

We Look forward to the Resurrection of the Dead: Does it Include Microbiomes and Cell Signals? An Interdisciplinary Reflection on Our Faith in a Neuro-cybernetic Era

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Abstract

This essay produces a dialogue between different disciplines, clarifying some of the modern confusion and misunderstandings regarding resurrection, the body, and human nature. It points out from biblical theology and dogmatics that human nature, while limited, is not a bondage that prevents freedom. The problem is rather due to sinfulness. The body, identity, and person, though distinct, are interconnected. Early Christian beliefs about bodily resurrection not only involve material bodies but are related to the entirety of human nature. While they may be channels for sin and death entering the world, the incarnation of Christ transforms them into bridges for transmitting grace. Therefore, soteriology must be based on a proper Christian anthropology. The opposite of the Holy Spirit is not the body or human nature; rather, the Holy Spirit is actively working within them, bringing freedom and ushering people into God’s new creation.

Keywords: Resurrection, human nature, body, identity, person

1. Introduction: Is Bodily Resurrection Believable?

The Christian Century recently published a short article titled “Jesus Resurrected Gut Biome,” where the author, Melissa Florer-Bixler, raised an interesting question: The Gospel of John describes the resurrected Jesus eating fish with his disciples by the sea, a story well known to Christians. From a modern scientific perspective, Jesus would need to digest the fish he ate. If his digestive system was like that of a regular person, it would contain countless microbes that aid in digestion, including those that convert proteins into amino acids to be transported to various tissues of the body.¹ So, did Jesus’ resurrection include the

¹ Melissa Florer-Bixler, “Jesus Resurrected Gut Biome,” *The Christian Century* April 2023, <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/voices/jesus-resurrected-gut-biome>, accessed on 5 June 2023.

various microbes within his body? Some of these microbes had accompanied Jesus' growth since Mary's womb, and without them, no one could survive. Did the microbiome that constituted Jesus' body also resurrect with him? If so, they would have conquered death and entered eternity ahead of the eschaton. This indeed is a difficult question to answer and is certainly not one that the biblical authors and the early church could have imagined. However, it is a legitimate question for those living in the age of science.

I have also heard in Australia that some believers, particularly church members involved in scientific research and especially those related to the medical field, deeply doubt or even outright deny the belief in the resurrection. Sometimes, this scepticism comes from senior members of the congregation. However, Paul clearly confronted his Corinthian congregates saying, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins." (1 Cor 15:17) Despite being surrounded by Greek culture, the early church professed belief in the resurrection of the body and eternal life, as the Nicene-Constantinople Creed affirms. Pastors may easily reproach them and outright deny their ideas. However, since these individuals are professionals, they are likely not pursuing some subjective imagination wishfully. This is an even more serious issue for Asian diaspora churches because many members have moved abroad due to their professions. Therefore, addressing their doubts is a significant issue in evangelism, apologetics, and pastoral care.²

I do not know the specific questions that the scientific researchers in the aforementioned church have exactly, but I can imagine that there are thousands of questions similar to the one raised by Florer-Bixler. Modern conceptions of Jesus' resurrection are bound to cause confusion. On the contrary, it is precisely we have gained more and more understanding of our bodies and the world that it becomes increasingly difficult to understand and affirm the belief in resurrection. It is no wonder that there has been a tendency throughout history to separate life after death with earthly life. Therefore, this essay seeks to engage in dialogue with various disciplines to clarify some of the modern confusions and misunderstandings about resurrection, the body, and human nature. It also aims to point out from biblical theology and dogmatics why the "resurrection of the body" was a firm belief in the early church and why it still holds significance for believers today. We will discover that although the body, identity, and personhood are different concepts, they are interconnected.

² In fact, since the Enlightenment, scepticism about the belief in the resurrection has not been uncommon. For an overview of this topic concerning 17th-century English Enlightenment thinkers cf. John Henry, "The General Resurrection and Early Modern Natural Philosophies: A Preliminary Survey," *Zygon* 58:4 (2023), 905-927.

Therefore, the belief in resurrection involves not only the physical body but also our whole human nature. An appropriate soteriological reflection must be based on a proper Christian understanding of humanity.

