

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION AND THE COMING KINGDOM: PHYSICAL OR SPIRITUAL

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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

In his classic, **History of Christian Doctrine**, William G. T. Shedd noted that "the doctrine of the resurrection of the body was from the beginning a cardinal and striking tenet of the Christian Church."¹ Indeed, according to the apostle Paul in order to be saved one must "believe in his heart that God has raised Him [Christ] from the dead" (Rom. 10:9-10 cf. I Thess. 4:14). For He "was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Rom. 4:25).

Paul insisted that if Jesus did not rise bodily from the dead, then: 1) Our faith is useless; 2) We are still in our sins; 3) Our departed loved ones are lost; 4) The apostles are false witnesses; 5) and "we are to be pitied more than all men" (1 Cor. 15:14-19). This is a sobering list of consequences for denying the physical resurrection of Christ. In short, if Christ did not arise bodily from the tomb, Christianity is false, we cannot be saved, and there is no hope that anyone will ever come back from the grave. "For it is Christ alone who has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10).²

THE NATURE OF THE RESURRECTION

Since Jesus is the "firstfruits" of the resurrection (1 Cor.

15:20) and since the physical resurrection of believers inaugurates the earthly reign of Christ (Rev. 20:4-6 cf. John 5:25-29), the nature of the resurrection has an important bearing on the question of whether the future kingdom will be physical or spiritual. Both the Bible and Christian creeds are unequivocal about the physical nature of the resurrection of Christ and of believers, whose resurrection is patterned after His (Phil. 3:21).

Christian Creeds

The Creeds, for example, have been unanimous in pronouncing the resurrection a physical event. The **Apostles' Creed** declares: "I believe in the...resurrection of the flesh." In his classic work on **The Nature of the Resurrection Body** (1964), J. A. Schep wrote: "We may say, therefore, that the entire early Church, in the West and in the East alike, publicly confessed belief in the resurrection of the flesh." And "in the Western creeds...this confessional formula has retained its place with hardly any exception. Up to the Reformation there is no exception at all."³ Further, "the Churches of the East retained the expression 'the resurrection of the flesh' up to the Council of Constantinople in 381." When it was dropped it was "without any intention to reject the Western formulations as unscriptural, [the Eastern Church simply] went her own way in formulating the truth."⁴

Both the New Testament and the Christian creeds support Schep's conclusion. The Bible refers to the resurrection body as a body of "flesh" on several occasions. In Luke 24:39 Jesus called His resurrection body one of "**flesh (sarx)** and bones." Referring

to the resurrection of Christ Peter declared: "nor did his **flesh** see corruption" (Acts 2:31). Speaking of Jesus' continued incarnation after the resurrection John twice called anyone "antiChrist" who denied that "Jesus Christ has come in the **flesh**" (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7). The use of the perfect tense (in 1 John 4:2) and the present tense (in 2 John 7) combine to demonstrate that John affirmed that Jesus came in the past in the flesh and He still remains in the flesh in the present (after His Resurrection and Ascension).

Likewise, the creeds confess that human flesh, both pre and post-resurrection is an essential constituent of Christ's full and true humanity. The **Apostles' Creed** is one of the earliest in Christendom and was called by the Nicene Fathers "the rule of the faith" and "the rule of truth," Its confession of "resurrection of the **flesh**" is an obvious reference to the material nature of the resurrection body. It was not until 1552 that the phrase "resurrection of the body" was admitted to the **Apostles' Creed** as an alternate reading for "the resurrection of the flesh." But as Schep notes, even here "the terms 'flesh' and 'body' were regarded as equivalent." In his helpful work on **The Resurrection of the Flesh**, Lynn Boliek also defends the phrase "resurrection of the flesh" as a "legitimate expression of the Biblical doctrine of the resurrection."⁵ If so, then both the apostolic creeds and the apostolic canon agree on the fact that the continuing material nature of the resurrection body is essential to an orthodox view of the resurrection of Christ.

