Q” (for the German *Quelle*, meaning “source,” which is assumed to be common to the Synoptics). It is seldom a good idea to try to find a Synoptic source or parallel text in John. Even when there is some textual similarity between John and the Synoptics, John is often using his “borrowed” material in such entirely original ways that reading one in terms of the other leads to misinterpretation.

Presuppositions about Interpretation

Second, in the process of interpretation in these essays there are three types of presuppositions that are operative. The first is **methodological**. The essays in this volume are *basically literary-critical in approach* rather than historical-critical. The literary-critical approach is characterized primarily by its privileging of the final text in its actual form rather than the sources, prehistory, processes of composition, history of redaction, and so on. The literary critic works with the text as a unity, in the form in which we have it in the best available manuscripts. That does not preclude investigation of sources, theories of authorship, redaction criticism, and so on. But these are used in service of interpretation of the final product, the gospel as it stands, rather than for constructing a hypothesis about what the text means in terms of what its history of composition involved. Thus, questions of characterization, plot, narrative structure and other genres, language, themes, symbolism, and so on are more significant than investigations of historical facticity, processes of composition, or parallels with other sources. By way of example, for the literary critic, in contrast to a historical critic, the primary question about the scene of Jesus’ death in John is not about whether his side was actually pierced with a lance (none of the Synoptics corroborates this detail) or whether such a wound would have produced a flow of blood and water given the physical condition of one who had died of suffocation caused

by crucifixion. The primary approach to the meaning of the text involves attention to such features as the Old Testament text evoked by the Evangelist, the symbolism of blood and water as it has been developed throughout the gospel, the way in which this symbolic feature is integrated into the witness motif of the Mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple at the foot of the cross, the relation of this scene to the opening scene of Jesus' public life in John, namely, the wedding at Cana, and the like.

A second type of presupposition operative in the interpretation of John 20 in the essays in this volume is **theological**, namely, that the *locus* of revelation is not the historical events that the gospel text recounts, nor even the intention of the author, but the text itself. Our interest is not primarily in what John the Evangelist intended to say but in what the Gospel of John actually says. This gives rise to a type of interpretation that is very different from that with which many critical readers are familiar. The latter are looking for "what really happened" (to which the text, they believe, gives us access) as the revelatory basis of their faith. It is what Jesus actually said, or did, or suffered that constitutes revelation. This is why a group of researchers like the Jesus Seminar scholars are so concerned to establish whether the pre-Easter Jesus actually said such-and-such a sentence (that is, whether the sentence is "authentic") or whether the sentence reflects the understanding and interpretation of the community/evangelist that produced the text. The former is considered truly revelatory whereas the latter is later ("non-authentic") interpretation. When we have several versions of the same sentence, the challenge is to decide first whether Jesus actually said something like this and second, if he did, which of the available versions is closest to what Jesus actually said.

Anyone familiar with the Gospel of John will know that much of what is attributed to Jesus in John not only has no parallels in the Synoptics but could hardly have been said by a first-century Jewish prophet. But down through the centuries John's gospel has been considered supremely revelatory. From the earliest centuries (beginning with Clement of Alexandria in the second century, cited in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.7), John has been called "the spiritual Gospel," not despite its often "nonhistorical" (meaning nonfactual) character, but because of its deep salvific truthfulness. In other words, truth and fact are not the same thing, and we often do a better job of conveying the truth of something by bypassing the literally factual in favor of the metaphorical or symbolic or even by rearranging "facts" or supplying interpretations. But, in any

case, the revelatory character of Scripture is a property of Scripture as *text*, not of the text as factual record. This is not at all to deny that Jesus was a real, historical human being who actually lived, acted, spoke, etc., nor that the gospels give us reliable access to this human being and his life. But we do not have a tape recording, a court stenographer's notes, or a camcorder video of the life of Jesus. We have a profound interpretation of the meaning of Jesus as the ultimate revelation of God, which we access not primarily by archaeological excavations but by theological interpretation.

My position (and that of many contemporary, especially literarily oriented, scholars), therefore, is that the locus of revelation is the text itself, what the inspired biblical authors wrote for the sake of our salvation. In other words, our faith is normed by the inspired text of Holy Scripture, not by historical facts, many of which we cannot establish with absolute accuracy but which, even if we could establish their facticity absolutely, would not in themselves be revelatory. Many of Jesus' contemporaries knew exactly what he did and said because they saw and heard him. But they did not believe. On the contrary, many who never saw or heard the pre-Easter Jesus, came to believe in him because of the word of those bearing witness. Our faith rests on the word, the text, of the apostolic witnesses through which we encounter Jesus in the New Testament.

The third presupposition is **hermeneutical**. If the locus of revelation is the text, the *event* of revelation takes place in the interaction between text and reader, that is, in the reading (or hearing) by which one interprets the text. This interaction or encounter between reader and text gives rise to meaning, to understanding. And it is understanding that is transformative.

Transformation is the purpose of our encounter with God through the word of God mediated by the biblical text. The reader will note that none of the essays in this book is a purely or exclusively academic project. My purpose in writing them was not to critically analyze the text for its own sake or to unravel historical conundrums or mediate disagreements between texts or scholars. My purpose was to facilitate the transformative encounter with the word of God in the interaction between the reader and the text.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, the erudite scholar of comparative religions who died in 2000, in his influential book *What Is Scripture?* suggests that Scripture is less a noun (denoting a book or its contents) than a verb (a way of acting), that is, less a thing than a process. In his wide-ranging

study of how the sacred texts of each of the world's great religions function in their respective believing community, he demonstrates that, in attempting to engage the major issues and crises of its concrete historical existence, the community uses its sacred texts to find sustaining cultural meaning. The texts the community considers sacred, revealed, and normative supply the reservoir of language, symbols, narratives, personal models, rituals, and so on by which the community negotiates its engagement with matters of ultimate concern. The texts are not dogmatic "answer books" or moral "manuals" but treasuries of experience with the Ultimate, the Transcendent, which model and mediate ongoing cultural engagement with ultimate concerns in the changing circumstances of historical existence. Thus, ongoing interpretation rather than definitive fixation of meaning is the sign of the life of the texts in the community. This process of "scripturing," rather than a fixed body of immutable truths enshrined in a document, is what characterizes Scripture as revelatory rather than a text as repository of information. Although this living relationship with the text, and through the text with Ultimate Reality, is realized in very different ways in different traditions, the sacred texts remain Scripture only to the extent that they function interactively within the community rather than becoming objects, however revered. In Christian terms we might say that only as long as the Bible resists our temptation to turn it into a relic or talisman does it remain Scripture. When our engagement with the text becomes a matter of "What does the Bible say?"—meaning "What is the (one and only correct) answer to this question or position on this topic?"—we have ceased "to scripture," and the biblical text has become an idol.

The essays in this book are not an attempt to present the correct information about the Resurrection of Jesus but to facilitate the reader's living engagement with the all-important question of what the Resurrection means in the life of believers. As Paul says, if Christ is not raised, your faith is in vain and you are still in your sins (see 1 Cor 15:14). But he was not attempting to prove to them that the Resurrection is a fact, much less to threaten them into an orthodox profession required for either Church membership or eternal salvation. He was trying to engage them in the adventure of faith in Jesus who is not a figure of the past, someone who died and is available to his disciples only as a memory, but alive and present to and among and in them. That is the same project that, I hope, engages the reader of these essays, whom I am inviting to read the Resurrection Narrative of the Fourth Gospel with the same lively faith that energized the first disciples of the risen Jesus and whose testimony

constitutes the biblical text we read today and invites all subsequent believers to enter into this mystery, to surrender to it, to live ever more deeply into it.

Overview of the Content

The essays in this volume fall rather naturally into two parts: the first concerned with the bodiliness of the Resurrection of Jesus and how he is present to his disciples throughout time; the second concerned with the central pericope of John 20, namely, the establishment of the New Covenant (John 20:19-23) and the commissioning of the disciples to continue the mission of Jesus, to take away the sin that prevents people from participating in that covenant.

Part 1: The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus

Chapter 1: The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus and Christian Spirituality. As mentioned above, this chapter provides a framework for Christian reflection on the Resurrection of Jesus by identifying the real issue, namely, the actual presence and action of Jesus in the life of his post-paschal disciples, which depends on Jesus' personal Resurrection. Unless Jesus is actually risen in the full integrity of his humanity, his presence to his post-paschal disciples is reduced to a memory of One who, in fact, has died and is no longer personally present. Because bodiliness is integral to humanity, Jesus' real Resurrection and presence to his disciples requires bodily resurrection. This essay is concerned with the meaning of body, ways of understanding bodiliness that are compatible with both the gospel data on the Resurrection and contemporary rationality, and the implications for faith, spirituality, and discipleship of the real presence of the risen Jesus to and in and among his disciples of all time.

Chapter 2: Touching the Risen Jesus: Mary Magdalene and Thomas the Twin in John 20. This essay is focused on the issue of the bodiliness of the risen Jesus as it is presented in the first and the fourth pericopes of John 20, the encounter between Mary Magdalene and Jesus in the Garden of the Tomb and the encounter between Thomas the Twin and Jesus in the place where the disciples were gathered on the evening of the first Sunday after Easter. Both pericopes are concerned with the issue of "touching Jesus": Mary Magdalene restrained from touching him, and Thomas

invited to touch him. The issue for the contemporary believer is “Where is Jesus?” and “How can he be encountered?” These two pericopes, which flank the central pericope of the establishment of the New Covenant, narratively explore the answer to these two questions. In effect, Jesus is present to his post-paschal disciples in the community of believers but only to those who, in fact, believe. Mary Magdalene must move from the dispensation of the pre-paschal Jesus-in-the-flesh whose corpse she was seeking on Easter morning into the post-paschal dispensation in which the living Jesus is present in the community to which she bears witness; Thomas must move from his fixation on the type of experience of Jesus that characterized his historical career into the acceptance of the ecclesial presence of Jesus in and through the witness of the disciples. In both cases, the obsession with the historical-physical must give way to faith in the ecclesial-bodily presence of Jesus. Touch, the most intimate of the senses, is not abolished but transformed, as is the believer’s experience of the risen Jesus.