2. The Immortality of the Soul or the Resurrection of the Body?

We cannot deny that our understanding of the resurrection is very limited; Paul also pointed out that the resurrection comes first from Christ, and everyone else is still waiting for their order (1 Corinthians 15:23). Therefore, throughout the generations, there have been many unclear and even erroneous concepts about the resurrection and human nature. However, we can also ask in reverse: if there is life after death, is it a stage with no continuity with our current embodied life? If so, calling it a “resurrection” is indeed inappropriate, and it would be more accurate to use the ancient Greek philosophers’ term “the immortality of the soul.”³ In fact, Paul also explicitly acknowledged, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Cor 15:50) Yet, how should we understand this traditional concept? How can modern people inherit it or should they abandon it?⁴

The confusion mentioned above is somewhat related to a presupposition: the resurrection of the body means the resuscitation of the physical body that lived in the earthly life after death,⁵ whereas the immortality of the soul rejects this possibility. However, both believe that the life living within the individual continues in some form after death,⁶ which is also the cause of the confusion. Does the Christian understanding of the resurrection necessitate choosing one over the other? In fact, the Bible does not speak much about the events after Jesus’ resurrection. They are mostly from the final parts of the Gospels, which

³ Not all ancient Greeks reject the idea of bodily resurrection, cf. John Granger Cook, “Resurrection in Paganism and the Question of an Empty Tomb in 1 Corinthians 15,” *New Testament Studies* 63 (2017), 62-74. Besides, it is noteworthy that the New Testament authors employed the term “resurrection” rather than “rapture”, “ascension”, “transformation” and the like, cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids & Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003), 866-870.

⁴ For a dogmatic discussion cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1996), 58-76.

⁵ This seems to be the basic meaning of the verb ἐγείρω, cf. James Ware, “The Resurrection of Jesus in the Pre-Pauline Formula of 1 Cor 15:3-5,” *New Testament Studies* 60 (2014), 492-497. However, this does not rule out the possibility that the quality of the resurrected body is different from before. See the following discussion.

⁶ Whether the resurrection involves a physical body or not can pose cognitive difficulties, which is one of the traditional topics in the philosophy of religion that we cannot discuss comprehensively in this article. Cf. P. W. Gooch, “On Disembodied Resurrected Persons: A Study in the Logic of Christian Eschatology,” *Religious Studies* 17 (1981), 199-213. The New Testament authors also had their concerns. For an analysis from a Corinthian perspective, cf. Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 115-117, 127-129.

are often scattered stories. From a narrative perspective, we often focus on the differences in his body before and after the resurrection, such as familiar people not recognizing him (John 20:14; Luke 24:15-16), his ability to pass through closed rooms freely (John 20:19, 26), and even his ascension to heaven (Acts 1:9). Yet, despite this, we can still affirm that the resurrected Jesus had a body of flesh and bones like any ordinary person (Luke 24:39-40), could converse and eat with people (Luke 24:42-43), and bore the wounds from the crucifixion, which served as a sign for the disciples to recognize him (John 20:20, 27). From an academic perspective, the above passages involve authors and audiences from different periods and backgrounds, making it difficult to provide a simple, comprehensive analysis.⁷ Therefore, the above summary is constructed from a narrative perspective, aiming at the general modern understanding within the church. From this perspective, the resurrected Jesus not only had a body but also shared many aspects with ordinary people. Resurrection does not imply living apart from the body; although this body seems to have transcended some previous limitations, it still bore some past (injury) marks, indicating continuity with the past life rather than a complete break.

From the New Testament to theological discussions, partly influenced by the age of reason, modern scholars' understanding of resurrection can also be categorized into different types.⁸ The first view holds that the accounts in the Gospels should be seen only as the disciples' subjective experiences, intended to show that the actions initiated by Jesus continued even after his death. Conversely, the other side argues that Jesus' crucifixion, burial, and resurrection cannot be reduced solely to the disciples' experience. The account of the empty tomb is a significant counterargument, and even the Jewish council that sent Jesus to the cross did not deny the fact that his body was missing (Matt 28:11-15).⁹ Of course, even the latter perspective, which emphasizes the connection between the Nazarene Jesus and the resurrected Christ, cannot deny that the body of the resurrected Christ differs from its previous (perishable) state. Thus, there is not only a continuity but also some changes, and it

⁷ For an analysis from a Lukan perspective cf. Alexander P. Thompson, "The Risen Christ and Ambiguous Afterlife Language: An Examination of *πνεῦμα* in Luke 24:36-43," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 38:4 (2019), 809-827.