Another early creed that speaks to the issue of the nature of the resurrection body is the **Second Creed of Epiphanius** (374 A.D.). It affirmed that Christ went into heaven in the same body of flesh in which He suffered. "For the Word became **flesh**,...the same suffered in the flesh; rose again; and went up to heaven in the **same body**, sat down gloriously at the right hand of the Father; is coming in the **same body** in glory to judge the quick and the dead;..."⁶

Three things are evident from this. First, Christ was resurrected in the same "flesh" in which He was crucified. Second, "flesh" is used interchangeably with "body." After all, a human body is body of flesh. Thus to deny that Jesus had a fleshy human body either before or after the resurrection is to deny the incarnation itself (cf. John 1:14; 1 John 4:2). Third, this same substantial body of flesh in which Jesus lived and died is now in heaven and will return again (at His Second Coming) to establish His reign on earth.

The Formula of Concord (A. D. 1576) of the Lutheran church confesses: "We believe, teach and confess...the chief articles of our faith (of Creation, of Redemption, of Sanctification, and the Resurrection of the **flesh**)...."⁷ It adds, "This **same human nature** of ours...doth he raise from the dead, and with great glory (as being his own) doth he crown it."⁸

The Saxon Visitation Articles (A. D. 1592), prepared by Lutheran theologians in Saxony, declare: "Christ, according to the **flesh**, is placed at the right hand of God, and has received power

in heaven and earth, and is made partaker of all the divine majesty, honor, power, and glory."⁹

Likewise **The French Confession of Faith** (A.D. 1559), prepared by John Calvin and approved by the Synod of Paris in 1559, pronounced that "although Jesus Christ, in rising from the dead, bestowed immortality upon **his body**, yet he did not take away from it the truth of **its nature**, and we so consider him in his divinity that we do not despoil him of his humanity."¹⁰ This confession speaks explicitly to the point that the resurrection did not take away from the nature of the physical body but simply added immortality to it. For to deny the material nature of the post resurrection body is a denial of Christ's humanity.

The Belgic Confession (A. D. 1561), adopted by the Reformed synod at Emden (1571) and the Synod of Dort (1619), also that materiality is essential to humanity in the post resurrection body. For "though he hath by his resurrection given immortality to the same, nevertheless he hath not changed the reality of his **human nature**; forasmuch as our salvation and resurrection also depend on the **reality of his body**."¹¹ Likewise, it confesses that "that our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, **corporally and visibly as he ascended** with great glory and majesty.... For all the dead shall be raised out of the earth, and their souls joined and united with **their proper bodies in which they formerly lived**."¹² Here again, numerical identity and materiality are essential to the humanity of Christ in the post resurrection state.

The Thirty Nine Articles of Religion (A. D. 1562) were adopted

by the Church of England and revised for the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States in 1801. They declare that: "Christ did truly **rise** again from death, and **took again his body, with flesh and bones**, and all things appertaining to the perfection of **Man's nature**; wherewith he ascended into Heaven, and there sitteth, until he return to judge all Men at the last day."¹³ This could scarcely be more explicit about the numerical identity and materiality of the resurrection body. Christ rose and ascended in the exact same body of "flesh and bones" in which He lived and died, a body that was constitutive of His human nature. And it is this same body "wherewith" He ascended into heaven.

The Westminster Confession has been the standard for orthodox Presbyterians since it was first adopted in A.D. 1647. The article on the resurrection of Christ (VIII, 4) affirms that Jesus "...was crucified, and died; was buried, and remained under the power of death, **yet saw no corruption**. On the third day He arose from the dead, **with the same body in which He suffered, with which also He ascended into heaven**, and there sitteth at the right hand of His Father, making intercession, **and shall return**, to judge men and angels, at the end of the world."¹⁴ Here again the language is clear: The Resurrection and Ascension was in the "same" physical body Jesus had before His death. In fact, that body "saw no corruption," so it had to be the very same material body in which Jesus died.