Chapter 3: The Resurrection of the Body in the Fourth Gospel: Key to Johannine Spirituality. This essay is the most comprehensive and synthetic of the collection. It deals with the whole of John 20, including the introduction and conclusion and the central pericope on the establishment of the New Covenant. It deals with the issue of the bodiliness of the risen Jesus in terms of Semitic anthropology and sapiential eschatology in the attempt to develop a theory/theology of the body in the dispensation of the Resurrection. The essay pulls together all the issues of part 1 in relation to the spirituality of the contemporary believer.

Part 2: John’s Theology and Spirituality of Presence

Chapter 4: The Raising of the New Temple: John 20:19-23 and Johannine Ecclesiology. This chapter deals in detail with the central pericope of John 20, the raising up in the midst of the disciples of the New Temple, that is, the bodily risen Jesus, and his establishment of the New Covenant between the community of his disciples who are now the new People of God and the One who is now the God and Father not only of Jesus but also of his disciples. In this pericope the Johannine “great commission” is given to Jesus’ new corporate Body, the Church. Empowered by Jesus’ Spirit whom he breathes into them, the disciples will continue the work Jesus was empowered and sent to accomplish, namely, the taking away of the sin of the world.

Jesus, in his Glorification on the cross, took away the “sin” (singular) of the world, the refusal of God’s love. He definitively broke the power of Satan over humanity. But dealing with the “fallout” of Satan’s work, the “sins” (plural) of humans down through the ages, will be the task of the Church until the time when all humanity will share in the Resurrection of the Son. This is the “greater works” that Jesus promised his disciples they would do after his departure.

Part of the task of this chapter is to try to distinguish the Johannine “great commission” from the Matthean notion of “binding and loosing,” or granting and refusing absolution of particular sins, which is not a Johannine concept or theological motif and is hardly sufficiently global or transcendent to constitute a description of the Church’s mission until the end of time.

Chapter 5: “Whose Sins You Shall Forgive . . .”: The Holy Spirit and the Forgiveness of Sin(s) in the Fourth Gospel. This chapter deals with the same pericope, the appearance of Jesus to the disciples on Easter night, and the Johannine “great commission.” But the focus in this essay is an analysis of the theology of sin, which is deeply enmeshed with the violence that undermines the community Jesus came to found and its defeat through the forgiveness Jesus mediates rather than on the sealing of the New Covenant with the New People of God that was the focus of the preceding chapter. In particular, this chapter is concerned with the role of the Holy Spirit in the overcoming of sin. The Holy Spirit who descended on Jesus at the beginning of his public life is given by Jesus to his disciples to enable them to be his presence in the world and to carry on his work of defeating the power of the Prince of this World and drawing all people to Jesus in the community that is his body.

Chapter 6: The Lamb of God and the Forgiveness of Sin(s) in the Fourth Gospel. This essay, the most recent, published in 2010, is the culmination of the work on the Johannine “great commission.” Its context is the contemporary situation of sinfulness, namely, the worldwide escalation of violence. The theories of two contemporary thinkers, René Girard on scapegoating violence and Eugen Drewermann on the psychological problem of the refusal of creaturehood, are used to analyze the problem of violence: Where does it come from? Why is it so universal, endemic, and seemingly ineradicable? Why are humans so totally incapable of dealing with it? How does the salvific work of Jesus offer its solution? How are his post-Easter disciples called to participate in that work?

The particular focus of the article in relation to the Fourth Gospel is on the unique Johannine title for Jesus, “the Lamb of God” who takes away the sin of the world. An investigation of the Old Testament background of this title in the Abraham and Isaac narrative, the Suffering Servant figure in Isaiah, and the symbol of the Paschal Lamb helps unfold the nature of the foundational sin, namely, the refusal of creaturehood, and the character of the only remedy for it, namely, the undergoing of scapegoating violence by Jesus whose salvific suffering takes away the sin of the world. Jesus accepted the creaturehood that humans have refused and by doing so broke the hold of Satan on the world that God so loved.

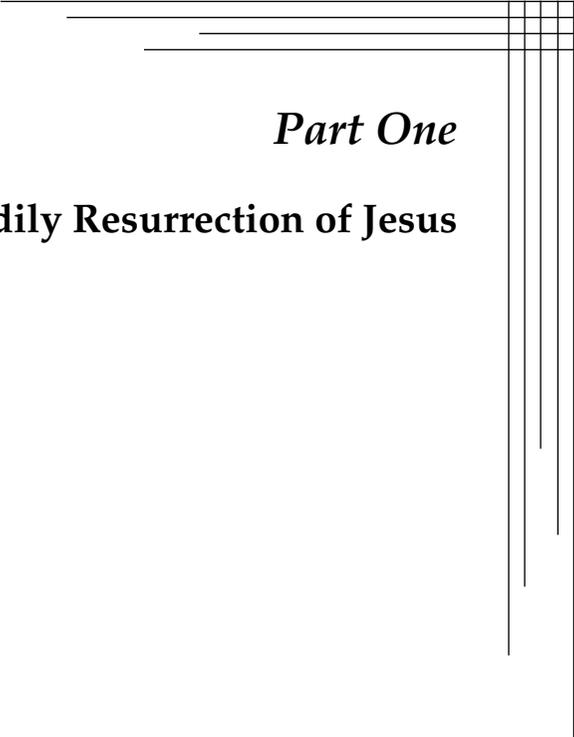
The interpretation of Jesus’ salvific work opens up the meaning of the participation of his disciples in that work that is communicated to them by the risen Jesus in the gift of the Spirit on Easter night.

Conclusion

Although these essays do not constitute either a full commentary on or interpretation of the Johannine Resurrection Narrative or a complete theology of the Resurrection of Jesus or its significance for believers, I hope the collection will function to introduce readers in a new way into the theological problematic of the Resurrection in the New Testament and show how wrestling with the biblical material on this theme can move beyond endless arguments about unavailable facts or pointless apologetic that can never produce or augment faith. By seriously engaging the biblical text on the Resurrection of Jesus, not as a trove of facts about the first century, but as a privileged mediation of the paschal mystery, readers can find their way into the world of eternal life Jesus opened for us in his victory over death. If those who read these essays emerge from the experience more sensitized to the spirituality of the Fourth Gospel, better readers of the biblical text, and more committed participants in the life of the One risen in our midst, it will have more than achieved its purpose.

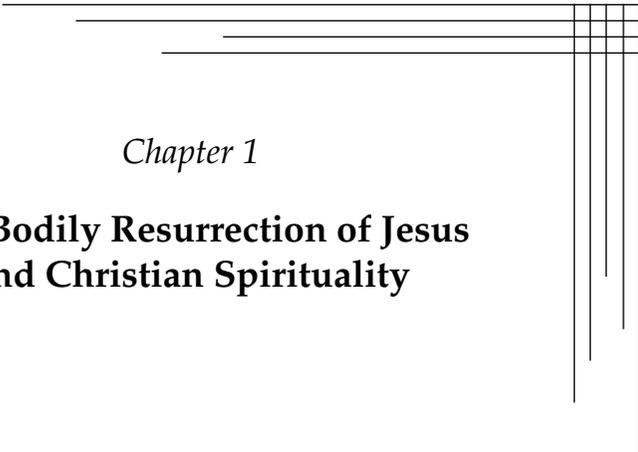
Abbreviations

FE	Fourth Evangelist
FG	Fourth Gospel
LXX	Septuagint
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament



Part One

The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus



Chapter 1

The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus and Christian Spirituality

I. Introduction

The primary concern in this essay on the Resurrection of Jesus is not purely exegetical or abstractly theological but arises from the realization I have come to through privileged involvement in the spirituality of many contemporary Catholic Christians that the active presence of Jesus in their lives presents a very real problem. Jesus Christ is, theologically speaking, at the heart of Christian faith and spirituality. His effective disappearance from the horizon of reality for many people, especially the more educated, is not a peripheral matter but a threat to the integrity and specificity of their Christian faith.

A number of factors have converged in recent decades to undermine the once self-evident conviction about the reality and activity of a living Jesus in the daily life and experience of the Christian. Among these factors is the encounter of Christianity with the great world religions. As thoughtful Christians have come to know the nobility and purity of life, the courageous social commitment, and the theological and philosophical sophistication of the pilgrims on these ancient spiritual paths, they have developed serious hesitations about the absolute and exclusivist claims of the Church for Jesus' uniqueness as the sole savior and only way of

Originally published as "The Resurrection of Jesus and Christian Spirituality," in *Christian Resources of Hope*, ed. Maureen Junker-Kenny (Dublin: Columba Press, 1995), 81–114.

salvation for all peoples, claims that are intimately connected to belief in Jesus' divinity and Resurrection.¹ The avatars and spokespersons of the divine in these other religions seem to play the same role in the lives of their devotees that Jesus does in the Christian scheme of things, but none of these other religions makes claims about resurrection from the dead and subsequent indwelling presence. Although this challenge to some of the central affirmations of classical Christology is not the subject of this essay, the reflections that follow may have some relevance to that discussion.

A second factor contributing to the erosion of Christian faith in the real presence of the living Jesus in the life of the believer comes from contemporary science and especially from cosmology influenced by post-Newtonian physics. If the real Jesus is, in some sense, bodily then, if he is alive and active, he would seem to require a "place" in which to exist. Since the idea of a geographical, extraterrestrial place is no longer plausible to the contemporary mind, the lack of a "where" for Jesus (to say nothing of Mary and the saints) raises a serious question about the "what" of the claim that he is alive and active in the real world.

A third source of conceptual difficulty for the contemporary believer comes from modern depth psychology and cultural anthropology. These disciplines raise unavoidable questions about personal, individual, and *a fortiori* bodily survival beyond death for anybody, including Jesus, as well as serious questions about how, and therefore if, personal indwelling of one bodily person in another is possible. The spiritualization of these questions is actually an avoidance of them because the issue is not whether there can be, or is, a divine (or at least supra-human) spiritual influence in human life (which is a widespread, if not virtually universal, conviction among religious people)² but whether Jesus, risen from the dead, is still active in the world and specifically in the life of the believer.

