

1 CORINTHIANS 15

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1 Cor. 15 occupies a prime place in the Christian understanding of resurrection, both that of Christ and that of the Christian, and yet I do not believe its full significance has yet been understood. With this in mind I attempt here a dispassionate reading of this important text. By that I mean that I shall approach the text without any preconceptions derived from our knowledge of the gospel traditions, confident that in doing so we shall be placing ourselves to some extent in the position of Paul's first readers. In so far as we can reconstruct primitive Christian preaching<sup>1</sup>, we can say that that preaching contained, of course, news of Christ's resurrection, but no details concerning the empty tomb, the first witnesses, the appearances. We can further be more or less certain that, at least ten years before the composition of Mk and thirty before that of Mt and Lk, no written material was available to the Corinthians of Paul's time<sup>2</sup>.

Some commentators consider that, like 2 Cor, 1 Cor is an editorial amalgamation of several letters<sup>3</sup>. The main arguments are:

- a) there seems to be a contradiction between ch.8 and 10.23-11.1 on the one hand and 10.1-22 on the other;
- b) ch.13 interrupts the argument developed in 12 and 14;
- c) in ch.9 Paul seems to defend himself from attacks on his apostolic office; no such attacks are discernible in chs.1-4;
- d) in 1.10ff Paul seems familiar with the slogans of the various factions. 11.18ff, in which less familiarity is evident, would therefore seem to stem from an earlier situation;
- e) 4.19 and 16.5ff seem to be mutually contradictory.

As Friedrich Lang comments (*ibid*), the carving-up of a letter is necessary only when the text clearly indicates different situations, and the arguments in the case of 1 Cor are not such as to compel assent. On the other hand, the connexion of ch.15 with its surroundings is not so clear that it can be accepted uncritically. We therefore need to consider two hypotheses:

1. The present letter is substantially as Paul wrote it, and ch.15 is in its original place. (This is argued by Wolff<sup>4</sup>.) In this case, it is plausible to understand it as a pericope determined by two considerations. On the one hand, Paul wished to broach the main issue underlying the previously mentioned areas of dispute: marriage and virginity (7.1-40), food offered to idols (8-10), public worship (11) and spiritual gifts (12-14). He could equally

have reserved this discussion until after the next two items in the Corinthians' letter, the letter for the Jerusalem church (16.1-4) and Apollos' return to Corinth (16.12f). On the other hand, he wished to deal with misconceptions concerning resurrection, perhaps also mentioned in the Corinthians' letter at this point but not there introduced with the customary  $\pi\epsilon\rho\iota\ \delta\epsilon$ . (According to Gerhard Sellin<sup>5</sup>, Paul's reasons here are 'rhetorical'.) His theme is therefore that only those whose behaviour is above reproach can hope to benefit from Christ's acquisition of glorious access to God. Resurrection is a reality, he affirms, and strong Christians are mistaken in thinking that agape is dispensable.

2 The original context of 1 Cor.15 is irrecoverable. In this case we have to rely on the material provided by the chapter itself in our efforts to reconstruct the situation. This second hypothesis would weaken but not destroy the reading we propose, since the latter requires the chapter to be understood primarily as paraenesis and not as doctrine.

### The Situation

Do we need to determine the Corinthians' position(s) before we can understand Paul? Opinions are divided. Prof. Jean-Noël Aletti argues<sup>6</sup> that since Paul counters their conclusion (there is no resurrection) and not their arguments, whether spiritualist or materialist, it is not necessary to know what they thought in order fully to understand the apostle's position and the profundity of his views. There is something in this, but perhaps we do not need to renounce so easily the attempt to discover what the Corinthians thought.

According to Schrage<sup>7</sup>, the Corinthians' position is not that of Sadducees converted to Christianity, nor that of enlightened sceptics, nor that of philosophising Platonists, nor that of people who deny all life beyond death, but that of people who deny bodily resurrection (and also perhaps future resurrection). Barrett<sup>8</sup> argues skillfully (but I believe erroneously) that the Corinthians laboured under two errors: some accepted resurrection for Christ but not for others; others accepted resurrection but not in the body; Paul answers the first in vv.1-34, the second in vv.35ff. Lang too (p.232) opts for two Corinthian errors: a spiritualistic denial of bodily resurrection, and a Pharisaic belief that the earthly body would be resurrected as it stood. Klauck<sup>9</sup> argues that the Corinthians believed in personal immortality on the basis of a Greek body-soul dualism. According to Sellin (p.17), there are

three main theories:

1. the people in question excluded all possibilities of salvation beyond death;
2. they denied the futurity of resurrection (a Christian had already risen in his or her lifetime);
3. they proposed a spiritual, non-bodily resurrection.

Only one of these theories, according to Sellin, is satisfactory: no.3. Paul's opponents were anthropological dualists who denied the body all redemptive relevance (pp.21-37). To initiate his discussion, Paul summons up a fictitious objection (in the style of a diatribe) from his dualistic opponents, which rests on a non-Pauline understanding of σῶμα: "The body is ephemeral. Resurrection, which by definition is somatic, is therefore excluded". The objection is falsely put because it presumes man has a body, not, as Paul does, that man is a body (pp.72f). Sellin concludes from an examination of the language (pp.79-209) that such theories have their original home in Alexandrian-Jewish wisdom theology. Those who denied resurrection at Corinth were therefore pneumatics of Alexandrian-Jewish provenance, perhaps led by Apollos.