Even as late as 1833 the **Declaration of The Congregational Union** (1833) or the early Congregationalists and Baptists also

confessed that Christ was "manifested in the **flesh**" and "after his death and resurrection, he ascended up into heaven...." Referring to the material nature of the resurrected believer, they add: "And the **bodies** of the dead will be raised again."¹⁵ **The New Hampshire Baptist Confession** (1833) also acknowledged the material nature of the resurrection body, speaking of raising "the dead from the **grave**" where the material corpse was buried.¹⁶ Other Anabaptist and Baptist groups also confessed the literal physical nature of the resurrection body.¹⁷

Affirming resurrection in the same flesh that died is not only the biblical teaching on the resurrection but has been the universal confession of the orthodox Christian church down through the centuries. Strangely, even some, like professor Murray Harris, who deny the historic orthodox confession of the resurrection, admit nonetheless that "Until the time of the Reformation the creeds of the West spoke only of the resurrection of the **flesh** (**sarkos anastasis; resurrectio carnis**)." He adds, "Here 'flesh' refers to the material components, the substance, or the body: the flesh-body as distinct from the soul."¹⁸

DEVIATIONS FROM THE ORTHODOX DOCTRINE

Early Roots in the Teachings of Origin

Statement of Origin's Views

Origin claimed to believe in the resurrection of the "body,"¹⁹ but unlike his orthodox predecessors, contemporaries, and successors, Origin did not believe this would be a body of flesh. Summarizing Origin's view, Jean Danielou, concluded:

Bodiliness, then, is a consequence of the Fall. One day it will come to an end and there will be ~~an apocatastasis~~, a return to a purely spiritual state.... [T]he glorious [resurrection] body is an intermediate degree between the terrestrial, animal body and the state that pure spirits are in."²⁰

In other words, the resurrection body is not a physical body but what Origen calls a "spiritual" body on its way to becoming pure spirit. Likewise, Origen did not believe in the numerical identity of the pre and post resurrection physical body. He wrote, "So the body has well been called a river, since strictly speaking its primary substance does not perhaps remain the same even for two days...." He held that the resurrection transforms the physical into a spiritual body. For he believed that "God created two general natures,--a visible, i.e., a corporeal nature; and an invisible nature, which is incorporeal.... But this corporeal nature admits of a change in substance; whence also God, the arranger of all things...[commands] that the corporeal nature may be **transmuted**, and **transformed** into any form of species whatever...."²¹

Origen also contended that "the whole of bodily nature will, in the consummation of all things, consist of one species,... the **spiritual body**."²² The process by which this "different body" arrives is called by Origen transformation or transmutation. "Accordingly, it at one time puts off one body which was necessary before, but which is no longer adequate in its changed state, and it exchanges it for a **second [body]**."²³ This new body will not be material or visible, for "those things 'which are seen are

temporal, but those things which are not seen are eternal....'" And "all those bodies which we see...and have been made with hands, but are not eternal, are far exceeded in glory by that which is **not visible**, nor made with hands, but is eternal."²⁴

Origen calls this body "spiritual," "celestial," and even "ethereal" (the very thing later condemned by the Council of Toledo).²⁵ Hence, he does not really believe in a physical resurrection body but in a transformation of the physical body into a non-physical body. In the post resurrection state, the believer "assumes another [body] in addition to the former, which is needed as a better covering, suited to purer **ethereal** regions of heaven." Interestingly, like Origen, Professor Harris calls this a "**spiritual body**" and identifies it with the "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" of which Paul speaks in 2 Corinthians 5:1.²⁶ This means that believers receive their physical bodies at the moment of death and that their physical bodies are never resurrected from the grave!²⁷

Origen also believed that the resurrection body would have no limbs (legs or arms), being useless appendages, but would possibly be spherical in shape.²⁸ Similarly, professor Harris argues that the resurrection body will not have certain bodily organs (such as stomach, sex organs), since these would be "...useless relics of a former earthly body."²⁹ But so would legs and arms be useless by the same logic! What is left then is certainly not the numerically same body in which one lived before the resurrection, but a rather grotesque mutilation of it.

Origins Reasons for Denying the Physical Resurrection

In favor of spiritualizing of the resurrection body, Origen cited Paul's statement (in 1 Cor. 15:49) that "we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." But he believes that "the apostle wishes to conceal the secret meaning of this passage," thus necessitating that we take "a secret and mystical meaning."³⁰ It is with this same mystical method of interpretation that he dematerialized the physical resurrection and spoke of an ethereal, spiritual body.