⁸ This categorization referenced Michael Welker, "Resurrection and Eternal Life," in John Polkinghorne & Michael Welker eds., *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Science and Theology on Eschatology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 279-290.

⁹ The empty tomb is indeed a significant topic in the studies of the New Testament and early church, and it is connected to many backgrounds cf. Cook, "Resurrection in Paganism and the Question of an Empty Tomb in 1 Corinthians 15."

is not limited to a revival of the old flesh and blood.¹⁰ If this is the case, then the hope for a universal resurrection at the end, led by Jesus' resurrection, cannot be viewed in exactly the same way (Phil 3:21 indicates that the resurrected body will be transformed to be like the Lord).¹¹ This has important implications for our reflection on the belief in resurrection and its dialogue with the scientific age.¹²

3. Identity and Interaction within a Community

The human body and nature are certainly closely related, but they are not equivalent. If we focus only on the latter and affirm that the resurrected body is not completely the same as the current one, can we say that the human body is unimportant, even if the Christian tradition affirms the resurrection of the body? Can human identity and nature be separated from the body? Or, conversely, is the body indeed a constraint on human nature, such that without it, we might attain greater possibilities?¹³

British philosopher Bernard Williams (1929-2003) proposed a thought experiment fifty years ago that is still worth considering today:¹⁴ If Person A and Person B will be placed into a machine where their memories are swapped, and then Person A's body will be tortured while Person B's body will receive a \$100 000 reward, it seems that Person A should be quite willing to enter the machine (while Person B would be the opposite). However, if we think from another perspective: if Person A is told that he will undergo torture tomorrow, which would naturally cause great fear, and then informed that before this, all his memories will be erased and another person's thoughts will be implanted in his mind, would this alleviate his anxiety or make the situation worse? (Conversely, would Person B agree to the arrangement?)

Mentioning this thought experiment is not to ask us choosing between Person A or Person B, but to illustrate that we cannot reduce a person to merely a body carrying memories

¹⁰ James Ware, "Paul's Understanding of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:36-54," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133:4 (2014), 809-835 offers a detailed analysis in recent years, while affirming the original meaning of bodily restoration, it also recognizes that the resurrected body, due to the power of the Holy Spirit, possesses a fundamentally different nature.

¹¹ Brian Schmisek, "The Body of His Glory: Resurrection Imagery in Philippians 3:20-21," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 43:1 (2013), 26-27.

¹² Cf. Robert John Russell, "Bodily Resurrection, Eschatology, and Scientific Cosmology," in Ted Peters, Robert John Russell & Michael Welker eds., *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002), 8-15; Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2002), 91-112.

¹³ Cf. footnote 6 above.

¹⁴ Bernard Williams, "The Self and the Future," in *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956-73* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 46-63.

(or a soul). Human consciousness and identity are certainly related to memory, which is a result of the organization of individual life experiences. Memory cannot be easily separated from bodily experiences and is even a crucial element in shaping personal identity and personality. Individuals with schizophrenia or delusional misidentification syndromes sometimes believe that their own bodies or those of people around them have been invaded or altered by external entities, making it difficult to affirm past life experiences.¹⁵ From this perspective, we might more easily understand another layer of meaning in the resurrection of the body.

As mentioned earlier, the body of Jesus after the resurrection seems to be different from the past, to the point that people did not recognize him. However, he still bore the scars from the crucifixion, which even became a sign for the disciples to recognize him (John 20:20, 27).¹⁶ On one hand, as mentioned above, past experiences cannot be separated easily from the participant's bodily experiences, especially witnessing the brutal events of the Passion story, which created indelible memories for the disciples. This is a key focus for all the Gospel writers and defines the new relationship between God and the world (a God who became incarnate and actively participated in human suffering, connecting with the sufferers in this world).¹⁷ The resurrected Jesus also returned with a body, traveling with the disciples to Emmaus, participating in their fishing activities by the sea, and even eating and drinking with them. If the resurrected Lord had no body and was merely a spirit, all these actions would be unimaginable and even impossible to achieve, and at least the Gospel accounts would be very different.¹⁸ Of course, we are not saying that the resurrection must involve an

¹⁵ Cf. Nancy Murphy, "The Resurrection Body and Personal Identity," in Peters, Russell & Welker eds., *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*, 210-211; this phenomenon can also be related to theological reflection, cf. Harvey Cawdron, "Divided Minds and Divine Judgement: Dissociative Identity Disorder, Heaven and Hell, and the Resurrection of the Body," *TheoLogica* 7:1 (2023), 168-193.