Sellin has been too hasty in dismissing the first theory, in my opinion. As we shall see, Paul's argument can be summed up in two propositions: the dead can be raised from sheol; to be amongst those that are, one must be "in Christ". If these propositions contradict his opponents' views, the opponents thought either that there was no sheol, or that if there was, no one could leave it. These views are much more likely to be propounded by gentile than by Jewish Christians.

This view is strongly confirmed if 1 Cor.15 is taken to be an integral part of the letter. Some of the Corinthian community (or communities) who prided themselves on their new-found wisdom were causing dissension in the church (1.10-4.21), living immoral lives (5.1-13; 6.12-20), and despising the judgement of their fellow-Christians (6.1-11). Furthermore, they peddled erroneous views on the impact of the imminent End on the marriage tie, they saw no harm in eating meat that had reached the market-place or host's table via the pagan temples, they considered glossolalia the highest proof of their Spirit-possession, they objected to raising money for the Jewish-Christian church in Jerusalem, and finally they wanted the anti-Jewish Apollos sent back to Corinth to bolster their party. These are clearly the hallmarks of liberal gentiles.

On the question of resurrection, they seem to have believed that there was none, that is, that death was the end. This meant that Christianity was

reduced to a belief-system (a 'wisdom') offering an exhilarating freedom from restraint and the acquisition of impressive spiritual gifts, without responsibility towards the more scrupulous members of the community (Jewish Christians). Paul replies that their beliefs will exclude them through irresponsible behaviour from the greatest divine gift of all: agape, which remains firm even through death (13.13).

However, we anticipate. It is perhaps best to approach our reading of the text by offering a translation, using the twenty-sixth edition of Nestle as our Greek original. Explanatory headings are added to clarify the argument as I see it. The translation pretends not to solve all the difficulties in the text but to give the overall drift of Paul's argument. Some details of interpretation can be left undecided.

### Translation of 1 Cor.15

**Some of you say that since there is no resurrection or escape from sheol, Christian behaviour does not matter; they contradict our constant belief.**

<sup>1</sup>Now may I repeat, my friends, the gospel I preached to you, which you accepted, to which you now adhere, <sup>2</sup>and through which you are saved? (if, that is, you stand by the word I preached to you, unless of course you were not committed in your belief).

<sup>3</sup>One of the first beliefs I shared with you, which I too had accepted, was that although "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures <sup>4</sup>and was buried, he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that he was seen by Cephas, then by the Twelve; <sup>6</sup>afterwards he was seen once for all by over five hundred brethren", most of whom are still with us, although some have died. <sup>7</sup>Afterwards he was seen by James, then by all the apostles; <sup>8</sup>and lastly he was seen by me too, although I was as useless as a still-born child.

(<sup>9</sup>I am the least of the apostles, in fact unworthy to be called an apostle at all, because I persecuted the church of God, <sup>10</sup>but by God's grace I am what I am, and his grace to me was not in vain, because I worked harder than all of them - not I, of course, but God's grace working with me.) <sup>11</sup>So whether you heard them or me, our preaching was the same, and you believed it at the time.

<sup>12</sup>Now if our preaching was that Christ had been raised from among the dead, how can some of you now say that there is no such thing as a resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup>If there is no such thing as a resurrection of the dead, Christ was not raised, <sup>14</sup>and if Christ was not raised, our preaching was false and your belief was false. <sup>15</sup>We could even be called false witnesses of God because we testified that God raised Christ, which he could not have done if the dead cannot be raised. <sup>16</sup>If the dead cannot be raised, Christ was not raised, <sup>17</sup>and if Christ was not raised, your belief was worthless and you are still in your sins; <sup>18</sup>and those who have died in Christ are lost! <sup>19</sup>If in Christ we have put our hope in this life only, we are of all the most to be pitied. <sup>20</sup>As it is, however, Christ was raised from among the dead, the firstfruit of the dead, <sup>21</sup>because although death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also came through a man. <sup>22</sup>Although all die in Adam, all will be made alive in Christ, <sup>23</sup>but in proper order: Christ the firstfruit, then at his parousia those who belong to Christ.

### **The Consummation**

<sup>24</sup>And that will be the End, when he hands the kingdom over to God the Father and abolishes all rule and all authority and power. <sup>25</sup>He must reign until he puts all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup>The last enemy death has been made powerless, for Christ has subjected everything under his feet. (<sup>27</sup>When it says that all things have been subjected, it is clear that this does not include the subjecter, <sup>28</sup>but when all things have been subjected, the Son himself will be subjected to God who put all things under him, so that God may be all in all.)

**How do Christians believe they achieve this resurrection? By living according to spiritual values!**

<sup>29</sup>What, may I ask, is the point of baptism, if Christians are to be eternally dead? If the dead are not raised, why bother to be baptised? <sup>30</sup>Why do we run hourly risks? <sup>31</sup>I die every day. I say this because of my pride in you, my friends, in Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>32</sup>If I fought with wild beasts in Ephesus, what worldly profit will it bring me? If the dead cannot be raised, let us eat and drink, because we shall be dead tomorrow (Is 22:13). <sup>33</sup>Do not be deceived: 'bad company corrupts good habits'. <sup>34</sup>Live just and sober lives, not sinful lives. I am ashamed to say that some of you show in your behaviour no knowledge of God.