In his penetrating critique of the "spiritual body" view, such as both Origen and Harris hold, William Craig notes that "Origen's demurring to defend the resurrection of the flesh made him the target of treatises such as Athanagoras ^{on Resurrection} ~~De resurrectione~~ and Methodius ^{on Resurrection} ~~De resurrectione~~. The belief in a literal physical resurrection was associated with the belief in a literal millenium [sic], and Origen rejected both doctrines."³¹ In short, there is a direct connection between denying a literal resurrection and a literal kingdom to follow, whatever its length may be.

Criticism of Origen's View

St. Methodius (c. 815-885), brother of St. Cyril, leveled three main criticisms at Origen (in his ^{on Resurrection} ~~De resurrectione~~). He contended, first, that Origen's doctrine of the transmutation of elements "has this effect of destroying the perfected nature of God's creation." The transmutation of the material into a spiritual body amounts to "a destruction of this human and earthly body." There is no real relationship between this earthly body

which can be seen, touched, and had weight, and that spiritual body which could not be seen, could not be touched, and had no weight."³²

Second, "Origen did not draw the proper conclusion from the seed analogy" of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. Origen taught that the plant was different from the seed. However, as Boliek notes, "nature teaches that the seed produces the ear of corn which contains the same kind of seed."³³

Third, Origen's doctrine is self-contradictory. "For by Origen's own reasoning the characteristic form is given by the general appearance of the body including its individual members."³⁴ If this is so, then the resurrection body must have the same form, including arms and legs. But as Methodius pointed out, a human body devoid of all earthly attributes is inconceivable. St. Jerome summarizes these sentiments well: "To imagine a true resurrection apart from flesh and bones, apart from blood and members is not possible."³⁵

To these three arguments we may add a fourth. Denying a physical Resurrection and Ascension leads logically to a denial of a literal earthly reign of Christ that follows His return and the resurrection of believers. The two go hand in hand.

Summarizing Methodius, Jerome, and the Bishops of the Fifth Ecumenical Council, Professor Lynn Boliek provided an excellent statement of the central thesis of Origen's view of the resurrection body. And there is a striking parallel in Professor Murray Harris--at least on the spiritual nature of the resurrection body.

First, there is a tendency to eliminate the physical. According to Origen, "All souls and all rational natures whether holy or wicked, were formed or created, and all these, according to their proper nature are incorporeal."³⁶ Even the body of Jesus was changed from mortal to "ethereal" or "divine" in quality.³⁷ In brief, "the pressure of his system is directed toward the elimination of any and all bodily nature of man, even the spiritual body in the final consummation."³⁸

Second, the astral body mediated between the immaterial and the material. This "ethereal" body functioned as the spiritual vehicle of the soul. It survived death of the flesh and blood body. Little wonder this view has been condemned by both Church creed and council.

J. D. N. Kelly, in his classic work on **Early Christian Creeds**, summed up the orthodox position on the resurrection well:

When we come to the final clause of the Old Roman Creed, **THE RESURRECTION OF THE FLESH**, we can afford to dispense with any elaborate examination of its meaning. A belief in the resurrection of the body had been integral to Christianity from the beginning.... Anyone turning over the pages of the early fathers will gain a vivid impression of the immense importance the resurrection-hope had for the second century Church. To cite a few examples at random, the authors of **2 Clement** and the **Epistle of Barnabas** insist on the necessity of our rising in **the very flesh we now possess** in order that we may receive the due reward of our deeds.³⁹

Church Condemnation

In his noted work on **The Creeds of Christendom**, Philip Schaff lists the **Apostles' Creed** as one of the "ecumenical creeds" of the Church.⁴⁰ But it confesses, contrary to Origin, the resurrection

of the flesh. What is more, his view was specifically condemned by name in anathema no. 11 of the general Council of Constantinople (A. D., 553).⁴¹ Likewise, Origen's views on the resurrection were condemned at the Council of Toledo (A. D. 447) which declared: "We believe that a resurrection of **human flesh** will take place. . . ."⁴² Also the Fourth Council of Toledo (A.D. 663), addressing Origen's deviant view, declared that we "shall be raised up again by him [Christ] in the last days **in the same flesh wherein we now live,** (and) in the manner wherein the same (our) Lord did rise again...."⁴³ In fact, Origen was the only major writer in the first sixteen centuries of the church to hold the view now defended by Murray Harris and other evangelicals on the nature of the resurrection body.⁴⁴ And this has serious implications, both soteriologically and eschatologically.