¹ Serious discussions of and a variety of possible responses to the problem posed by the encounter of traditional Christology with the world religions can be found in Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986); Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), esp. chap. 9; Thomas N. Hart, *To Know and Follow Jesus: Contemporary Christology* (New York/Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1984), esp. chap. 10; Monika K. Hellwig, *Jesus, the Compassion of God: New Perspectives on the Tradition of Christianity* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983), esp. part 3.

² This is what Huston Smith refers to as "the primordial tradition," certainly more widespread among humans than the purely materialistic or atheistic alternatives. See Huston Smith, *Forgotten Truth: The Primordial Tradition* (New York: Harper and Row,

The cumulative effect of these (and probably other) factors on the religious imagination of many contemporary believers is that it has become very difficult to conceive of Jesus, who really died on the cross in the first century, as personally alive and active in the present. As Newman once observed, what we believe must be imaginatively plausible, that is, credible to the imagination.³ The inability of a reasonably sophisticated modern person to imagine Jesus as personally alive and present, active in the world and indwelling his disciples, is handled in various ways in the spirituality of different people.

Some have, not without deep regret and sadness, consigned Jesus to history. He is for them a supreme moral model because of the way he lived, what he taught, and how he died. His memory challenges and motivates them. If there is any way, however mysterious, in which those who have died are present to us, e.g., through memory or affection or within the energy of the cosmos in which we participate, Jesus certainly shares that type of presence. But essentially he is a figure of history, not of the present.

Other people have subsumed Jesus into the Spirit understood as a cosmic, perhaps personal but probably impersonal, life force that holds the universe together and gives support and direction to all things. This cosmic spirit is, at least for Christians, the Spirit of Jesus in that it keeps alive the project Jesus initiated. But again, Jesus himself must be recognized as part of the past, present in remembrance and even in the power of the Spirit, but not personally available to the contemporary believer.

A more conventional and perhaps less spiritually stressful approach is that of the fideist who simply professes the faith of the Church, whatever that entails, without attempting to make sense of such creedal affirmations as "I believe that Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of God and will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead," not to mention "I believe that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again on the

1976), and his reply to the challenge of Steven Katz, "Is There a Perennial Philosophy?," *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 55 (Fall 1987): 553–66. See also James Burnell Robinson, "The History of Religions and the Primordial Tradition," in *Fragments of Infinity: Essays in Religion and Philosophy*, Festschrift in Honour of Professor Huston Smith, ed. Arvind Sharma (Dorset: Prism, 1991), 217–33, which relates Smith's theory to the current "dialogue of the world religions."

³ Gerald O'Collins, in *Jesus Risen: An Historical, Fundamental and Systematic Examination of Christ's Resurrection* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 131, discusses the role of logical, practical, and creative reason in faith in the Resurrection and places this insight of Newman under the third category.

third day," or "Those who love me will keep my word. . . . [I] will come to them and make [my] home with them" (John 14:23).⁴

II. The Crux of the Problem: Resurrection

The theological crux of the problem in spirituality around the real presence and personal activity of Jesus in the life of the believer is the Resurrection. It is virtually certain, historically, that a Jewish peasant, Jesus of Nazareth, lived in first-century Palestine and that he really died by Roman execution with the collusion of the hierarchy of his own people. The faith of the Church holds, however, that this is not the end of the story. Jesus, it asserts, rose from the dead on the third day and is still with us. It is precisely this affirmation of the personal, bodily Resurrection of Jesus and his continued presence and activity in the world that poses a stumbling block for the religious imagination of some contemporary believers. Unless something that is intellectually coherent within the horizon generated by modern science, cosmology, psychology, anthropology, and history can be said about resurrection, the real presence of Jesus in the spirituality of the contemporary Christian, however deeply desired, can remain imaginatively implausible.

A very brief sketch of the career of the Resurrection in the faith experience, that is, in the spirituality (as distinct from official theology),⁵ of the Church will help locate the contemporary problem. The Church was born, somehow, in the experience of the Resurrection or, more exactly, in the experience of the risen Jesus by some of his historical companions. These people—e.g., Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter, the assembled disciples, the two Emmaus disciples, and eventually Saul of Tarsus (who was not a companion of the historical Jesus but was his contemporary)—witnessed to their personal experience of having seen and interacted with the living Jesus, the numerically identical person whom they (with the exception of Paul) had known during his earthly life, sometime shortly after his death and burial. Faith in the personal, indeed bodily, Resurrection of Jesus, including its significance as divine vindication of

⁴ The text is in the plural because the promise is that Jesus and the Father will come to the disciple. I put it in the singular to emphasize that the promise involves the presence of Jesus and not simply of God. All citations from the Bible, unless otherwise noted, are from the New Revised Standard Version.

⁵ For a good historical synopsis of the theology of the Resurrection, see O'Collins, *Jesus Risen*, 7–98.

Jesus' life and mission and its implication of eternal life for his followers, was the central tenet of early Christianity, that which essentially differentiated it on the one hand from the Judaism within which it arose and on the other hand from the religions of its Hellenistic surroundings. Faith in the Resurrection of Jesus made martyrdom possible because it assured those who shared in the sufferings and death of Jesus that they would also rise with him. The early Christians were Easter people and "alleluia" was their song. To a much greater extent than in the West, the Eastern Church has preserved this paschal religious culture.

In the Middle Ages the Christian faith underwent a pervasive reformulation in the categories of neo-Aristotelian philosophy. Questions about resurrection, both that of Jesus and that of Christians, were re-examined and perhaps overly determined by the preoccupations and the possibilities of the new philosophy. Questions centered on issues such as the physical requirements for resurrection (e.g., whether all the bodily parts of the deceased had to be available if he or she was to be raised) and the qualities of glorified bodies (such as subtlety, which enabled them to pass through solid substances).⁶ While these concerns had some implications for the religious imagination and popular piety of medieval Christians and some effect on Church practice (e.g., the prohibition of any form of disposal of the dead that would make bodily reassembly at the general resurrection impossible), they probably contributed little to the substantial enrichment of faith.

For the four centuries after the Council of Trent (1545–63) the Resurrection of Jesus was, in terms of spirituality, a quiet little doctrine that was dutifully professed once a week at the end of the Creed and was dramatically celebrated once a year at Easter. During the Easter season, it was solemnly proclaimed as the heart of the faith and then remanded to the liturgical and spiritual sidelines as the Church returned to "ordinary time," that is, to spiritual business as usual in which the historical life and teaching of Jesus, his exemplary Passion and saving death, and the life and virtues of Mary and the saints supplied the content for the devotional life of believers. (I am always intrigued by the fact that, even

⁶ For the classical medieval synthesis on the conditions (e.g., age, sex, etc.) and qualities (i.e., impassibility, subtlety, agility, clarity) of the resurrection body, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Supplement QQ 79–85. Margaret Miles, "The Revelatory Body: Signorelli's 'Resurrection of the Flesh' at Orvieto," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 22 (1992): 10–13, is a fascinating study of the late medieval problematic concerning the resurrection of the body as it is reflected in the arguments over the depiction of nudity in religious art.

today, many retreat directors, spiritual guides, and preachers seem to run out of steam in the face of the mystery of the Resurrection. What can be said about it that is morally motivating or spiritually functional in the life of believers? Like Milton's Hell, which is so much more interesting and convincing than his Heaven, the life of struggle and the self-giving death of Jesus are much easier to sink one's spiritual teeth into than his glorious Resurrection, which no one witnessed and no one has, as yet, emulated.)

There is no question that those who carried the Christian and especially the Catholic faith to the new world in the post-Reformation era were much more effective in communicating the reality of the Passion than that of the Resurrection to the peoples they encountered. Outside the Easter season, the Resurrection functioned in the post-Tridentine Church mainly as the *pièce de résistance* in its apologetic armory. It was the ultimate miracle that "proved" that Jesus was God and Christianity the one true religion.

In the 1950s the liturgical renewal that was maturing in the wake of the biblical renewal blessed by Pius XII in 1943 in his encyclical on the study of Scripture, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*,⁷ reasserted the centrality of Easter in the liturgical year and of the paschal sacraments—baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist—in the Christian life. This rediscovery of the biblical, liturgical, and therefore spiritual significance of the Resurrection⁸ was corroborated in the 1960s and 1970s by the theological renaissance connected with Vatican II, which unleashed a sudden resurgence, even an explosion, of speculative interest in the Resurrection. Literally thousands of books, monographs, dissertations, articles, and symposia proceedings on the subject were published. Even today the Resurrection is a virtual theological cottage industry. A Portuguese scholar recently published an article nearly three hundred pages long

⁷ The text of the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* is available in English in James J. Megivern, ed., *Official Catholic Teachings: Biblical Interpretation* (Wilmington, NC: McGrath, 1978), 316–42.

⁸ Books that crossed the boundaries of biblical study, liturgy, theology, and spirituality, such as Francis X. Durrwell, *The Resurrection: A Biblical Study* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960); Anscar Vonier, *The Glorification of Christ and the Eucharist* (Bristol: Burleigh, 1938; reprinted from *Buckfast Abbey Chronical* [July 1938]); and Columba Marmion, *Christ in His Mysteries*, trans. Mother M. St. Thomas, 7th ed. (St. Louis: Herder, 1940), signaled the reemergence of the Resurrection as a significant feature of immediate pre- and postconciliar spirituality.

with more than five hundred bibliographical references surveying recent research on the Resurrection.⁹

Although my concern in this essay is precisely the Resurrection of Jesus as the crux of the problem of Jesus in contemporary spirituality, I am not going to plunge into the current multifaceted discussion of such issues as the facticity and character of the Easter appearances, the historical reliability of the accounts of the empty tomb, the character of the Easter witness, the properties of the risen body, the content of the Easter kerygma, and so on. All of these questions have been exhaustively, and in some cases excellently, treated in recent biblical and theological literature on the subject.¹⁰ I am interested in the point of intersection between the biblical-theological issue of the Resurrection of Jesus and the problem in spirituality of the presence and role of Jesus in the faith life of the believer. For both substantive and strategic reasons, I think (or at least hope) that I can get at this problem by addressing a single facet of the resurrection problematic (which also has some relevance for the questions alluded to above) and one that is not often dealt with directly by either New Testament scholars or theologians, namely, the issue of the *body*, and specifically the body of the risen Jesus.