¹⁶ For a related theological and pastoral reflection cf. Robert H. Smith, *Wounded Lord: Reading John Through the Eyes of Thomas* (Eugene: Cascade, 2009).

¹⁷ This is a major issue in contemporary theology, particularly since World War II, and we cannot elaborate on it in detail here; cf. the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jürgen Moltmann, Miroslav Volf, etc. However, this is actually a traditional topic and has been extensively discussed from the early Church fathers to St. Thomas Aquinas; cf. Charles Pope, "Why Jesus' Resurrected Body still had Wounds," <https://blog.adw.org/2017/04/jesus-resurrected-body-still-wounds/>, accessed on 23 June 2023. For discussions connecting from the New Testament to theology cf. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*; N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); Christian Stettler, "The Resurrection of the Body. Its Place in Biblical Theology and Its Meaning for Christian Life and Witness," *European Journal of Theology* 32:1 (2023), 26-59.

¹⁸ Cf. René A. López, "The Nature of the Resurrection Body of Jesus and Believers," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170 (2013), 143-153; for the implications of the Lukan narrative cf. Thompson, "The Risen Christ and Ambiguous Afterlife Language."

exactly identical body to the previous one (as Paul says, it has at least been transformed into an imperishable state), but rather to highlight the significant meaning of bodily resurrection for the continuation of life.

We can even hypothetically consider that God could create a completely different body for Jesus and everyone else at the universal resurrection, but how could our consciousness and those around us confirm that “this person” is truly me?¹⁹ This is not only a focus of the resurrection narratives in the Gospels but also a common theme in modern films and dramas about out-of-body experiences and role-swapping. In this sense, the body is not only related to psychological issues of individual consciousness and experience but also a crucial element in shaping personal identity within a community. Conversely, identity or personality often needs to be demonstrated through concrete actions, which is why if we acknowledge Jesus Christ as the incarnate God who participates in human history, it means that God’s nature can be expressed through what His Son says and does, impacting us. Therefore, the resurrected Jesus is not just an intangible spirit but remains a flesh-and-blood presence among the disciples, influencing them and the church for future generations. This influence must occur through personal interaction within the community. This is why Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) believed that Christology is ultimately not a question of how (do the two natures connect) but a question of who (is Christ), and that “the Christological question can only be asked, as a scholarly question, within the sphere of the church.”²⁰ From one perspective, personal identity can only be fully expressed within a community, and thus faith in Christ can only have an impact through a believing community.

From the resurrection of Jesus’ body and his subsequent activities, it seems that God affirms the positive role of personal interaction and identity formation within the community. Of course, we should not overlook that since Augustine, the Latin Christian tradition has tended to emphasize the dark side of human nature and views original sin as having widespread effects among fallen human beings. But although Paul said that “sin came into the world through one man” (Rom 5:12), “so through the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.” (Rom 5:19) Both the Catholic and Protestant traditions commonly think of the process of justification and sanctification through the lens of the Latin doctrine of

¹⁹ Cf. footnote 6 above.

²⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Lectures on Christology,” in *Berlin: 1932-1933*, DBWE 12 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 303; For the contribution of this discussion to Christology cf. Rowan Williams, *Christ, the Heart of Creation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 169-217.

substitutionary atonement. However, if we focus on the role of Jesus' resurrection, 1 Cor 15 may be more relevant for this discussion.²¹ Paul contrasts the resurrected Christ, the "last Adam," with the "first Adam" (1 Cor 15:45),²² stating that Christ is "the first-fruit of those who have died." (1 Cor 15:20)²³ The question is how this effect operates within the new creation. Bonhoeffer's view on Christ and the church is worth considering, as he notes that the incarnate Christ reveals God's divine image and draws close to human race, calling people to open their closed selves and restore true fellowship with God and humans. Since the church is the body of Christ, it manifests His reality within this faith community, allowing people to encounter Christ through their connection with fellow believers and participate in the new creation, restoring human nature distorted by sin.²⁴