Contemporary Evangelical Deviation

The tragedy of much of contemporary evangelical scholarship is that it rides piggy pack on neo-liberalism and neo-orthodoxy. First there was the notorious denial of the resurrection by Rudolf Bultmann, who concluded that the resurrection "is no an event of past history.... An historical fact which involves a resurrection from the dead is utterly inconceivable."⁴⁵ Then there was Emil Brunner, who declared "Resurrection of the body, yes: Resurrection of the **flesh**, no! The "Resurrection of the body " does not mean the identity of the resurrection body with the material (although already transformed) body of flesh...."⁴⁶ Likewise, avant-garde Roman Catholic theologian Edward Schillebeeckx argued that the

resurrection of Christ was not in a physical, material body.⁴⁷ Although lauded by many for his belief in the empty tomb, Wolfhart Pannenberg also denies the orthodox doctrine of the resurrection, insisting that "it is self-evident for him [Paul] that the future body will be a different one from the present body, not a fleshly body but--as he says--a 'spiritual body.'"⁴⁸ For "the transformation of the perishable into the spiritual body will be so radical that nothing will remain unchanged. There is no substantial or structural continuity from the old to the new existence."⁴⁹

Keeping Company With The Cults

Not content with the similarity of their position with neo-orthodox and other unorthodox views on the nature of the resurrection, some evangelical scholars seem bent on keeping company with the cults. First there was the late George Ladd, who helped lead Fuller Seminary to a denial of the inerrancy of Scripture. He proclaimed that if an observer were in Jesus' tomb on that first Easter morning "all he would have seen was the sudden and inexplicable disappearance of the body of Jesus."⁵⁰ Jesus' post-resurrection manifestations were only "momentary appearances of the invisible, risen Lord to the physical sight and senses of the disciples."⁵¹ For "at his resurrection he [Jesus] entered the invisible world of God."⁵² Now there is Southern Baptist professor E. Glen Hinson who contends that "Paul was convinced that the Christ who appeared to him belonged to another order of existence than the Christ the disciples had known in the flesh. The risen

Christ has not a physical but a spiritual body.⁵³

Add to that professor Murray Harris who, with the blessing of his peers at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, affirms that "after his resurrection his [Jesus'] essential state was one of invisibility and therefore immateriality."⁵⁴ Likewise, believer's resurrection bodies "will be neither fleshly nor fleshy."⁵⁵ And after His resurrection "Jesus was neither visible to the human eye nor composed of 'flesh and bones.'"⁵⁶

In view of the clearly unorthodox nature of this view, one was surprised to see **Christianity Today**, once a theologically perceptive magazine, endorse such an erroneous doctrine, wildly claiming it is "evangelical fratricide" to criticize it! This is not the first time in the history of the Church that a significant step toward liberalism was taken by placing fraternity over orthodoxy.

Likewise, one has to wonder how anglican James Packer and the presbyterian James Boice could place their blessing on the position in a recent Zondervan publication, once known for its strong evangelical stand.⁵⁷ This they did in spite of the fact that the anglican **Thirty Nine Articles Of the Church of England** and the presbyterian **Westminster Confession** strongly condemn the position. Stranger still, Boice concludes that "If we had been present at the moment of the resurrection, we would have noticed that all at once the body of Jesus seemed to disappear. John Stott says that the body was "'vaporized,' being transmuted into something new and different and wonderful. Latham says that the body had been

'exhaled,' passing 'into a phase of being like that of Moses and Elias on the Mount.' We would have seen only that it was gone."⁵⁸

Boice's view on this point sounds strangely reminiscent of the Jehovah's Witness position. Indeed, many of the counter-cult groups are taking a stand on this issue, claiming in essence that if professor Harris and his compatriots are right they will have to apologize to the Jehovah's Witnesses! The leaders of the widely circulated counter-cult **Cornerstone** magazine recently stated that:

After some weeks of study, we have concluded that these books [of professor Murray Harris, **Raised Immortal** and **From Grave to Glory**] present some unorthodox views on the nature of the resurrection body, both of Christ and of the believer. Harris denies that the resurrection body of Jesus now subsists "in the flesh," according to the normal meaning of the words of 1 John 4:2 and 2 John 7.⁵⁹