I may be wrong, but in my ministerial experience with people dealing with issues in their own spirituality, e.g., Eucharist, personal prayer, and ministry, the problem about Jesus centers on the imaginative noncredibility of Jesus' post-death bodiliness and therefore of his personal continuance and real presence today. In other words, to be very precise from the standpoint of spirituality, it is not the *historicity* as such of the Easter appearances or the empty tomb that constitutes the stumbling block for faith. The problem is the *conditions of possibility* of appearances or an empty tomb. The question is usually asked in terms of historicity, i.e., *did* these things happen, but the real concern is *could* these things happen. Unless a real, living body can be ascribed to Jesus after his death, any

⁹ M. Isidro Alves, "Ressurreição e Fé Pascal," *Didaskalia* 29 (1989): 277–541.

¹⁰ See, for example, Gerald O'Collins, *The Easter Jesus*, new ed. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1980); *Interpreting the Resurrection: Examining the Major Problems in the Stories of Jesus' Resurrection* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984); *Jesus Risen* (see note 3 above) for theological discussion of the state of the question; Reginald H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), and PHEME PERKINS, *Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984) for New Testament scholarship on the subject; Raymond E. Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1973) for a biblical theology treatment.

talk of actual personal resurrection, his or ours, belongs in the realm of mythology, that is, of likely stories about otherworldly reality.

In what follows I want to propose an understanding of, or an approach to, body in relation to the risen Jesus that is, quite frankly, a hypothesis. I venture to propose it because it seems to me to offer some possibilities for dealing with some conundrums about the Resurrection of Jesus and our own resurrection that, to my knowledge, have not been dealt with to the satisfaction of many people. My hope is not to establish unarguable biblical proof or theological evidence but simply to open a path of reflection for committed Christians who want to be able to believe in the real presence of Jesus in their lives but who can only do so if what they believe is compatible with what they know.

By way of proleptic summary, then, I want to propose a way of thinking about *body* that will allow us to take seriously (not literally) what the New Testament says about the Resurrection of Jesus, that is, about the appearances and the empty tomb and the response of the first disciples, as well as the faith experience of the Church down through the ages, especially that of the mystics, and therefore to imagine the *living presence of Jesus in our lives* without having to suspend or bracket our modern consciousness as it is shaped by history, anthropology, psychology, and post-Newtonian science. Specifically, I want to explore the possibility that thinking in a new way about body will allow us to affirm the personal bodily Resurrection of Jesus in a way that can be meaningful for a twenty-first-century person.

III. New Testament Data

In order to pose properly the relevant questions about body, specifically as they pertain to the body of the glorified Jesus,¹¹ we must briefly examine the New Testament data on the subject. This data can be divided conveniently into material about the appearances of the glorified Jesus

¹¹ I prefer the term “the glorified Jesus” to “the risen Jesus” because the former does not prejudice the discussion of resurrection. To say that Jesus is “glorified” is to claim that he is alive in a way that transcends historical, earthly life. To say that he is “risen” is to make some claims about how glorification takes place, i.e., by a transformation of the body. The latter is precisely the point at issue in this discussion. In other words, I want eventually to conclude to the Resurrection as a way of understanding the Glorification of Jesus that, in itself, could be affirmed without taking any particular position on the possibility or reality of Jesus’ relation through the body with intra-worldly subjects at the present time.

and material about the empty tomb. I am going to try, eventually, to establish, contrary to the contention of some biblical scholars and some theologians, that these two sets of data are intrinsically and necessarily related to each other precisely because they are both concerned with the body of the risen Jesus, specifically where and how it *was* and where and how it *was not*.

Our first concern is with the appearances of the risen Jesus. These events or occurrences (whether historical, delusional, imaginary, real, or fabricated) are presented in the New Testament in two forms: kerygmatically or as proclamation, and narratively or as story. The major kerygmatic presentations occur in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, probably the oldest formulation we have, and in the Petrine sermons in Acts 2 and 3. In the first, Paul announces that Jesus died, was buried, and was raised and that he appeared after his death to two series of witnesses: Cephas (Peter), the Twelve, and more than five hundred disciples together and, in quasi-parallel form, James (the leader of the Jerusalem Church as Peter is of the "great Church"), all the apostles (a group larger than the Twelve but associated with them in the foundational ministry of the Church), and Paul himself (who, like the five hundred, belongs to the post-public life community). In Acts, Peter testifies to the fact that Jesus whom the Jews had killed was raised up by God and lives now at God's right hand. In these kerygmatic accounts the Resurrection of Jesus is asserted on the basis of his having appeared to some of his followers who became, in virtue of their experience, witnesses to the reality of the Resurrection and Jesus' continuing life among them.

In each of the four gospels we find narrative accounts of the post-death appearances of the risen Jesus. In Matthew 28 we have the story of Jesus appearing first to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (vv. 9-10) and then to the Eleven in Galilee (vv. 16-20). In Luke 24 we have the elaborate narrative of the encounter with Jesus of two disciples, Cleopas and another (perhaps the wife of Clopas who is known to the tradition as a follower of the earthly Jesus [see John 19:25]), on their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus (vv. 13-31); a brief reference to an appearance to Simon (v. 34); and the story of the appearance to the Eleven and their companions (vv. 36-53). In John 20 we have the narratives of Jesus' appearance first to Mary Magdalene (vv. 14-17), then to a group of disciples that seems to have included but not been limited to the Twelve in Jerusalem on Easter evening (vv. 19-23), and finally to Thomas in the (same?) group of disciples a week later (vv. 26-29). In chapter 21 of John, regarded by many scholars as an appendix added by someone other than the Evangelist, we have one of the most dramatic narrations of a resurrection

appearance, Jesus' breakfast with the Seven (not all of whom are members of the Twelve) on the shore of the Lake of Galilee and his conversation with the chastened Peter. And finally, in the appendix to Mark's gospel, chapter 16:9-20, we have abbreviated stories of the risen Jesus appearing first to Mary Magdalene (v. 9), then to two disciples walking in the country (v. 12), and finally to the Eleven at table (v. 14). Although this section of Mark is probably a conflation of stories from the other gospels (the first a parallel of Matthew and John; the second of Luke; the third of Luke and John), it does offer a corroboration of the most important narratives of Easter appearances: that to Mary Magdalene and to the group of disciples (including, no doubt, Peter, although it is interesting that Mark, like Matthew and John, gives no account of an individual appearance to Peter).

If the proclamation and the narrative material is combined, we find that the New Testament testifies to Jesus' appearance to individuals (Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter, and Thomas), to small groups (the women at the tomb, the Emmaus disciples), to symbolic groups (the Eleven or Twelve, the Seven), to large groups (the Eleven and their companions, the community of disciples gathered together without and then with Thomas, a group of more than five hundred), and finally to Paul who is the "last" not only chronologically but theologically.¹² In other words, the data about the appearances is extensive and diverse and suggests by its quantitative and qualitative variety that we are not dealing with a single or private experience that was multiplied by psychological "contagion" or literary replication. We are dealing with something that "happened," whatever that was or means.

What is significant for our purposes in this essay is what is asserted by the New Testament accounts and what conclusions about the glorified Jesus as risen are implied by these assertions. In the simplest terms, the New Testament accounts, both kerygmatic and narrative, concur in asserting that Jesus *manifested himself*, i.e., revealed himself or made himself visible, and that he *was seen* by those to whom he manifested himself. The purpose of these self-manifestations or self-revelations was to confirm the faith of his disciples and to commission them to share that faith with the whole world.

Two important conclusions about the risen Jesus, and specifically about his body, can be derived from the appearance accounts. First, the ap-

¹² See Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins, "The Uniqueness of the Easter Appearances," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 54 (1992): 287-307, esp. 295-97.

pearances were *not available* to “neutral” observers. Jesus, although present, could not be seen unless he manifested himself and could only be seen by those to whom he manifested himself.¹³ Furthermore, even these “seers” could not recognize him unless he identified himself to them. In other words, we are not dealing with a natural, physical body such as Jesus had before his death, which was visible to anyone who was present where Jesus was present and who was recognizable by his physiognomy as any other mortal is. There is nothing naïve (however artless they may seem) about the accounts of the appearances. Those who saw the risen Jesus knew that whatever “seeing” meant it was not a purely biological, optical event in the natural order, i.e., within the arena of historical cause and effect and governed by the coordinates of space and time.

Second, the appearances, however extraordinary and nonphysical in the natural sense of the term, were *objective* in the sense that they were not self-induced on the one hand or hallucinatory on the other. They were real, and their cause was independent of the experiencing subject. The narratives testify to this “objectivity” in a number of subtle but convincing ways. The recipients, we are told, did not expect to see Jesus alive. Mary Magdalene, the disciples on the way to Emmaus, the gathered disciples in Luke were lost in grief and despair and were totally astonished, even to the point of disbelief, by the appearances. Furthermore, the recipients were manifestly incapable of inducing the appearances. Mary Magdalene searches for the body, questions the angels and Jesus himself; the disciples on the way to Emmaus admit to Jesus their despair. Had they been able to “conjure up” his presence, these stories would have been unnecessary and pointless. It is also important to note that the appearances are not “visions of the night” like Joseph’s or the Magi’s dreams in Matthew’s infancy narrative (see Matt 1:20-23; 2:12, 19-20) or ecstatic experiences like Paul’s rapture to the third heaven (2 Cor 12:2) or Peter’s vision at Joppa (Acts 11:5-10) or the apocalyptic vision of the Seer on Patmos (Rev 1:9ff).¹⁴ The Easter appearances happened in “broad daylight” while their subjects were fully awake and going about their ordinary, historical business such as meeting, eating,

¹³ This is the conclusion of Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives*, 48, and has been widely accepted by scholars.