4. The Driving Force behind the Body

As seen from above, from the perspectives of science, philosophy, and psychology, we can affirm the significance of the resurrection of the body, as it involves the formation of identity within the community and the interaction between persons and God. However, we must admit that our knowledge of the resurrected body is limited. Apart from the accounts of Jesus' post-resurrection activities in the Gospels, the most significant reference is

²¹ This essay does not intend to be a contribution to New Testament studies, although we will explore some related scriptural passages. For academic commentaries cf. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Ada: Baker Academic, 2003); Richard Hays, *First Corinthians* (Interp; Louisville: John Knox, 1997); for topics related to these scriptures cf. Cook, "Resurrection in Paganism and the Question of an Empty Tomb in 1 Corinthians 15"; James D. G. Dunn, "How are the Dead Raised? With What Body do they Come? Reflections on 1 Corinthians 15," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 45:1 (2002), 4-18; Andrew Johnson, "Turning the World Upside Down in 1 Corinthians 15: Apocalyptic Epistemology, the Resurrected Body and the New Creation," *Evangelical Quarterly* 75:4 (2003), 291-309; Jerry L. Sumney, "Post-Mortem Existence and Resurrection of the Body in Paul," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 31 (2009), 13-21; Ware, "The Resurrection of Jesus in the Pre-Pauline Formula of 1 Cor 15:3-5"; Ware, "Paul's Understanding of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:36-54"; Joel White, "'He was Raised on the Third Day according to the Scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:4) A Typological Interpretation based on the Cultic Calendar in Leviticus 23," *Tyndale Bulletin* 66:1 (2015), 103-119; Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 312-361.

²² Concerning the concept of Adam Christology cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (London: SCM, 1980), 98-128; Brandon D. Crowe, *The Last Adam: A Theology of the Obedient Life of Jesus in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Bakers, 2023).

²³ For a related discussion cf. White, "'He was Raised on the Third Day according to the Scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:4)."

²⁴ This is the central idea of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's doctoral thesis; cf. *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, DBWE 1; trans. Reinhard Krauss & Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009).

undoubtedly found in 1 Cor 15.²⁵ Returning to the bodies of the “first man Adam” and the “last Adam” (1 Cor 15:45), Paul’s descriptions are indeed challenging for modern people:

So it is with the resurrection of the dead... It is sown a physical body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body (σῶμα ψυχικόν), there is also a spiritual body (σῶμα πνευματικόν). (1 Cor 15:42-44)

Modern people even of Asian descent, much like those immersed in ancient Greek dualism, often put the soul and the body in opposition, making it easy to perceive the “spiritual body” mentioned here as something separated from reality.²⁶ However, Paul’s reference to both “physical” and “spiritual” points to the “body,” which is a concrete entity, also serving the function of connecting one’s own body and person with those of others.²⁷ Moreover, even though both Greek and modern people often adopt a dualistic view of soul and body, there is a significant difference between the two perspectives. Modern people tend to consider the material world as real and matters of spirit or soul as fictitious, hence the need to prove many aspects of faith (such as the existence of God or life after death). In contrast, Greek culture regarded the mutable and perishable world as deceptive, with spiritual matters considered eternal, thus more real and valuable. The former was often seen as a temporary imitation of the latter, intended to realize its essence and potential. Of course, this is not to say that Paul fully embraced Greek cultural understanding; on the contrary, it is generally believed that his concepts remain quite Hebraic (Pharisaic) in tradition.²⁸ When we read it this way, we can understand what Paul is saying here: he is not only pointing to the transformation of individual lives but also to the metamorphosis of the entire world and age.²⁹

²⁵ Cf. footnote 21, 22 above.

²⁶ This perhaps relates to the mind-body dualism initiated by René Descartes, but the resurgence of virtue ethics over the past half-century has brought renewed attention to personal identity, character, and communication; cf. Murphy, “The Resurrection Body and Personal Identity,” 212-218. For the meaning of the New Testament vocabulary cf. Ware, “Paul’s Understanding of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:36-54”; Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 282-286.