**Surely, I hear you say, corruptible humans cannot be raised beyond death!  
Of course they can - by God's power!**

<sup>35</sup>Those of you of whom I am speaking will now ask, of course, how the Christian dead can be raised, and what sort of body they will have! <sup>36</sup>Foolish people, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies, <sup>37</sup>and what you sow is not the future body but a naked grain, as it were of wheat or some other crop. <sup>38</sup>God gives it whatever form he chooses, each seed is different. <sup>39</sup>Not all flesh is the same: humans have one kind, animals another, birds another and fish yet another. <sup>40</sup>There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but their glories are not the same. <sup>41</sup>The glories of the sun and the moon and stars are not the same; stars too differ in their glory. <sup>42</sup>The same may be said of resurrection of the Christian dead. What is sown in corruption is raised in incorruption; <sup>43</sup>what is sown in dishonour is raised in glory; what is sown in weakness is raised in power. <sup>44</sup>What is sown as a natural body is raised as a spiritual body.

**Those who will benefit from this transformation are those who have modelled themselves on the second Adam, Jesus Christ.**

There is a natural body, but there is also a spiritual body. <sup>45</sup>Even though, as it has been written, 'The first man Adam became a living soul' (Gen.2.7), the *last* Adam became a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup>The spiritual body, however, does not come immediately. The natural body comes first, then the spiritual body. <sup>47</sup>The first man was made from the earth, he was earthy; the second man is from heaven. <sup>48</sup>Earthy people are like the earthy man, and heavenly people are like the heavenly man, <sup>49</sup>and just as we were once in the image of the earthy man, so we shall be in the image of the heavenly man. <sup>50</sup>Let me tell you this, my friends: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God! Corruption cannot inherit incorruption!

**I can even tell you how the transformation will take place.**

<sup>51</sup>I can now reveal that although we shall not all have died, we shall all be changed, <sup>52</sup>in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, at the moment of the final trumpet. The trumpet will sound, and the Christian dead will be raised incorruptible, and God will change us!

**Conclusion: mend your ways!**

<sup>53</sup>So this corruptible life must put on incorruption, and this mortal life must



v.29,35,42,52 refers to Christians and is marked in the translation by the addition of "Christian". A more detailed discussion follows below.

v.15 "cannot be raised", οὐκ ἐγείρονται, lit. are not raised. Also v.16.,

v.18 "are lost", ἀπώλοντο, lit. were lost (aor.) when they died.

v.20 "As it is", νυνὶ. Its exact force is difficult to determine. Wordsworth<sup>12</sup> takes it to be a reference to the time of year when Paul was writing, ie Easter 57 CE. Others prefer a logical sense.

v.21 "through a man", δι' ἀνθρώπου, or through human means.

v.23 "at his parousia", ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ. Some older commentators understood this to mean "at his (first) advent", but the relevance of this is hard to see.

For a full discussion of the concept ἀπαρχῆ, the reader may consult Osten-Sacken<sup>13</sup>.

v.24 "That will be", εἶτα, lit. then, either after the parousia or (as in my translation) at the moment of the parousia.

v.26 Or "among these enemies death is made powerless last": ἔσχατος ἐχθρος καταργεῖται ὁ θάνατος is translated here according to the suggestion of A.Vanhoye (quoted by Carrez<sup>14</sup>). Wolff, p.181, prefers a combination of "eliminate" (ausschalten) and "annihilate" (vernichten). Robertson-Plummer<sup>15</sup> offer "brought to nought" and "done away", and Moffatt<sup>16</sup> "put down".

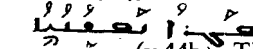
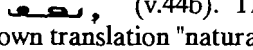
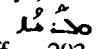
v.29 The translation of this notorious verse is justified in J.C.O'Neill's article<sup>17</sup>. I cannot agree with Aletti, pp.77f, that the different interpretations do not alter the logic of Paul's argument. Briefly O'Neill's argument is this. There are three substantial difficulties with regard to the usual translation (eg the RSV):



1 Vicarious baptism is nowhere attested and in any case seems theologically impossible;

2 ὅλος would more naturally go with νεκροὶ than with the verb, from which it is widely separated;

3 the textus difficilior, v.29c, would be that given in minuscule MS 69 and is preferable: ... βαπτίζονται ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν τῶν νεκρῶν. The verse begins to make sense if we take ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν in v.29b to mean "on behalf of (themselves as) corpses" (as in Chrysostom), ie some Corinthians were getting baptised against an imminent death. "The whole verse", continues O'Neill, 'may then be paraphrased, "Otherwise what do those hope to achieve who are baptised for their dying bodies? If the completely dead are not raised, why then are they baptized for themselves as corpses?"'



- '(p.311). In other words, some Corinthians were seeing in baptism a prophylactic against decay of the body: it would ensure their bodily resurrection. Wordsworth, p.139, gives an explanation in some respects similar.
- v.32 Or "If as far as man is concerned (ie without divine interference), I fought with the wild beasts' etc.  
"If the dead cannot be raised", occasionally understood as attached to v.32a.
- v.34 ἀγνωσίαν γὰρ θεοῦ τινες ἔχουσιν πρὸς ἐντροπῆν ὑμῶν λαλῶ.  
The context seems to demand a criticism of the Corinthians' *behaviour* rather than just of belief. See also B.Standaert in the discussion that followed Aletti's paper (apud de Lorenzi <sup>18</sup>). I do not see how Barrett <sup>19</sup> justifies regarding vv.29-34 as a "digression".
- v.35 seems to be continuing the dialogue and so refers to those mentioned in v.12.
- v.38 Some commentators emphasise the adversative δὲ here: what you sow is not the future body, but God gives etc.
- v.39 For some reason the Peschitta has used "body" (ܒܘܕܢܐ) to translate Paul's σὰρξ .
- v.44 Paul's σῶμα ψυχικόν in v.44a and b is translated in the Syr as  (v.44a) and  (v.44b). The Vulg has corpus animale in both cases. Our own translation "natural" can therefore be substituted by "fleshy" or "animal".
- v.45 "Even though", to translate the καὶ simply omitted in many English translations. The underlinings in my translation represent the emphatic positionings of the Greek: ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδάμ εἰς πνεῦμα ζωοποιούν.
- V.47 The Syr, normally very literal in its translation of the Greek, here adds  'The second man is the Lord from the heavens'.
- v.48b Wolff, p.203, argues that the future rather than the present tense should be supplied.
- v.49 The textual variant φορέσωμεν, 'let us be', might even be preferable here, but I do not insist on it. I am not quite sure why Barrett ('The significance', p.119) understands the Greek to be an inceptive aorist: We began to bear.
- v.51 μυστήριον in Paul is an aspect of the gospel made known in these last times.
- v.52 God will change us, ἀλλαγῆσόμεθα, divine passive.
- v.55 Where Paul's Greek reads θάνατε ... θάνατε and the Vulg mors