They add, "We are concerned that Christians not be swayed by these erroneous doctrines." Further, "we also are disturbed that any evangelical scholar would be inclined to think [as Harris does] that a 'resurrection' occurs at the believer's death, while the believer's corpse is still untouched in the grave."⁶⁰

Another cult watching group, Personal Freedom Outreach, has also published articles condemning Harris's views in **The Quarterly Journal**.⁶¹ They conclude that "There is no contesting that Dr. Harris' view is a departure from the clear teaching of Scripture and the accepted historical view of the Church that Jesus was raised in a body of "flesh and bone" that continued to be just that." They further affirmed that "the view that Christ's raised body continuing as a flesh/spirit nexus has been the stated position of orthodoxy for these 19 centuries of Church history."

"Dr. Harris' view is new, novel and Gnostic in tendency and should be soundly refuted and rejected. We should stand up and be heard and not give this one way. If we do, what will be next? Enough is enough!"⁶²

Ex-Jehovah's Witness scholar, and author of a two volume classic on Jehovah's Witnesses and the resurrection, titled **Another Jesus**, Duane Magnani, examined carefully the essential similarities between Harris's view and the Jehovah's Witnesses. He concluded, **"this is not only unorthodox, but heretical CULTIC doctrine. It is essentially the teaching of Jehovah's Witnesses."**⁶³ Magnani goes on to make the following point by point comparison between Harris and the JWs which we summarize as follows:

JWs--Jesus Christ himself had such a resurrection, not to life in a physical body....⁶⁴

Harris--Another characteristic of Jesus' resurrection body was **the ability to materialize and therefore be localized at will.** This is a corollary of his essential materiality....⁶⁵

JWs--The first Adam was created a living soul or human creature. However, this last Adam, who is Jesus Christ, was not made a human creature at his resurrection, but was made a spirit which fact accounts for his invisibility.⁶⁶

Harris--...the first Adam, who had a physical body, which implies a last (or second) Adam who had or gained a spiritual body.⁶⁷

JWs--...the bodies in which Jesus appeared after his resurrection were neither the body that was crucified nor his glorious spiritual body, but the bodies created expressly for the purpose of appearing to his disciples.⁶⁸

Harris--The Appearances of Jesus, which were real and material, were designed to convince his disciples of the reality of his personal identity as the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth, not the physical nature of the resurrection body.⁶⁹

JWs--[They reject the view which claims that] a resurrection of the body that died--which the Apostle declared will never be resurrected--but a new body be substituted when the soul, the

being is resurrected.⁷⁰

Harris--[In 2 Corinthians 5] He [Paul] alludes to the replacement of the earthly house by the God-given dwelling (v. 1) and of one place of residence by another (v. 8). From this viewpoint the new body is qualitatively and numerically distinct from the old body.⁷¹

JWs--...resurrection does not mean bringing the same chemical elements together again. It means that God recreates the same person, with the same personality.⁷²

Harris--If the notion of a material identity between the two forms of embodiment must be rejected, we may propose that the identity is personal.... One and the same person finds expression in two successive but different types of body. There is an identity of occupant but not of dwelling.⁷³

JWs--Every member of that kingdom must be spirit, changed from human to spirit in the resurrection and live as spirit creatures in heaven invisible to human eyes.⁷⁴

Harris--This suggests that after his resurrection **his essential state was one of invisibility and therefore immateriality.**"⁷⁵

Jw's--...he [Jesus] himself could not enter into that Kingdom while still in the flesh, (1 Cor. 15:50) but that he must also be 'changed' to spirit conditions by resurrection....⁷⁶

Harris--After the forty days, when his appearances on earth were ended, Jesus assumed the sole mode of being visible to the inhabitants of heaven but having a nonfleshly body.⁷⁷

THE RELATION OF THE RESURRECTION TO THE COMING KINGDOM

From these last quotations it is clear that on such a view of the resurrection, there can be no literal, physical kingdom to come. For if true, then both Christ and believers have a spiritual body, having entered by their resurrections into a spiritual kingdom. Thus it does not make sense to talk about a literal, physical return of Christ on whatever end of the millennium, since Harris believes that apart from Christ' brief resurrection appearances, Jesus' post-resurrection body is "invisible" and