²⁷ The translation also creates confusion here, because when Paul later mentions “flesh and blood (σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα) cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 15:50), he uses a completely different set of terms. The “mortal body” (σῶμα ψυχικόν) in 1 Cor 15:44 might be understood as the “natural” body. In Paul’s thinking, the body (σῶμα) and the flesh (σὰρξ) have different connotations and values. Cf. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 51-73; Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 282-284.

²⁸ Martin, *The Corinthian Body*; Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 277-311.

²⁹ Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 317-333; Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 370-374.

After contrasting the mortal body and the spiritual body, Paul continues, “The first man, Adam, became a living being (ψυχὴν ζῶσαν); the last Adam became a life-giving spirit (πνεῦμα ζωοποιοῦν).” (1 Cor 15:45) Here, (human) being and spirit are indeed contrasted, but since it has been explained above that both have bodies, the contrast is not between spiritual and physical, but rather between whether the driving force within the fleshly body is “spiritual” or “natural.”³⁰ Doesn’t this align with the traditional view of the spirit versus the flesh? No, because both aspects point to the physical body. What is emphasized here is the source of the body’s power – the former being natural, the latter being (Holy) Spirit. The focus, rather, is on the essential difference in the body before and after resurrection, which is brought about by the Holy Spirit.³¹ No wonder Paul believed that it was the power of the Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 1:4).³² He even equated the Holy Spirit and Christ with the Lord (2 Cor 3:16-17), laying the foundation for the early church’s confession.³³ The body and human nature are not to be despised, but they are related to the constitution of identity and personhood. The key to their quality lies in whether they are driven by the Holy Spirit. Even if human nature is bound by sin after the fall, whether it can be delivered depends on this.

In this light, although the human body and human nature bear flaws after the fall, as many early church fathers believed that God’s image within them had been distorted, sin and death have since entered the world.³⁴ Yet, the last Adam also uses the same channel to bring

³⁰ Similarly, in these verses, the terms ψυχὴν/ψυχικόν can be understood as “natural,” referring to a living person, contrasted with πνεῦμα/πνευματικόν; cf. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 76-78; Johnson, “Turning the World Upside Down in 1 Corinthians 15,” 292-296; Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 282-286. Besides, James Ware compellingly pointed out that, from the perspective of Greek grammar, the aforementioned contrasts all indicate that these terms are adjective phrases of the fleshly body; cf. Ware, “Paul’s Understanding of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:36-54,” 821-825.

³¹ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 347-356; Ware, “Paul’s Understanding of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:36-54,” 827-835 offers a fantastic analysis of this paragraph; besides, Johnson, “Turning the World Upside Down in 1 Corinthians 15” relates the discussion to 2:6-16, clearly shows that the difference is due to whether the driving force is from the Holy Spirit.

³² As mentioned above, we should not exaggerate the contrast between spirit and body. The body still plays an important role in the created order. An interpretation of this paragraph cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8 (Word Biblical Commentary 38A)* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 13-16.

³³ Cf. Jason Lam, “Lingen tiyan yu chuantong xinyang de fuhe [The Reconciliation of Charismatic Experience and Traditional Faith],” in Justin Tan & Peter Tie eds., *Spirit Wind: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Global Theology- a Chinese Perspective* (Wantirna: Melbourne School of Theology, 2022), 182-185.

³⁴ Irenaeus and the concept of recapitulation are the representatives; cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 170-174.

humans from death to life, into the fellowship of the new creation, to enjoy eternal life.³⁵ Believers are sent into the world for this purpose, to restore human nature through connection with the last Adam and to recover the lost image of glory. Therefore, the body and human nature cannot be seen merely as prisons or shackles to be discarded but also as instruments that can be used by the Lord to transmit salvation. Although the body and human nature have their limitations, they are not flaws (God's creation was deemed good!). The true shackles should be sin, not human nature.