... mors, the Syr has  (death) and   
(sheol).

v.58 Klauck understands by 'the Lord's work' the Christian community, and by 'their labour' the work of catechesis and mission.

## B. Theology

We now proceed to make a number of points about the theology of 1 Cor.15 before drawing the threads together at the end.

1. The chapter's **essential argument** is that if Christians are to rise as Christ did, their lives must exhibit the behaviour characteristic of Jesus. Because Christ rose to God, even though his body remained visible in the tomb, Christians will rise to God, although the presence among them of their deceased brethren's corpses apparently holds out no hope. This doctrine, says Paul, is an essential part of the Christian faith.

2. Paul does not indulge in speculation about resurrection for its own sake. (I say this against Robertson-Plummer, pp.328f, and others.) He is desperately concerned about divisions in the Corinthian community, caused by gentile Christians' throwing their weight around. The **ethical or practical function** of the chapter is demonstrated by the following features:

- 1) the introductory δὲ (15.1) is intended to link ch.15 with chs.12-14 and probably with chs.1-14, all of which, in one way or another, concern dissensions in the community.
- 2) Jesus' resurrection means that we are saved from our sins vv.17f.
- 3) Christian conduct is of value only if there is a resurrection, vv.30-33.
- 4) the Corinthians are urged to abandon their sinful ways, v.34, because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom, v.50.
- 5) they must abound in the Lord's work, confident that their labour is purposeful, v.58.

3. The **time-scale** is important. The chapter shifts between the past, the present and the future in a slightly haphazard and disconcerting manner<sup>20</sup>:

<u>past</u>	Christ was raised, vv.1-23
<u>future</u>	an excursus: the victory will be finally manifested at the End, vv.24-28
<u>present</u>	if there is resurrection, we must lead sober lives, vv.29-34
<u>future</u>	the resurrection will depend on God's ability to transform, vv.35-44a
<u>present\future</u>	only those modelled now on the heavenly Man will inherit

	the Kingdom, vv.44b-50
<u>future</u>	the resurrection will be God's work, vv.51-52
<u>present</u>	the ultimate reward depends on Christian lives now, vv.53-58.

A later writer might have clarified the time-sequence, but Paul was living in an age imbued with a vivid sense of the future's impingement on the present. If we can organise Paul's thought for him, he seems to have worked on the following time-scale. Christ's resurrection, which was always part of Christian kerygma, proves that resurrection of human beings is possible. If it is possible, who can hope to benefit from it? Those who live in Christ. Christ has already been raised, but Christians dead by the time of the parousia (plus those still alive at the parousia) will be raised to God. Non-Christians will presumably remain in sheol. Resurrection is a future event but one already begun in so far as Christ has already been raised and as people prepare themselves for it now.

4. Christ's resurrection proves that resurrection for humans is possible, vv.3-23. Further, Christ is the firstfruit of the Christian dead, vv.20,23. And thirdly, heavenly people are like the heavenly man, v.48. These three points demonstrate Paul's conviction that **Christ's resurrection is the pattern and power of ours**: what happened to Christ in the past will happen to those who die in him. As Schrage (p.23) says, in Paul's mind the resurrection of Christ and that of Christians go together. This Pauline thought, which occurs also in Rom.8.11; 1 Cor.6.14 and 2 Cor.4.14, is derived, according to Schrage, from traditional material<sup>21</sup>.

5. A crucial element in a proper understanding of 1 Cor.15, to my way of thinking, is Paul's clear distinction between **anarthrous νεκροὶ** and **οἱ νεκροὶ**, generally completely ignored by commentators, but even when adverted to, misunderstood. Winer, for example, cited by Wordsworth (p.13), supposes that the former refers to dead people as individuals and the latter to the dead as a group as distinguished from the living, but this is not borne out by Pauline usage. Müller<sup>22</sup> is very dismissive of Jeremias' understanding (which I endorse), whereby anarthrous νεκροὶ refers to the dead in general and οἱ νεκροὶ to the Christian dead in particular. He comments: "Nothing indicates that 1 Cor.15 concerns the fate of the non-Christian dead" - that surely is *petitio principii* - and "furthermore, the phrase **ἀνάστασις ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν** does not occur in the New Testament. The phrase is always **ἀνάστασις ἐκ νεκρῶν**" - which does little credit to Prof.Müller's understanding of Paul's thought in 1 Cor.15. He concludes rhetorically: "How is it possible to understand that in v.32 all the

dead are meant, but in v.35 only the Christian dead?" I trust that the translation given above has made it intelligible.