"nonfleshly."⁷⁸ Indeed, he contends that "the risen Christ is a **permanently** embodied Spirit who... [a]fter the forty days...assumed the **sole** mode of being visible to the inhabitants of heaven but having a nonfleshly body."⁷⁹ He calls the Ascension "a **permanent** return to the spiritual realm."⁸⁰ On such a view, a literal second coming and earthly kingdom makes no sense. In view of this one wonders in what sense Harris could be a pre-mill, something required by the doctrinal statement of his seminary.

By contrast, the Bible speaks of Jesus returning so that "every eye will see Him" (Rev. 1:7) and "His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west, Making a vary large valley" (Zech. 14:4). In fact, when our Lord ascended bodily into heaven, "while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold two men stood by hem in white apparel, who said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9-11). Such descriptions do not lend well to a spiritual interpretation of the kingdom to come. Nor do the words of our Lord in Matthew 19 when he declared: "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sits on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (v. 28).

In order to avoid the obvious conclusion that Jesus rose, ascended, and will return in the same physical body and flesh and

bones in which He died, Murray Harris reduces the Ascension into a mere "parable." He claims that

It was a vivid dramatization of Christ's earlier exaltation to the Father's right hand, a **parable** acted out for the benefit of the disciples as a visual aid and historical confirmation of a spiritual reality, comparable to the removal of the stone from the tomb (Matt. 28:2) or the eating of a piece of broiled fish (Luke 24:42-3).⁸¹

Indeed, Harris contends that Jesus "body was capable of receiving food, for evidential reasons" as "an accommodation to human understanding" in order "to assure his disciples of his reality and to set their minds at their ease."⁸² "His eating was therefore no proof that 'flesh and blood' do in fact inherit the kingdom of God, for it was both exceptional and purely evidential."⁸³ Consequently, Harris argues that "the material 'flesh and bones' that Jesus had during this encounter with his disciples were not integral to his 'spiritual body' but had been assumed temporarily, but none the less really, for evidential reasons, as accommodations to the understanding of his disciples."⁸⁴ In short, Jesus did not rise in an essentially and continuously physical body.

Some Obvious Consequences of A Spiritual Resurrection Body

Several observations are relevant to Harris' description of the nature of the resurrection body and its bearing on Christ's return and kingdom. First, in a permanently spiritual, nonfleshly resurrection body Jesus cannot inaugurate a literal, physical kingdom of any kind, whether millennial or eternal.

Second, if the ascension of Christ is merely a "parable" acted out for evidential reasons, and if Jesus will return again in like manner, then this is tantamount to a denial of the literal, physical return of Christ to earth. This would apply whether one is a pre, post, or a-millenarian.

Third, Harris' claim that the temporary materializations of Christ were not in a form integral to his resurrection body has two disastrous theological consequences. First of all, it makes Christ into a deceiver. For when Jesus appeared to His disciples in this alleged replica body he said emphatically, "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have" (Luke 24:39). If this is not deception, then it is difficult to know what would be.

Further, Harris' view denies the efficacy of Christ's death and resurrection. For if Jesus did not rise in the same body in which He was crucified, then he did not gain the victory over death and the grave (cf. Heb. 2:14-15). Unless the body that died came back to life, then the Devil won and God lost.

The Nature of Change In The Resurrection Body

One final thought is in order. The fact that Jesus will return in the numerically same body of flesh and bones in which He died, rose, and ascended does not deny Paul's claim that the resurrection body will be marvelously "changed" (1 Cor. 15:51). For the change the apostle spoke about will not be a change of bodies but a change in the body that is raised. It will not be a change from an essentially material body to one that is not

essentially material, but from a physical body that is perishable to a physical body that is imperishable (1 Cor. 15:42), and from a corruptible physical world to an incorruptible physical world (Rom. 8:18-23).