5. Human Nature itself as a Sign of Transcendence

More than twenty years ago, there was a movie called "The 6th Day." Adam, the protagonist, is illegally cloned, but later he and his clone work together to save his family. In the story, the clone asks Adam if he counts as a human as he is being cloned and lacking a soul. Adam responds that if he can risk his life to save others, how could he not be considered a human? Bringing up this movie plot is not to delve into whether a clone has a soul, but to point out that what makes a human cannot be measured solely from a biological or psychological perspective. Throughout history and across cultures, religious traditions have always defined humanity or human nature beyond these standards.³⁶ Connecting to the earlier topic about the driving force of life, if we consider human nature in this way, then the starting point of resurrected life should not be viewed merely in terms of physical changes, but rather in terms of the power that brings about resurrection.³⁷

If the initiation of resurrection lies in the power of the Holy Spirit, the distinction in the essence of life does not wait for the body and universal resurrection to begin. Besides separating body and soul, believers regardless of eastern or western descent, often isolate this life from the next, which is clearly problematic from this perspective.³⁸ Paul explicitly states that the Spirit that raised Jesus and everyone else from the dead now lives within believers (Rom 8:9-11:23). Indeed, it can be said that the Spirit is external to the natural person; but if

³⁵ This is also based on Adam Christology. For a New Testament overview cf. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (London & New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 199-204.

³⁶ This discussion centred about the movie is inspired by an essay: Pan-chiu Lai, "Renleide weilai [The Future of Human Being]," in Jason Lam, Pan-chiu Lai & Yuen-tai So, *Friend or Foe? The Pluralistic Relationship between Science and Religion* (Hong Kong: Ming Feng, 2012), 213-242.

³⁷ James D. G. Dunn, "The Spirit and the Body of Christ," in *The Christ and the Spirit: Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 329-342.

³⁸ For an analysis from New Testament studies cf. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 461-472; for a discussion connecting resurrection with finite life cf. Ernst M. Conradie, "Resurrection, Finitude, and Ecology," in Peters, Russell & Welker eds., *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*, 277-296.

anyone is in Christ, they are within God's new creation, where everything is made new (2 Cor 5:17).³⁹ In this sense, while Christ's resurrection certainly comes from the power of the Holy Spirit, the resurrection of the body ultimately belongs to the spiritual. As mentioned above, Paul is not suggesting that this is fictional or unfulfilled; on the contrary, it is more real than the material world we dwell in!⁴⁰ This calls us to view the world with a completely new perspective – not by adding a spiritual dimension to the material one and devaluing the latter, but by recognizing that the spiritual world encompasses the entirety of human nature and everything around us, as it all belongs to the realm loved by God.

Some scientists, such as Francis Crick (1916-2004), who discovered the DNA double helix model, indeed once stated:

You, your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behaviour of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules. ... You are nothing but a pack of neurons.⁴¹

The unsettling aspect of this statement is evidently the attempt to reduce immaterial things such as identity and even human nature to purely material categories. In the current rapid development of biotechnology and cybernetics, it is not hard to imagine that one day technicians might indeed be able to fully replicate the physiological information within the human body into computer components. The experiments envisioned by Williams fifty years ago and the cloning actions depicted in "The 6th Day" twenty years ago could be achievable; immortality through technology may even come true.⁴²

Even so, we can still ask Crick or anyone else: Would you be willing to swap your thoughts or body with someone else's, or back them up to give it a try? After all, this is just

³⁹ Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Magaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 83-98.

⁴⁰ Another short article from *The Christian Century* is noteworthy: Ross M. Allen, "Do We Need a Raised Body?", *The Christian Century* 6 April 2022, 28-31.

⁴¹ Francis Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul* (New York: Scribner's, 1994), 3.

⁴² Needless to say, this is different from the concept of bodily resurrection discussed above; cf. Noreen Herzfeld, "Cybernetic Immortality versus Christian Resurrection," in Peters, Russell & Welker eds., *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*, 192-201.

like copying and transmitting data from biological hardware as we do with computers! Regardless of the answer, it is likely that anyone considering this would not only think about the purely material and technical aspects but must also include the subjective will of the participants – their own considerations and those of the people and things around them, as well as thinking from emotional, cultural, ethical, and religious perspectives. In other words, even if certain operations could be technically successful, the decisive factor does not lie within them. Crick’s reductionism cannot provide a solution for this. Human consciousness and nature certainly have their limitations, but their very existence is a signal of transcendence beyond the material body and should not be understood as bondage. From a faith perspective, on the contrary, this should be seen as a gift from God, enabling people to break free from the confines of the physical body and engage in relationships with others and with God.