It is unfortunate that neither the Vulgate nor the Peschitta preserves the distinction, partly because the lack of definite article in Latin and Syriac militates against it. (Other translations or periphrases would have been possible, in theory at least.) The Vulgate reads *resurrectio mortuorum* (and equivalents), while the Peschitta translates as ܩܘܡܢܐ ܡܘܬܘܘܬܐ . On the other hand the latter preserves better the flavour of the Greek phrase ἐκ νεκρῶν by using ܩܘܡܢܐ ܡܘܬܘܘܬܐ where the Vulgate is satisfied with a *mortuis*. The following table illustrates the difference in 1 Cor.15:

νεκροὶ (trans. "the dead in general", all those in sheol)

- v.12 (Christ) has been raised from among the dead  
How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?  
13 If there is no resurrection of the dead ...  
15 ... if the dead are not raised ...  
16 If the dead are not raised ...  
20 Christ has been raised from among the dead  
21 Through a man (came) a resurrection of the dead.  
29 If the dead are not raised...  
32 If the dead are not raised...

οἱ νεκροὶ (trans."the Christian dead in particular", those who will rise from sheol)

- 29 What is the point of being baptised if one is eternally dead?  
35 How are the dead raised?  
42 So it is with the resurrection of the dead.  
52 The dead will be raised incorruptible.

The distinction is observed in all other genuine Pauline letters. Thus of the sixteen occurrences of νεκροὶ in Rom, all are anarthrous but one: "God gives life to the (Christian) dead" (4.17). Similarly 2 Cor.1.9 (the only occurrence there with article): "That was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the (Christian) dead". Col.1.18 refers to Christ as the "first-born from among the (Christian) dead" (with article), and 1 Thess.4.16

speaks of "the (Christian) dead in Christ" who will rise first.

Anarthrous νεκροὶ refers to those in sheol from among whom the Christian just are raised. Thus Paul always refers to Christ's resurrection (cf Rom.1.4; Gal.1.1), but to those who are raised as οἱ νεκροὶ (eg Rom.4.17; 2 Cor.1.9; 1 Thess.4.16). There are two apparent exceptions. Col. 1.18 reads at first sight as if νεκροὶ ought to be anarthrous, but whether we read πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν or (with P<sup>46</sup> and Sinaiticus) πρωτότοκος ἐκ νεκρῶν the sense of the phrase is that Christ is the first of those who are to rise (cf Rom.8.29, "firstborn among many brothers"). The other apparent exception is 1 Thess.1.10, but some reputable MSS (Alexandrinus, the Ephrem Rescript and others) omit the article.

This convention is not always observed in the deutero-Paulines: Eph.5.14 is a case in point. This is in any case a quotation (untraced).

6. An ecumenical symposium on 1 Cor.15 was held in Rome at the Abbey of St.Paul-outside-the-Walls in 1983, and the Acta were published in 1985<sup>23</sup>. The exposition of vv.35-58 was entrusted to Prof.Karlheinz Müller of Würzburg, and he argued against any *continuity between earthly and heavenly body*: there is a destruction of the old and a creation of the new *ex nihilo* (pp.171-255). In the discussion that followed his paper, Wilckens (ibid., p.268) and Cipriani (ibid., p.270) accepted this for both Christ and Christians. Wolff, p.195, is of the same opinion independently.

Sellin too (pp.210-223) understands Paul in this way. Paul was opposing a dualism which undervalued the body. For him, post-mortem existence was spiritual and bodily. v.36 makes it clear that the new σῶμα (of the plant) is a new creation. The point is precisely that there is no continuity from the existence as "seed" to the existence as "plant". Between the two comes death (as in the Christological kerygma of v.3ff). The transformation after death is by God (v.38). Paul thus regarded death, according to Sellin, as an annihilation. The thought of a continuous identical subject not only is absent from Paul but is here sabotaged. There is no kernel of man which might guarantee continuity. "As Christ died and was raised, so are Christians" (p.215). Without death there can be no new creation. Without death Christ's resurrection would not be the opening-up of new life. Paul uses the category of new creation at two levels: for the believer's present change of existence brought about by dying with Christ in baptism, and for future bodily resurrection.

It is astonishing that neither Müller nor Sellin seems to have understood the implications of what they are saying. If Christ's risen body was a new creation, then what the disciples "saw" was not the crucified and buried body. That, presumably, was still in the tomb: God would hardly go to the trouble of destroying it instantaneously, especially as the bodies of deceased Christians are allowed to decay.

Now I happen to think that Müller and Sellin are intemperate in their formulation of Paul's thought. "Destruction and new creation" (Sellin), seem to me not to respect the text: "σπείρεται ... ἐγείρεται, what is sown ... is raised" (vv.42f.) There is a continuity as well as discontinuity, and Gillmann is more accurate in his analysis<sup>24</sup>. He draws attention to five images:

1. The seed is sown, and the result is new life, vv.36-38;
2. Similarly, life comes from death: the imperishable from the perishable, v.42b, glory from dishonour, v.43a, power from weakness, v.43b, spiritual body from physical body, v.44a. Paul expatiates on this with further metaphors:
3. we take on a change of image, v.49;
4. we are transformed and so inherit the kingdom of God, v.50;
5. we put on a change of clothing, v.53.

Now each of these images balances continuity and discontinuity:

- A.
  - 1) death is the end of a person's earthly existence in all its aspects;
  - 2) the heavenly body is utterly different from the physical body.
- B.
  - 1) God provides a new body for the deceased Christian;
  - 2) it is the same person who lives, dies and puts on immortality.