¹⁴ For a fuller discussion of the differences between the Easter appearances and other visionary or ecstatic experiences in the New Testament, see O’Collins, *The Easter Jesus*, 20–22. In particular, he points out that the Easter appearances do not happen in sleep or even at night, do not take place while the recipient is in ecstasy, have no apocalyptic features, are never described as “visions,” and are never silent.

traveling, and fishing in the very real world of houses, gardens, cities, roads, and boats. Finally, the Easter appearances were unique, limited to the time just after the death of Jesus, and they came to a definitive end after the appearance (“as to one untimely born” [1 Cor 15:8]) to Paul on the road to Damascus.¹⁵ Although the history of spirituality is replete with accounts of visionary encounters of the mystics with Jesus, e.g., those of Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila, or Catherine of Siena, the Church has never suggested that these visions were identical in kind or comparable in significance with the Easter appearances. The faith of the Church does not rest upon these experiences even though it is greatly enriched by them.

From the foregoing observations it is clear (if, of course, one accepts the biblical witness to the appearances of the risen Jesus) that the New Testament accounts intend to assert that in the appearances we are dealing with some bodily reality, i.e., something that can be perceived, about which it is appropriate to say, “I saw.” The risen Jesus does not, however, always “look” the same, i.e., he is not physically recognizable either in relation to his pre-death appearance or in terms of other Easter appearances. In short, there is a bodily reality that is not an ordinary, natural, physical body. But it is also not an invisible spirit or a group consciousness of some kind. The glorified Jesus, as he appears to his disciples, is a singular, personal, and perceptible agent who is numerically identical with the One who died on the cross on Good Friday and who interacts with his disciples who are still in this world and subject to the conditions of historical existence. We are dealing with historical experience (that of the disciples) of nonhistorical reality (the glorified Jesus) somehow mediated by body (which is what we mean by the risen Jesus).

Let us turn now to the empty tomb, remaining clear about our objective. It is not historical curiosity or apologetic potential that focuses our exploration but what the empty tomb offers to our reflection about the body of the risen Jesus. I will raise four questions about the tomb, two of which must be answered at this point if we are to proceed with the argument, and two of which will be held in suspension until the end of our considerations about the nature of body.

First, in view of questions that have been raised repeatedly by modern biblical and theological scholarship, we must ask whether, in fact, the tomb of Jesus was empty on Easter morning. Scholars who wish either

¹⁵ See Kendall and O’Collins, “The Uniqueness of the Easter Appearances.”

to deny that it was empty or to assert the irrelevance of the question and/or the insignificance of the answer are concerned to protect faith in the Resurrection from the vicissitudes of historical research on the one hand and from physicalist or resuscitacionist interpretations of Resurrection on the other. Both concerns are legitimate, but in this case the price (denial of the fact of the empty tomb) is too high, both in terms of scholarship and in terms of the meaning of resurrection; furthermore, it is unnecessary. The empty tomb has never been proposed, either in the New Testament itself or by the Church, as “proof” of the Resurrection.¹⁶ The tomb is empty, according to the normative text ascribed to the angel in Mark 16:6, *because* Jesus is risen. No one concludes that Jesus is risen because the tomb is empty. There could have been any number of explanations for such a fact, some of which—e.g., theft of the body—were apparently proposed even during the New Testament era (as suggested by Matt 28:11-15).

There are a number of very good reasons to accept the accounts of the empty tomb as witness to the reality of the situation. First, the earliest testimony in Jerusalem to the Resurrection, testimony that was enormously troubling to the civil and religious authorities, could have been discredited easily by anyone producing the body from the tomb. If Jewish or Roman authorities could have done so, they surely would have. Whether or not the former circulated stories of theft of the body and paid off tomb guards to corroborate it, they obviously agreed that the body, for whatever reason, was not in the tomb.

Second, the contention of some scholars¹⁷ that no one knew where the body of Jesus was buried since it was probably thrown into a common grave for criminals seems ill-founded. The early community took pains to obviate such a hypothesis. Joseph of Arimathea is a character who appears nowhere in the accounts of the life of the historical Jesus, but he suddenly appears in all four gospels to take the body of Jesus from the cross and bury it. Furthermore, in all four accounts he is not alone (which would have made it possible to claim that he had been invented solely for the apologetic purpose of establishing the location of the grave) but accompanied or viewed by others in his activity. In Matthew 27:57-61

¹⁶ This is not to say that some scholars have not attempted to use the empty tomb as some kind of proof. See, e.g., the article by Francesco Spadafora, “Prova fisica della resurrezione de Gesù N.S.,” *Divus Thomas* 55 (1952): 64–66.

¹⁷ See, for example, John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 155–60.

Joseph is observed by Mary Magdalene. In Mark 15:42-47 he is observed by Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph. In Luke 23:50-55 he is observed by the women who had accompanied Jesus from Galilee who, according to Luke 8:2-3, are Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna. And in John 19:38-42 Joseph is assisted by Nicodemus, and in the following episode Mary Magdalene knows exactly where to go to look for the body.

A third telling argument for the historicity of the empty tomb is the fact that only women are associated with the story of its discovery. If the early Church had invented the story in order to "prove" the Resurrection, they would surely have established its facticity by the testimony of legal witnesses, i.e., males. In fact, the male disciples do not believe the testimony of the women in Luke or, perhaps, in John. In both cases, male disciples go to the tomb in response to the witness of the women and find things as the women have said, that is, they find the tomb empty of Jesus' body. But the discovery of the empty tomb and the original witness to the fact was ascribed to the women, which suggests that it was not invented and was not regarded as apologetically important or used in order to establish the fact of the Resurrection.¹⁸ Furthermore, Paul, in writing to converts who lived far from Jerusalem and would be unlikely ever to visit the site, does not mention the empty tomb. He apparently does not consider it integral to his witness to the Resurrection. In other words, there is no real motive in terms of apologetics for inventing the empty tomb story. It is probably recounted because it happened. The women went to the tomb on the morning after the Sabbath and found it open and empty of Jesus' body.¹⁹

Finally, as Gerald O'Collins says, any argument against the empty tomb has to be constructed in spite of, indeed in contradiction of, the unanimous literary evidence, which is a tricky proposition if one wants to maintain the validity of the testimony to the Easter event itself that is delivered in the same documents by the same witnesses.

The second question is perhaps more important than the first: does it matter whether or not the tomb was empty since its being empty proves nothing about the Resurrection? For several reasons I would maintain that it matters a great deal whether the tomb was empty, but not because

¹⁸ O'Collins, *Jesus Risen*, 126, also considers this argument persuasive.

¹⁹ In some cases there is "something" in or at the tomb: angels, men in white, grave clothes (seen by the two disciples in John and referred to in the account of the visit of the male disciples in Luke). The point is that what was not in the tomb was the body of Jesus.

this constitutes a proof of bodily resurrection. First, the tomb with its sealing stone was, for the Jews of Jesus' time, the ultimate sign of being cut off from life. The fact that the tomb was found open and empty, in conjunction with the appearances, was a most important sign that Jesus was not in the power of death but alive with God. This is exactly the point of Peter's long disquisition in Acts 2:24-36 contrasting David who "both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day" (v. 29) with Jesus whom God would not allow to experience the corruption of death but whose liberation from the tomb was foretold by David who could not have been speaking of himself when he said "you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption" (v. 27, citing Ps 16:8-11). This is also the point of the first Easter episode in John in which the Beloved Disciple sees the face veil lying rolled up in a separate place and believes (John 20:7-8) even though neither the Beloved Disciple nor Simon Peter yet understands that Jesus is risen from the dead (John 20:9). What he believes is that Jesus is glorified, i.e., that he is no longer in the power of death but alive with God.²⁰ Understanding that the *glorified* Jesus (i.e., Jesus living after his death) is *risen* (i.e., again in interaction with his disciples) arises not from viewing the empty tomb but from the commissioned witness of the one who receives the foundational Easter appearance and comes "announcing" or proclaiming it (*aggelousa* [John 20:18]), Mary Magdalene.

Second, if, as some scholars have suggested, Jesus is alive with God, that is, resurrected in the theologically significant sense of that word,²¹ even though his body decayed in the grave, then there is essentially no difference between the Resurrection of Jesus and whatever is true of any just person who has died in God's favor. Again, the point of Peter's contention about David, whom Peter believes to be safe with God but whose "tomb is with us to this day" with the bones of David inside it, is that the Resurrection of Jesus is unique, unprecedented, *sui generis*. A major facet of resurrection hope is that Jesus is the firstfruits of the new creation, that something original and unprecedented has occurred in

²⁰ See my article, "Seeing and Believing in the Glorified Jesus (John 20:1-10)," in *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, rev. and exp. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 2003), 202-10, for a more complete substantiation of this point.

²¹ One reason I distinguish between "Glorification" and "Resurrection" is to obviate the confusion implied in this position. One could maintain that Jesus was glorified, i.e., alive with God, even if he were not risen, i.e., bodily interactive with his own. But the point of the resurrection stories, esp. in John, is that Jesus is not only glorified but also risen.

him that is the foundation of a hope for all who follow him, a hope that exceeds any that was possible before him (see esp. Col 1:15-18).

Finally, refusal or denial of the empty tomb tradition reveals a hidden Docetic or at least platonically dualistic presupposition. It involves asserting that Jesus is not his body but a separable, solely spiritual "person" who can leave his body behind as a disguise or a shell and still be fully and completely who he is, that is, the glorified Lord risen from the dead.

The significance of maintaining *that* the tomb was really empty on Easter morning and that this fact, although not a proof of bodily resurrection, is nonetheless *theologically important* can appear only in response to the final two questions about the empty tomb, which I will raise at this point by way of anticipation but put off answering until after we have explored more carefully the notion of body. The third question is "Why was the tomb empty?" and the fourth, very closely related to it, is "What happened to the body of Jesus that was buried?" In other words, these questions really mean to inquire into the relationship between the crucified body of the earthly (pre-Easter) Jesus buried in the tomb and the risen body of the glorified (post-Easter) Jesus encountered in the appearances.²² Hopefully, a nuanced understanding of that relationship will supply some resources for contemplating the possibility of Jesus being really, i.e., bodily or humanly, present and active in the world today.