In discussing Williams’ experiment, we have already pointed out that humans cannot merely be seen as combinations of memories or consciousness loaded into bodies. Thus, as Crick suggested, reducing the former to the latter naturally leads to problems with biological information. Consequently, we find that it is impossible to separate the soul, memory, and consciousness from the body, just as it is impossible to believe that they are merely products of the physical shell. We have always found it difficult to define what humanity is – it certainly has its limitations and dark aspects – but salvation must also be related to it. God was not ashamed to take on its form (Phil 2:6-8). It is no wonder that the Old and New Testaments regard both “the first Adam” and “the last Adam” as the image of God (Gen 1:26-27; Col 1:15-16), and the two are also connected.⁴³

6. A Final Remark with Ecological Concern

So, after a comprehensive discussion, we have not yet revolved the original question: Did the microbiome within Jesus also resurrect with Him? Have they entered into glory as well? We must admit that, from a scientific perspective, or from the viewpoint of the natural human body, it is difficult to have a definitive answer. The resurrected Jesus possessed an imperishable spiritual body, which is essentially different from our current one, yet there is still a certain continuity; at least the disciples ate and drank with the resurrected Jesus. From this perspective, it can be inferred that the resurrected body might also have a gut biome!⁴⁴

⁴³ Cf. footnote 22 above.

⁴⁴ This is also the answer of Florer-Bixler, “Jesus Resurrected Gut Biome.”

However, whether these microorganisms are the same as those at the time of His crucifixion is something we cannot answer. We only know that this belongs to the realm of spiritual matters. Nevertheless, this also carries significant implications for modern people.

In the above discussion, we connected the concepts of body, identity, and personhood, largely staying within the interpersonal perspective. However, if the human body not only forms interpersonality but also links species, as indicated by the digestive tract of Jesus, then the incarnate Lord's participation extends beyond the human world to encompass all visible and invisible through whom are created. If the resurrected Lord's body must contain other biological groups, this signifies that His salvation is not limited only to humans but includes all of creation that He loves and cares for.

This should not be surprising, as the New Testament's depiction of the new heaven and earth includes the tree of life and the river of life (Rev 21:6; 22:1-2, 14, 17). Did Isaiah not already proclaim that "The wolf shall live with the lamb; the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the lion will feed together, and a little child shall lead them." (Isa 11:6)? Of course, we can understand these as symbolic portrayals; but if large animals are included, why would the microbiome be excluded? The ancients lacked knowledge in this area, so they did not describe it. However, for modern people living amid ecological crises, this might carry significant implications, as God never confined His salvation plan to humans alone. Humans and other creatures have always been interconnected within God's grand and beautiful creation blueprint.⁴⁵

If the resurrected Jesus still has a microbiome, it means that the scope of God's love and care is always far greater than we have imagined. How can humans then disregard all that the creator cherishes? Thus, the belief in bodily resurrection is not, as many think, a negative form of escapism, but rather calls for us to actively participate in and transform the world that the Lord aims to renew through the Holy Spirit.

Is our existing body and human nature bondage that separates us from God? From the discussion in this essay, it is absolutely not the case. Although human nature has its limitations, it is not a shackle; what truly restricts freedom is sin. Body, identity, and

⁴⁵ There have been theological reflections from this perspective, cf. Michael Kunnen & Clayton D. Carlson, "Deeply Connected to God's Good World, the Human Microbiome," *Christian Scholar's Review* 46:2 (2017), 113-126; Aaron M. Hill, "The Other Within: Rethinking Theological Anthropology in Light of the Microbiome," *Christian Scholar's Review* 50:1 (2020), 39-59.

personhood are interconnected. They might have been channels through which sin and death entered the world, but the incarnate Lord has also transformed them into bridges of His grace. It is not the body or human nature that stands in opposition to the Holy Spirit; rather, the Holy Spirit is meant to work through them, allowing people to enjoy freedom and enter into God's new creation. The narratives after Jesus' resurrection provide us with some images, offering a glimpse of the goodness of the end times and its significant implications for the present. We are sent to be God's ambassadors and to cherish everything that God cares for.

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