We might also mention that from a different angle, that of dogmatic theology, G.Nossent<sup>25</sup> accuses the Müller-Sellin view of essentialism: "What would eventually ensure the identity of the person who is annihilated and then re-created could only be the eternal idea of his essence...but would not a more coherent existential philosophy acknowledge that this suggested re-creation is in fact a substitution of subjects? It would no longer be I but another, since I would have disappeared".

This modification of Müller and Sellin does not, however, destroy their central contention, which I believe we should accept, viz.that Jesus' physical body is irrelevant to the resurrection event. On Paul's own theology it cannot be the locus of a dominical presence or the vehicle of a heavenly exaltation.

7. Does Paul know of the **empty tomb tradition**? Some writers argue that he does. Dhanis<sup>26</sup>, for example, takes the four articles of the confession in vv.3-5 and makes two comments:

1. they "were sure to" ("durent") have been commented on in Paul's teaching, and such commentary "was sure to" ("devait") have included a narrative (death, burial, appearances).
2. the commentary on the third article (resurrection) "probably" consisted of a mention of the empty tomb.

Now Dhanis is embarrassed by the fact that in itself the text of 1 Cor gives no evidence for his conclusion, and he is therefore forced to adduce the synoptic material - a legitimate step, he argues, in view of "the bond which connects it in a general way with the primitive catechesis". The reader may also consult Martini<sup>27</sup>, who argues that the empty tomb is presumed not only in 1.Cor.15.4 but also in Acts 10.40 and 13.29.

Against W.Marxsen, Hempelmann<sup>28</sup> maintains that the priority of 1 Cor.15.3ff over the more elaborate gospel stories is questionable:

1. it begs the question by neglecting the historical credibility of the gospel accounts;
2. it presumes that the longer is always an overworking of the shorter; the reverse is frequently true;
3. one may not properly compare a brief credal formula and an extended narrative;
4. the gospel tradition knows of material foreign to the Pauline tradition (eg the Emmaus appearance) which cannot plausibly be derived from 1 Cor.15.3ff;
5. the date of a source is no indication of the date of its content; the gospels could contain information as old as and more reliable than 1 Cor.

Now I venture to suggest that without looking for a reference to the empty tomb on the basis of the gospel material, one would never suspect Paul of knowing it. The text of 1 Cor itself gives no hint of such a tradition, even by implication, and commentators look for it on external grounds only. A dispassionate reading of

1 Cor.15.3ff, in the light of the rest of the chapter, leads to the conclusion not only that Paul knew of no empty tomb but rather that his entire thesis is based on the contrary supposition.

8.How reliable is Paul's view of the historical fact (as he supposed) of the full tomb? In general **Paul's knowledge of Jesus' history** was sound. Bornkamm<sup>29</sup>

shows that his relation of history is preferable to Luke's, and two essays in the 1984 symposium on *The Jesus Tradition Outside the Gospels* show a substantial knowledge of dominical logia and deeds in Paul<sup>30</sup>. In brief, Wenham's argument is as follows. He takes three samples: 1 Cor.7.10f (Paul knew of Jesus' divorce saying, the 'let not man put asunder' saying, and the whole block of tradition found in Mk.10/Mt.19, including the M tradition concerning eunuchs); Rom.12 (Paul knew of the primitive tradition behind Mt.5.38-48/Lk.6.27-36 on not retaliating); and Gal.1-2 (Paul knew of Peter's primacy, cf Mt.16.17-19). This material, together with that studied in Wenham's previous book on *The Rediscovery of Jesus' Eschatological Discourse*<sup>31</sup>, demonstrates that Paul was familiar with a wide variety of gospel material that occurs later in Q,M,L and Mk. It includes sections of the Sermon on the Mount, the mission discourse, the divorce pericope, the eschatological discourse and the passion narrative.

Whether Paul quotes explicitly, freely or implicitly, the Jesus tradition was evidently authoritative for himself and his readers. That he is less formal in his use of the material is explicable on the premise that while he can take it for granted most of the time, the evangelists were trying to preserve and transmit it, only secondarily to interpret or apply it. Richardson and Gooch<sup>32</sup> conclude that Paul was familiar with a number of traditions of Jesus' teaching: on divorce, the mission charge, on the faith that moves mountains, the wise builder and so on.

It is therefore a perfectly scholarly deduction that Paul's supposition of a full tomb as the positive basis of his thoughts on bodily resurrection is primitive, authentic and reliable. This would of course have important implications for an examination of the gospel accounts.

### The Resurrection of Jesus in 1 Cor.15

We are now in a position to extract Paul's view of the mechanics of Christ's resurrection. The main thrust of the chapter is an exhortation to live Christian lives on the grounds that resurrection is available only to those who die in Christ. Christ is upheld as the model, pattern or firstfruit; whatever happened to him will happen to Christians. Thus he died and was buried; Christians die and are buried. He was raised from sheol; Christians will be raised from sheol. He was taken to God; Christians will be taken to God. Jesus' resurrection is therefore metahistorical and metempiric. It is accessible only to those with faith, which Paul also expresses by including it in the kerygma.



The only distinction between Jesus and Christians is temporal: Jesus has already been raised, because otherwise the last enemy, death, would not have been conquered. His being released from sheol is the ground of our hope. We, on the other hand, shall not be raised until the final trumpet; until that glorious moment, the Christian dead remain in sheol with the non-Christian dead. Paul accepted this distinction from traditional understandings of the Last Day<sup>33</sup>.

Paul's spatial scheme is conditioned by the world-understanding of the Judaism of his time<sup>34</sup>. Sheol was beneath the flat world. Heaven was above the sky. Resurrection was literally an ascension from below the earth to above the skies, and only God could so raise people. How far this scheme mars the appropriation of Paul's theology in our time is for the reader to decide. As I see it, we could dispense with sheol and still leave his essential vision intact.