IV. Thinking about Body

In recent decades Christian theologians, and indeed educated believers in general, have moved beyond the dualistic theories of the relation of

²² My own tendency to distinguish among the earthly Jesus, the glorified Jesus, and the risen Jesus is confirmed by the distinction Marcus Borg makes between the pre-Easter and the post-Easter Jesus. In *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 195, Borg says, "I would like to replace the phrases 'the Jesus of history' and 'the Christ of faith' with 'the pre-Easter Jesus' and 'the post-Easter Jesus.' By 'the pre-Easter Jesus,' I mean of course the historical Jesus; by 'the post-Easter Jesus,' I mean the Jesus of Christian experience and tradition in the years and centuries after the death of the pre-Easter Jesus." I think his concern is similar to mine, namely, that what we are talking about by terms such as "the risen Jesus" and "the post-Easter Jesus" is not a pure construction of faith but Jesus who lived on earth, lives with God, and is interactively present to his disciples throughout Christian history.

body to soul in the human subject that characterized post-Tridentine thinking. The platonic conception of the body as “prison” of the soul that must dominate the body in this life and that escapes from the body in death, as well as the bipolar understandings of physical versus spiritual, body versus soul, or matter versus spirit, have been largely supplanted by understandings of the human subject as “embodied spirit” or as “inspirited body.” The human is a single subject with two dimensions or aspects, each of which characterizes the subject as a whole, each of which is equally although differently essential to who we are and determinative of our identity, action, relationships, value, and so on. The body is not a servant to be used and/or abused (*pace* St. Francis on “brother ass”), nor is it a dispensable casing of the spirit (*pace* Plato).

As the medieval historian Carolyn Walker Bynum in a typically brilliant and fascinating study²³ points out, however, it is not nearly as easy to shed our dualism as we might think. Bynum did a detailed investigation of the seemingly absurd and even repulsive (to modern sensibilities) medieval disputations about the material continuity of the human body in resurrection. The medievals discussed such things as whether bits of one’s body, like fingernails and hair, would have to be found and reassembled for the general resurrection at the end of the world, or whether the body of a person who had been digested by a cannibal would be resurrected as part of the eater or the eaten. The point of her investigation is that these disputations were not frivolous arguments among underemployed academics but serious engagements, by way of “cases,” with the issue of the role of the body in personal identity.

As Bynum points out, we have our own versions of these very arguments. We also are concerned about whether, if enough parts or certain parts of a person are replaced, the person remains him- or herself. In films and stories we have speculated about whether the murderer who receives the heart of the saint (or vice versa) might begin to act like the donor. And we continue to question whether it is ethical to replace a defective human heart with an animal organ or to experiment with the body or organs of a person who has died. Until very recently the Church did not permit cremation and the scattering of the ashes of the deceased but insisted that the entire body be interred in a single place. The underlying question is the integrity of the person in relation to the body, and

²³ Carolyn Walker Bynum, “Material Continuity, Personal Survival, and the Resurrection of the Body: A Scholastic Discussion in Its Medieval and Modern Contexts,” *History of Religions* 30 (August 1990): 51–85; see esp. 52–57.

there seems to be an ambiguity if not contradiction in maintaining that the person *is* his or her body and yet that the body, at least in part, can be separated from the person or even interchanged with body parts from another person or an animal without intrinsically affecting the identity of the person.

The medievals actually had available a solution to the dilemma posed by the belief that unless every scrap of the material body of the deceased could be “found” by God and reassembled the person would not be her- or himself at the general resurrection. The potential solution lay in Thomas Aquinas’s application of Aristotelian hylomorphic theory to the human person. If, as Aquinas posited, the soul is the substantial form of the body, then the human being is not two separate complete substances, a subsistent body and a subsistent soul, each able to exist on its own. Rather, the person is a single substance proceeding from the interaction of two principles, matter and form, which must be united for the person to exist. Whatever matter the soul informed, whether or not it was the identical second matter of that person’s earthly life, would be the actual body of that person. But, as Bynum points out, even Thomas was not really faithful to his own theory when it came to the issue of the resurrection of the body of human beings. And he was probably right, she concludes, because the theory that the soul could inform any matter tends to reduce the body to a mere actualization of prime matter, and our experience is that the body is, in the history of the person, “personalized” and therefore constitutive of the person in a highly specific and irreplaceable way. Aquinas was more in line with this personalistic understanding of the self in his insistence that the just person, in the period between personal death and the general resurrection, was in a somewhat incomplete condition, the incompleteness being specific in relation to the person’s own body and not materiality in general, and that in the resurrection souls will be reunited with their own bodies.²⁴

I would like to try to get out of this impasse by posing the question in another way. Rather than asking whether or not the specific body is essential to the person or, more graphically, how much of oneself one can lose or have replaced before one ceases to be oneself, let us ask, “What is the significance of body? What does body mean?” In other words, to escape the dilemma that faces us if we start by an examination of the

²⁴ See *Summa Theologica* Supp. Q. 78, art. 3; Q. 79, art. 1.

body either physically or philosophically, we will inquire into the nature of the *body as symbol of the self*.

It would seem that body signifies at least four things. First, body grounds and manifests *identity through change*. It is striking that, although the body in all its parts is completely reconstituted physically approximately every seven years through the replacement of every cell within it, the person remains numerically identical. Photos of a person at ages five, twenty, and fifty will reveal that the person is the same individual. Those who know the person can attest to that identity. At no point in the process does the person experience sloughing off his or her body or becoming someone else. The body, although physically completely different, is the principle of identity, the locus of recognizability. The body registers and expresses both the change and the identity at one and the same time.

Second, the body is the principle of *personal consistence*. It is the body that makes the person one in herself and distinct from all others.²⁵ In the terms of medieval philosophy, matter is the principle of individuation. The body marks the person off, inwardly in relation to the self and outwardly in relation to everything and everyone else. No matter how widely one extends oneself into the world through action and interaction, the bodily self remains distinct and consistent. The embodied self is "bounded" by body. There is a qualitative difference between an attack on one's ideas or projects and an attack on oneself. No matter how close one is to another physically, even in sexual union, the two are never actually one.

Third, and in complementarity with the existential solitude just described, the body provides the condition of possibility and the ground of *interaction with others*. Because one is located in space by one's body, one can be found by others, recognized, and engaged by them. The body allows one to be present, to speak and hear, to touch and be touched, in short, to interact physically and spiritually with others. The most poignant

²⁵ An interesting corroboration of this point from studies in cultural anthropology and Jungian psychology is the recognition that the "virgin archetype" as it is realized in the virgin goddesses of ancient mythology (Artemis, Athena, and Hestia) signifies the "one-in-herself" character of the one who "belongs to no man" and especially who does not act out of the desire to please, to be approved, or even to control. She "does what she does . . . because what she does is true," as Jean Shinoda Bolen puts it in *Goddesses in Everywoman: A New Psychology of Women* (New York: Harper, 1984), 36; see the whole of chap. 3. This cultural and psychological significance of virginity closely connects what I am calling personal consistence with body.

verification of this feature of bodiliness is the devastating experience of the absence of a loved one who has died. Faith in the communion of saints, in the presence and effective intercession of those who have gone before, does nothing to alleviate the total interactive nonavailability of those who have died. The popular film *Ghost* presented this feature very well as the absolute inability of the deceased main character to effect any material change in the historical world despite his very real presence, knowledge, love, and fierce desire. He required temporary embodiment in a medium in order to interact with his bereaved friend, and he eventually acknowledged the inevitability of his final bodily disappearance from her life.

Finally, body allows the individual to constitute the node of a *network of relations among others*. All of the people related to a single individual are somehow related to each other through that person. This relationship may or may not be rendered explicit, as when a person introduces to each other two or more of his or her friends. But whether or not the relations are made explicit, the fact that each is related to the subject relates them to each other.

Examination of the New Testament material on the Resurrection of Jesus reveals that what is being affirmed about him is not the physicality of the risen body, about which the texts are extremely discreet and even ambiguous, but the fact and the significance of Jesus' mode of presence among his disciples, a mode of presence that can only be affirmed in terms of body.

First, the risen Jesus was recognized as identically the same person whom his disciples had known in his earthly, i.e., pre-Easter, life, who had really died on the cross and had been buried. The One they encountered after the crucifixion was Jesus, not some shade or ghost or trace or representation of him. This seems to be a major point of the accounts of Jesus' encounters with Mary Magdalene, the disciples on the way to Emmaus, Thomas, and the disciples in Jerusalem.

Second, the risen Jesus whom his disciples encountered in the appearances was a distinct person. They do not describe an experience of cosmic energy or a generalized experience of light or beauty²⁶ or being caught up in a force field or absorbed in an experience of mystical union or

²⁶ In Acts 9:3-7 Saul sees a light and hears the voice of Jesus; his companions heard the voice but saw no one, perhaps not even the light. The voice of Jesus asking Saul why Saul was persecuting him and identifying himself as "Jesus whom you are persecuting" makes clear the personal identity of the one whom Saul encountered.

simply inwardly enlivened by the Spirit. They experienced Jesus as a person distinct from themselves and from everything else, someone who became really present (visible) to them and then ceased to be present (vanished from their sight) and whose presence and absence they did not control. The Emmaus account is particularly graphic on this point.

Third, while Jesus was present to them the disciples could interact with him. They could see him, talk to him, hear him speaking to them, even touch him. Jesus interacted with them, ate with them, conversed with them. They did not simply imagine him present, imagine what he would do if he were present. They experienced him actually doing things they could not have predicted, such as appearing in a room whose doors were barred, making breakfast for them, questioning them about things they had said when he was not perceptibly with them.

Finally, Jesus' disciples experienced themselves as having in common their relationship with him in the present and not merely a shared memory of his having been with them in the past. They recounted to each other their experiences with the risen Jesus and they knew they were talking about the same person. When the Emmaus disciples returned and recounted their experience on the road, the others affirmed that Jesus was indeed risen because he had also appeared to Simon (see Luke 24:33-34). But perhaps the most striking manifestation of this particular feature of the risen Jesus was Jesus' response to Saul when the latter asked, "Who are you?" and Jesus replied, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." Not only is Jesus the center of the network of relationships among his disciples but he is so identified with them that their relationships with each other are their relationship with him.