Now if Paul's essential vision concerns Jesus' metahistorical journey to the Father in defiance of and through or beyond death, any idea of Jesus' returning to this life at any stage would be irrelevant and contradictory. If he rebounded from death or went through death only to reappear in earthly life afterwards, what sort of example for us could he have offered? An empty tomb and physical appearances accessible to history could only encourage the Christian to believe that Christ's resurrection was unique, whereas for Paul it is the very blueprint of Christian resurrection. Christian behaviour has post-mortem consequences. If Christ did not break out of death and ascend to God in his heaven, we are still in our sins, trapped in sheol, to which all those not in Christ are doomed for ever.

Bearing these ideas in mind, we can confront the appearances listed in vv.5ff. A physically accessible return of Jesus to this life would sabotage his entire argument, so Paul can mean only a spiritual vision. How then are we to understand the language of the credal formula which Paul borrows and extends in vv.3b-5 + 6-8? Lohse is right, in my opinion, when he maintains<sup>35</sup> that for Paul the resurrection/exaltation of Jesus, unlike his death which was a "historical piece of news", was the subject of belief (eg Rom.4.24) and confession (eg Rom.10.9). It always involved belief in the God who raises the dead (Rom.4.17 etc), a phrase with unmistakable Jewish overtones. Paul saw two corroborations of the resurrection in the scriptures and in the testimony of witnesses to whom the risen Lord had appeared. These appearances, argues Lohse, are not like historical sightings, because if Jesus' resurrection were the reanimation of a corpse, it would be accessible to history, and it

would not be a defeat of death (since the person would still be subject to mortality). Jesus' resurrection cannot be an object of proof or denial. 'Our eyes see the cross, but our ears hear the word: Christ is risen' (p.60). To believe in the risen Christ is to accept him as Lord.

Lohse's view is confirmed by some other considerations:

1. The "third day" is surely a **theological** rather than a historical datum (Moffat, p.237; Gutwenger<sup>36</sup>; Klauck, p.109; an opposite view is argued by, among others, Wolff, pp.162-165).
2. The word ὠφθη is part of theophanic convention (Klauck, p.109; Lang, p.212) and not to be taken as a synonym of βλέπω or θεωρέω. Although he is more cautious than I think is necessary, Schrage, p.33, acknowledges that ὠφθη "emphasises the inner perception". Weatherhead<sup>37</sup>, quoting F.W.Moyle (1928), expresses the difference by saying that βλέπω and θεωρέω mean seeing with the optic nerves, while ὁρώ indicates mental insight or spiritual vision. For the various possibilities of translating ὠφθη, see Wolff, pp.165ff and Klauck, p.109.
3. And finally, Paul interprets his Damascus road experience as on a par with the Easter experiences of Peter and the other witnesses. In the Acts 9 account, Paul's companions hear the divine voice but see nothing, and in the Acts 22 account they hear nothing but see a light. Even Paul himself is not said to have seen anything but a bright light (*vide* Schillebeeckx<sup>38</sup> for a wider discussion). In other words, what we are dealing with is not a historical sighting but an inner conversion experience, with difficulty translatable into words intelligible to others.

Hempelmann argues (pp.13ff) that the disciples' Easter faith is inexplicable, in view of the disgrace and degradation associated with crucifixion, except on the premise that Jesus appeared to them physically after his death. I should prefer to say that, as with Paul and his conversion, it dawned on them that Jesus was the messiah and that the Old Testament prophecies applied to him. The Easter faith of those who were already sympathetic to Jesus and that of those like Paul and James who were not, are similar in that both groups needed to be convinced of the true nature of Jesus' messiahship. One cannot play one off against the other, as Hempelmann does (pp.62-66). Now conversion is always an act of divine mercy, no preliminary meritorious act or state of mind is required of the believer. What therefore changed the disciples from cowards, and Paul from a persecutor, to brave preachers was a conversion experience which is only metaphorically translated as an

appearance of the risen Lord.

Finally, I am not saying that the Pauline view of Jesus' resurrection is the only one or that where Christians today disagree with it they are in error or confused. I have simply wished to show that Paul's view is not that generally supposed.\*

#### NOTES

1. Cf the classic *The Apostolic Preaching* by C.H Dodd (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936, 1966), pp.7-35; E.E.Lemico, 'The Unifying Kerygma of the New Testament', *JSN* 33 (1988), pp.3-17.
2. If Kelber is to be believed: *The Oral and the Written Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), ch.1.
3. Details in F.Lang, *Die Briefe an die Korinther* (Das Neue Testament Deutsch,7; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1986), pp.6f.
4. C.Wolff, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther. Zweiter Teil* (Theol.Handkomment.zum NT,7/II; Berlin: Evangelische Verlaganstalt, 1980,1982<sup>2</sup>),pp.147-149.
5. G.Sellin, *Der Streit um die Auferstehung der Toten. Eine religionsgeschichtliche und exegetische Untersuchung von 1.Korinther 15* (Göttingen:Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1986), p.16.
6. J.-N.Aletti, 'L'argumentation de Paul et la position des Corinthiens. 1 Co 15,12-34', in L.De Lorenzi (ed.), *Résurrection du Christ et des Chrétiens* (1 Co 15) (Rome: Abbaye de S.Paul hors-les-murs, 1985), pp.63-81.
7. W.Schrage, '1.Korinther 15, 1-11', in L.De Lorenzi (see note 6 above), pp.21-45.
8. C.K.Barrett, 'The significance of the Adam-Christ typology for the Resurrection of the dead: 1 Co 15,20-22.45-49', in L.De Lorenzi (see note 6 above), pp.99-122.
9. H.-J.Klauck, *1 Korintherbrief* (Die Neue Echter Bibel,7;Würzburg: Echter, 1984,1987<sup>4</sup>), p.112.
10. G.G.Findlay, 'St Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians', in W.Robertson Nicoll (ed.), *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), Vol.II,pp.729-953.
11. J.H.Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. and T.Clark, 1862,1901<sup>4</sup>,1914), *sub voce*.
12. C.Wordsworth, *The New Testament of our Lord Saviour Jesus Christ in the Original Greek, with Introduction and Notes* (London: Rivingtons,1877, 2 vols) II, pp.73-144.
13. P.v.d.Osten-Sacken, 'Die paulinische *theologia crucis* als Form