V. Rethinking Materiality in Terms of Symbol

Most of the challenges to faith in the bodily Resurrection of Jesus center on the issue of materiality. What kind of body did the risen Jesus have? Where could it be now? How could Jesus appear and disappear bodily and apparently be bodily in more than one place at a time? Could the risen Jesus really be touched? Could he eat fish and, if he did, what became of the food? How could Jesus enter a sealed room? What happened to the body in the tomb? Although most theologians would not formulate the questions this way, or indeed at all, these are often the questions lurking just below the surface of sophisticated linguistic gambits (e.g., casting theological doubts on the historicity of the empty tomb)

designed to keep such questions from arising.²⁷ Theologians are much more comfortable talking about the *glorified* body than about the glorified *body*. Paul was dealing with exactly these questions with his Corinthian correspondents: "But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?'" (1 Cor 15:35).

The source of the problem would seem to be our coterminous equation of bodiliness, materiality, and physicality, an equation that is verified in all the instances of our actual experience of bodily beings in this world but that, I would like to suggest, is not philosophically absolutely necessary. It may be possible to think of body as implying materiality but not necessarily physicality with the further implication that materiality is not necessarily physical. Paul seems to have been implying something like this when he spoke of "heavenly" (*epouránia*) and "earthly" (*epígeia*) bodies (1 Cor 15:40), or "physical" or "natural" (*psychikón*) and "spiritual" (*pneumatikón*) bodies (1 Cor 15:44-49).

Perhaps we can limber up our imaginations by recalling that matter has at least three states, solid, liquid, and gaseous, and that the same matter can be transformed from one to the other. Furthermore, energy can function as particles or as waves, and matter and energy can be transformed into one another. In other words, materiality is not as static a concept as we spontaneously imagine when we hear the word. Although we naturally think of "material" as implying a freestanding "chunk of stuff" (i.e., physicality), the concept is actually more malleable.

Second, while we ordinarily use the word "body" to mean matter in its solid state, we also use it metaphorically to refer to very immaterial things such as a "body of evidence" or the "body of an argument." In other words, body has as much to do with unity and consistency as it does with physical solidity.

Third, physicality in the strict sense of the term has to do with materiality understood as extension in space and time through the positioning of parts outside of parts with the "decomposability" that is inherent to such composition. But extension in space and time, which is the essence of materiality, is not necessarily identical with having parts outside of parts. Thoughts, for example, or influence can be extended through space and time, as can intentions and projects.

If we combine these ideas, we can readily see that all real bodies in our experience are composed of matter, and all the matter we know of is in some sense physical. Body can, however, be thought of nonmateri-

²⁷ This is the point of O'Collins in *The Easter Jesus*, 90-97.

ally (at least metaphorically), suggesting that bodiliness is not primarily materiality but unity and consistence, and *a fortiori* bodiliness is not necessarily physical. Furthermore, materiality itself is primarily constituted by extension in the world of space and time, and extension is not necessarily or exclusively physical. In other words, it is possible, at least conceptually, to distinguish body from materiality and physicality, and materiality from physicality. If this type of distinction can be achieved conceptually, perhaps it could be verified in reality.

Using these presuppositions I would like to suggest that by substituting a theory of body as symbol²⁸ of the self for a theory of body as second matter in relation to form it would be possible to construct a coherent theory of Jesus' bodily but nonphysical Resurrection that could account for the experience of the disciples after the crucifixion as well as ground the experience of the real presence of Jesus in the life of subsequent disciples.

The primary role of body in the constitution of the human being is not as a physical "house" for the spiritual soul or even as matter in relation to the soul as substantial form. Rather, body is the symbol, or symbolic presence, of the self. It is the perceptible material through which the person is one-in-himself/herself, distinct from others, intersubjectively available, and able to be interpersonally involved with a plurality of other selves who are related to each other because of their relation with the one symbolized. This symbolic material, the body, can and does undergo all kinds of change and transformation in order to symbolize adequately, to "body forth," the self in its various states such as child or adult, ill or well, and so on. Because the body is a symbol of the self and not an arbitrary sign of something other than itself, however, it remains recognizably identical throughout the processes of change, even very dramatic and radical ones such as the loss of limbs, bodily functions, major organs, or even consciousness.

The point at which the body as symbol ceases to be identical with the person is the moment of death. At that point the body is no longer, properly speaking, the body (the symbolic presence) of the person; it is a corpse. In other words, while continuing to exist materially, it has been transsymbolized. It is now the presence of an absence; it is the trace in

²⁸ I am making use of a theory of symbol rooted in the thought of Paul Tillich as developed by Paul Ricoeur. I have explained it at length in my book *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 33–36.

this world of a presence that has ended. That is why the corpse is so awe-inspiring, so reverence-evoking, even so terrifying. This is especially true for those most closely related to the deceased person because what is no longer present is a personal organizing center of meaning and relationship. The disappearance of this presence requires, indeed causes, a radical restructuring of life and relationships among those who remain behind. The corpse, no longer symbolic of the self of the person, is now the symbol or perceptible presence of the absence of the person. It makes clear to us that the person is no longer available, no longer interactively present to us, no longer recognizable or reachable by us. The network of relationships that centered in this person must be renegotiated. This is probably the reason why it is more difficult, for example, for a family to have a member simply “missing in action” for decades than to know the person has been killed and to be able to bury the corpse. Not having the corpse, the symbol of the definitive end of the person’s intra-worldly presence, means that the family’s relationships remain in a state of suspended animation. The person is neither present nor absent, and the network of relationships cannot be renegotiated or stabilized.

Symbol, in short, is not something imaginary or fictive, nor is it a mere “sign,” that is, something that stands for something other than itself. It is the way of being present of something, such as person, that cannot be encountered except in and through its symbolization. Perceptibility is necessary for symbolic presence precisely because it is the essence of a symbol to make perceptible what in and of itself is not perceptible. For example, the kiss expresses love; rape embodies hatred; the Gospel makes divine self-gift revelatory; the body makes the person available. Perceptibility (and therefore materiality) of some kind is intrinsic to symbolization, but what is essential to the notion of symbol is that it renders present and available that which it symbolizes. Consequently, the risen Jesus requires materiality of some sort, that is, perceptibility, in order to be encountered by his historical disciples. The body of the risen Jesus functions symbolically just as his earthly body did, but the difference lies in the character, not the fact, of his bodiliness. In other words, what changes through Resurrection is not the reality but the mode of the bodily or symbolic presence of Jesus among his disciples. The major difference between our earthly (material/physical) bodies and the glorified (nonphysical) body of Jesus as symbolic is that the physical materiality of our bodies entails space-time limitations and the intrinsic decomposability of physicality that no longer apply to Jesus’ body since he is no longer within history. “Death no longer has dominion over him” (Rom 6:9), and neither do the conditions of intra-historical existence.

I am suggesting that what we mean by saying that Jesus is risen is neither that he was physically resuscitated as an ordinary participant in intra-worldly history nor that he became a nonbodily spirit. Rather, he was transformed in God in such a way that he could symbolize himself in ways that transcend our ordinary experience or capability (or his while he was on earth). He could now “body forth,” that is, materialize and therefore symbolize, his presence at will without being subject to the limitations of physicality that we spontaneously associate with materiality, namely, subjection to the limitations of causality, space and time, and the inevitability of death through physical decomposition. In other words, the glorified Jesus realizes in himself the essential meaning of corporality, bodiliness (including a transcendent relationship to materiality), without the limitations of physicality precisely because he is no longer a participant in intra-worldly history, in the space-time continuum of cause and effect to which physicality responds. The glorified Jesus has absolute control of his self-symbolization in a way that mortals (including the pre-Easter Jesus) do not. For the glorified Jesus, to be “bodily” is to be personally and identically (i.e., numerically) himself in the full integrity of his humanity and able to be present and active in relation to us in whatever ways are appropriate or necessary for us. This implies that he can “materialize” himself in any way, in any place, in any time that responds to his purposes. The relationship between bodiliness and materiality that obtains in the historical individual is reversed in the glorified Jesus. For the former, materiality determines bodiliness, and this is probably the best definition of physicality. For the latter, the glorified Jesus, bodiliness (that is, the capacity for self-symbolization) determines materiality, and this is what we mean by the glorified body or what Paul called the spiritual body, materiality completely instrumental to person.

VI. Implications of the Theory of Body as Symbol for Questions about the Resurrection of Jesus

In what follows I would like to revisit some of the thorny questions about the Resurrection of Jesus to see if a symbolic rather than hylomorphic theory of body can make possible more coherent responses. If so, the real presence of the glorified Jesus not only to his earthly disciples during the immediate post-Easter period but to later disciples throughout history may be more imaginatively plausible and therefore able to function in living faith rather than by way of willed suspension of disbelief.

What happened to the body of Jesus in the tomb?

If the body, as I have suggested, is the symbol of the person, then Jesus, if he is alive, could not leave behind a corpse. The corpse is the sign of the absence of the person, the departure of the person from interactive presence with others; it is a trace within history of a person who is no longer present and active in history. If Jesus is truly risen he is not dead; he is not absent; he is, on the contrary, alive, present, and active and, when he chooses to be so, active within history or in relation to people within history. A corpse of the living Jesus would be a counter-symbol. It makes no more sense to ask where the corpse of Jesus "went" than to ask where my five-year-old body is now that I am an adult. The answer is that the child body, the symbol of my five-year-old self, is not because my five-year-old self no longer exists. Or better still, it is subsumed in the present symbol of myself, the body that I am today. The body of the pre-Easter Jesus is not resuscitated, nor did it decay. It is not. Or better still, it is subsumed into the symbolic capacity of his glorified self. I suspect that this is why Jesus, although able to prevent his disciples from immediately recognizing him, was truly *recognized* by them when their eyes were opened. His bodily continuity is the locus of his recognizability.

Was the body of the glorified Jesus who appeared to his disciples "solid"? Could he eat, be touched, and so on? In other words, was it a real body or just an appearance of one?