apokalyptischer Theologie', *EvangTheol* 39 (1979), pp.477-496.

14. M.Carrez, 'Résurrection et Seigneurie du Christ: 1 Co 15,23-28', in L. De Lorenzi (see note 6 above), pp.127-140.

15. A.Robertson-A.Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* (The International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T.& T.Clark, 1911, 1914<sup>2</sup>, 1955), p.356.

16. J.Moffatt, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (The Moffatt New Testament Commentary; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938, 1954), p.246.

17. J.C.O'Neill, '1 Corinthians 15:29', *ExT* (1979\80), pp.310-311.

18. B.Standaert in L.De Lorenzi (note 6 above), p.95.

19. C.K.Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Black's New Testament Commentaries; London: 1968, 1971<sup>2</sup>), p.369.

20. H.Berkhof, *Christ the Meaning of History* (London: SCM, 1966), p.182: 'It is sometimes difficult (especially in 1 Cor 15) to say where the boundaries are because the consummation is simply presented as the continuation of history'.

21. Loc.cit (note 7 above). Cf.J.Daniélou, *La Résurrection* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), p.66.

22. K.Müller, 'Die Leiblichkeit des Heils 1 Kor 15, 35-58', in L.De Lorenzi (see note 6 above), pp.171-255, at pp.206f, note 120.

23. Under the editorship of L.De Lorenzi: see note 6 above.

24. J.Gillman, 'Transformation in 1 Cor 15:50-53', *ETL* 59 (1982), pp.309-333.

25. G.Nossent, 'Mort, immortalité, résurrection', *NRT* 91 (1969), pp.614-630.

26. E.Dhanis, 'L'ensevelissement de Jésus et la visite au tombeau', *Greg* 39 (1958), pp.367-410.

27. C.M.Martini, 'La testimonianza dei primi cristiani per la risurrezione di Gesù', *CivCatt* 2930 (15 July 1972), pp.125-135.

28. H.Hempelmann, *Die Auferstehung Jesu Christ - eine historische Tatsache? Eine engagierte Analyse* (Wuppertal: R.Brockhaus, 1982). Cf J.Wenham, *Easter Enigma. Do the Resurrection Stories contradict one another?* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1984); A.T.Nikolainen, *Der Auferstehungsglauben in der Bibel and ihrer Umwelt. II. Neutestamentlicher Teil* (Helsinki: Finnische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1946), pp.137-206.

29. G.Bornkamm, *Paul* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1971), pp. xiii-xviii and 3-106.

30. D.Wenham, 'Paul's use of the Jesus Tradition: Three Samples', in D.Wenham (ed.), *The Jesus Tradition Outside the Gospels* (Gospel Perspectives Volume 5; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), pp.7-37; R.Richardson-P.Gooch, 'Logia of Jesus in 1 Corinthians', *ibid.*, pp.39-62.

31. *Gospel Perspectives Volume 4*; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984. In his review, F.Neirynck rejects the book's thesis but welcomes much of its subsidiary material: *ETL* 61 (1985), pp.192f.

32. See note 30 above.

33. 'For Paul (as an ex-Pharisee) resurrection from the dead is an eschatological event', Wolff, p.173.

34. Cf. W.Mass, '„Abstiegen zur Hölle" : Aspekte eines vergessenen Glaubensartikels', *Internat.kath.Zeitschr.Communitio* 10\1 (1981), pp.1-18; H.Gollinger, '„Wenn einer stirbt, lebt er dann wieder auf?" (Ijob 14,14)', in L.Oberlinner (ed.), *Auferstehung Jesu - Auferstehung der Christen* (FS Vögtle; Freiburg-Basel-Vienna: Herder, 1986), pp.11-38; L.Ramaroson, 'Immortalité et résurrection dans les psaumes', *ScEsp* 36 (1984), pp.287-295.

35. E.Lohse, 'Was es heißt: Ich glaube an den auferstandenen Christus. Vom Zentrum einer Theologie des Neuen Testaments', *BerlTheolZeitschr* 4 (1987), pp.53-67.

36. E.Gutwenger, 'Auferstehung und Auferstehungsleib Jesu', *ZKTh* 91 (1969), pp.32-58.

37. L.Weatherhead, *The resurrection of Christ* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1959), p.50. Cf. also the discussion in C.A.Perry, *The Resurrection Promise* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Eerdmans, 1986), pp.10-19.

38. E.Schillebeeckx, *Jesus. An experiment in Christology* (London: Collins, 1979), pp.360-379.

\* The foregoing paper is a reworking and expansion of part of 'The Resurrection - A New Essay in Biblical Theology', *King's Theol.Rev.* 13 (1990), pp.16-19.

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