As symbolic mode of presence, Jesus' body is real. How its relation to materiality is actualized in any given situation depends on how Jesus chooses to be present. If the appropriate mode of presence requires a quasi-physicality in order to express, to symbolize or "body forth," his identity, his consistency, his interactive presence, there is no reason why it cannot assume the qualities of physicality such as the ability to be touched or to eat. This type of self-symbolization was characteristic of the post-Easter appearances in a way it has not been in even the most "bodily" of mystical experiences of later Christians, and this is probably one feature of what Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins refer to as the "uniqueness" of these foundational appearances.²⁹ For example, St. Teresa of Avila testifies that, after her experience of transforming union became virtually habitual, Jesus was almost always perceptibly present at her

²⁹ Kendall and O'Collins, "The Uniqueness of the Easter Appearances," 299.

side.³⁰ Julian of Norwich speaks of seeing Jesus suffering on the cross.³¹ Catherine of Siena received a wedding ring from Jesus during an experience of mystical espousal.³² Despite the bodiliness of these experiences, they do not involve the quasi-physicality of the post-Easter accounts. All of these mystics refer to their experiences as “visions,” Teresa specifying that they are “intellectual” as opposed to imaginative visions. Although these questions about the nature of mystical experiences are immensely complicated and not the subject of this essay, I mention them because a symbolic theory of the bodiliness of the glorified Jesus does seem to offer some resources for a theoretical understanding of the Jesus-mysticism of some Christian mystics, an issue that has been highly problematic in cross-traditional studies of mysticism and even in Christian theology precisely because Jesus-mysticism requires that Jesus, and not just the Holy Mystery that is God, exist and be active in the present. To speak of Jesus requires reference to his integral humanity and thus to his bodiliness.

What can be said about Jesus’ personal identity? Does he exist today; does he live? Or is he simply the “Christ of faith,” “risen in the community,” a “cause that goes on”?

The glorified Jesus is all of these but not reducible to any of them or to all of them taken together. The primary ongoing symbolization of the glorified Jesus in this world is his present historical body, which is all the baptized who are corporately one as the Body of Christ through the power of his indwelling Spirit. The earthly or pre-Easter Jesus, whose life is the model and whose teaching is the inspiration of these believers, is, for them, the Christ of faith, i.e., the One who is mediated to them in Scripture and the other sacraments and received in faith. They can literally claim with Paul, “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). And the cause of Jesus does go on, precisely because they are, corporately, his body in this world furthering his project. But

³⁰ See Teresa of Avila, “Interior Castle,” in *Teresa of Avila: The Interior Castle*, trans. and ed. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 150–55. This description occurs in *Sixth Dwelling Places*, chap. 8, 150–55.

³¹ See Julian of Norwich, “Showings,” in *Julian of Norwich: Showings*, trans. and ed. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), e.g., 136, 141, 193, 207.

³² This extraordinary experience is recounted in Catherine’s biography by Raimondo da Capua, [*Legenda major*] *S. Caterina da Siena*, trans. Giuseppe Tinagli (Siena: Cantagalli, 1934), book 1, chap. 12, 165–70.

this mystery in its entirety is only possible if the real Jesus himself exists, lives, acts. If Jesus is dead and buried, a figure of history available only in and as a memory, all of this becomes playacting. In other words, the glorified Jesus *is* the Christ of faith, *is* the principle of his Body the Church, *is* the One whose cause continues in and through his disciples down through history.

VII. Implications for Spirituality

The question that stimulated this reflection on the Resurrection of Jesus arose from the concern within contemporary spirituality with the role of Jesus in the faith life of the believer. Therefore, it is now time to draw out the implications of this reflection for Christian faith and especially for Christian hope.

Let me begin by attempting to state in relatively non-mythological language³³ what I mean by the Resurrection of Jesus. It should be clear at this point that I want to distance myself from those theological positions that would define the Resurrection of Jesus as the definitive disappearance of the personal Jesus and his replacement by a community that continues his vision and work; a purely subjective, although highly motivating, experience of Jesus' ongoing significance on the part of his disciples; an absorption of Jesus, without remainder, into the cosmic mystery that some people call God, and so on. *By the Resurrection I mean that Jesus, who really lived in first-century Palestine and really died on the cross, is alive with God in the full integrity of his humanity, that is, as a body-person, and is interactively present in and among us now and forever.* What then are some of the implications for Christian spirituality of such an understanding of the Resurrection?

First, this understanding of the Resurrection implies that prayer to Jesus (not just prayer to God through Jesus or in the Spirit of Jesus), both kataphatic and apophatic, is grounded in reality. Kataphatic or dialogical prayer to Jesus is an address to a person who is truly alive and available to the baptized believer. Apophatically experienced personal union, or

³³ All human language about "heavenly," that is, transhistorical, reality is necessarily mythological because we have to use our earthly categories to describe and talk about what transpires in another sphere of reality. We are using mythological language when, for example, we speak of Jesus "ascending" into heaven or "sitting at the right hand of God."

what is sometimes called Jesus-mysticism, is neither hallucination nor a case of essentially nonthematic universal mysticism mediated through Christian symbols. It is experience of the glorified Jesus who is able to effect a union between himself and his disciples so intimate and immediate that Paul's claim that Christ lives in him (Gal 2:20) or John's presentation of Jesus' claim to be in us and we in him (e.g., John 14:20) are to be taken with absolute seriousness.

Second, it is the living Jesus who is really identified with his disciples. The baptized act "in persona Christi," not in virtue of ordination, or by permission or delegation, or only when doing sacred actions. The indwelling of Jesus is quite real, and he is more intimate to us than we are to ourselves. It is quite possible for us to be oblivious of this fact and even effectively to nullify its potential for good by our actions. But the reality remains that those who have been laid hold of by Christ are actually changed by his real presence in their being and life. Furthermore, when we relate to our neighbor, either to do good or to do ill, we are not imagining that we are relating to Jesus, imaginatively substituting his face for theirs so that we can "act as if." The glorified Jesus' words to Saul who was persecuting the Christians, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5), or Matthew's presentation of Jesus' words at the last judgment, "As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me" (25:40), are not the pious hyperbole of the early Church. When Jesus said to Catherine of Siena, in vision, that she could really serve him by serving her neighbor³⁴ he was not offering a temporary palliative to her fervor until she could encounter him in glory but reminding her of the truth of the Gospel claim. To speak of the "whole Christ" is not metaphorical language but a recognition of the corporate reality of which the risen Jesus is the unifying principle.

Third, Jesus, now glorified, is no longer limited, either personally or as principle of his corporate members, by gender, ethnicity, race, age, chronological setting, or any other characteristic that is a function of physicality. However we might imagine Jesus in prayer (and most people probably imagine him as a young man with Semitic features), Jesus' real continuity with his historical self is no longer personally limiting. His bodiliness is not physical. When some of the medieval mystics spoke of Jesus as "mother" they were not distorting his reality but attending to something in Jesus that he himself affirmed but that was "muted" in his

³⁴ Raimondo da Capua, *S. Caterina da Siena*, book 2, chap. 1, 171–81.

earthly life by the fact of his physical maleness, namely, his maternal or nurturing character in relation to his disciples. Jesus, although he died in his early thirties, is no less identified with the elderly in their aging than he is with young people. Jesus is no more Jewish than Gentile, male than female, straight than gay, white than black, well than sick, European than Asian or Hispanic. Jesus is fully identified with his body, which is individually each of his members and corporately the Church.

Fourth, Jesus exists as a person in the Holy Mystery we call God. He is not diffused in some cosmic ether or energy field or absorbed into some overarching universal process. It is precisely because of this that we can profess, "I believe in the resurrection of the body," which is not a confession of belief in personal immortality of the disembodied spirit and even less in the absorption of the subject into an impersonal cosmic process. The early Church's faith that Jesus is the "firstfruits" of those who have fallen asleep (see 1 Cor 15:20) and the assurance that what is true of Jesus now will be true of all of his disciples is a profession of faith in personal, bodily resurrection. My contention is that the contemporary believer can only make this profession with intellectual integrity if we can achieve some kind of understanding of body that is compatible with what we know of the cosmos and anthropology.

VIII. Conclusions

What the New Testament says about the Resurrection of Jesus marks it off from anything we know or experience to have been the case with anyone else who has died, even Mary, the Mother of Jesus, whose "assumption" has been defined although its biblical basis and specific content are anything but clear. The decay of corpses other than Jesus' and the appearances of Jesus to his disciples during a specified and limited amount of time signifies that the eschaton (which is probably not a cosmic event marked by astrological phenomena) has begun in Jesus but that it is still to come in regard to those who have died in Christ and thus who truly live even now (see John 11:25-26). As John's account of the resuscitation of Lazarus in contrast to the Resurrection of Jesus makes clear, there is a real difference between what happened to Jesus after his death and what has so far been verified in his disciples.³⁵ But the object

³⁵ See my article, "The Community of Eternal Life (John 11:1-53)," in *Written That You May Believe*, 171-83.

of Christian faith and hope is precisely that the difference is not definitive, that those who have fallen asleep await the resurrection that is already achieved in Jesus (see Rom 8:23).

We do not know in detail what awaits us, but some affirmations are perhaps well grounded in what we can know of Jesus' Resurrection. First, we are destined for personal, bodily (in the sense of "body" that has been the subject of this essay, namely, personal identity and interpersonal relationship) life in God with Jesus through the Spirit. Second, because death is not the end, because death is not a descent into nothingness, a disappearance of body into undifferentiated matter and of spirit into impersonal energy signaling the end of personal integrity and interpersonal relationship, what we do in this life really matters. The relationships that we forge with Jesus, in Jesus with God, and with our sisters and brothers in Christ have a future. Our spiritual lives and ministerial commitments are worth the candle. Our efforts at world transformation make sense, even when we do not perceive the results in our own earthly careers. We are not howling against the night that will ultimately end it all or killing time here waiting for a completely other existence that has no continuity with this one. We are building the City of God into which we and our world will be transformed although the manner of this transformation is beyond our imagination.

As Paul said long ago, if Christ is not risen, our hope is in vain and we are, of all people, the most deluded (see 1 Cor 15:12-14). The one thing the Church has always gotten right is the proclamation, "Jesus Christ is truly risen, Alleluia!"