Here again the Creeds and Councils of the Church have defined the limits of orthodoxy on the nature of the resurrection body. One must hold that Christ and believers will be raised in substantially the same physical body, the one constitutive of their human nature. The creeds affirmed that "the Word became **flesh**,...the same suffered in the flesh; rose again; and went up to heaven in the **same body**, sat down gloriously at the right hand of the Father; is coming in the **same body** in glory to judge the quick and the dead;..."⁸⁵ Again, "Christ did truly rise again from death, and **took again his body, with flesh and bones**, and all things appertaining to the perfection of Man's nature; **wherewith he ascended into Heaven**, and there sitteth, until he return to judge all Men at the last day."⁸⁶ Likewise, they affirm that "On the third day he arose from the dead, **with the same body in which he suffered; with which he ascended into heaven**, and there sitteth at the right hand of his Father..."⁸⁷ And that we "shall be raised up again by him [Christ] in the last days **in the same flesh wherein we now live**, (and) in the manner wherein the same (our) Lord did rise again...."⁸⁸ In brief, it is contrary to confessional orthodoxy to deny that there is a change in substance in the pre and post resurrection body of Christ or of believers.

But while there will be no **substantial** change in the

resurrection body or the restored creation, there will be **accidental** changes. As William G. T. Shedd noted, "the difference will be in the secondary, rather than in the primary properties of the natural body." He cites the **Westminster Confession** (XXXIII, 2) for support: "all the dead shall be raised up, with the **self-same bodies**, and none other (although with **different qualities**)" The Puritan theologian John Guill wrote clearly: "The body, at the resurrection, will not be a new aerial, and celestial body, as Origen and others thought; or a spiritual one, as to its nature and substance. It will be different from what it is now, as to its **qualities**, but not as to its **substance**." Like Paul's seed analogy (in 1 Cor. 15:37-38), the pre and post resurrection body will "differ not in their specific **nature**, but in some circumstances and **accidents**."⁸⁹ A failure to make this distinction leads not only to an unorthodox view of the physical resurrection but to a denial of any literal, physical kingdom to come as well.

Notes

1. William G. T. Shedd, **A History of Christian Doctrine**, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, 2.403
2. See our **In Defense of the Resurrection** (Lynchburg, VA: Quest Publications, 1991) for a further defense of the importance of the resurrection.
3. J. A. Schep, **The Nature of the Resurrection Body** (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), p 221.
4. Ibid., p. 223.
5. Lyn Boliek, **Resurrection Of The Flesh** (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1962), pp. 222, 227.
6. **Two Creeds of Epiphanius: Second Formula** (A. D. 374) in Philip Schaff, **the Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes** (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983): 2:37, emphasis added.
7. Schaff, **Creeds of Christendom**, ibid., 3:98, emphasis added.
8. Ibid., p. 99, emphasis added.
9. Ibid., p. 183, emphasis added.
10. Ibid., p. 368-369, emphasis added.
11. Ibid., p. 404, emphasis added.
12. Ibid., pp. 433-434, emphasis added.
13. Ibid, p. 489, emphasis added.
14. Ibid., pp. 620-621, emphasis added.
15. Ibid., pp. 731-733, emphasis added.
16. Ibid., p. 748, emphasis added.
17. Ibid., pp. 749f.
18. See Murray Harris, **Raised Immortal** (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), p. 132, emphasis added.
19. Origen, **De Principiis** 3.6.6; 2.3.2, trans. by Rev. Frederick Crombie in Philip Schaff ed., **The Ante-Nicene Fathers** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), vol 4.
20. Danielou, **Origen** trans. by Walter Mitchell (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), p. 218.

21. Origen, *ibid.*, 6.7, emphasis added.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*, 7.32, emphasis added.
24. *Ibid.*, 4.5, emphasis added.
25. See note 88 below.
26. *Ibid.* 7.22.
27. See Harris, *ibid.*, p. 100.
28. Lynn Boliek, **The Resurrection of the Flesh** (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 46. J.D.N. Kelly acknowledges that "critics charged him [Origen] with affirming that 'in the resurrection the bodies of men rise spherical' (**sphairoeida**). He may well have done so, on the Platonic theory that the sphere is the perfect shape, but the evidence is not compelling" (**Early Christian Doctrines**, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960), p. 472).
29. Harris, **From Grave to Glory** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), p. 418.
30. *Ibid.*, 5.19.
31. William L. Craig, **The Historical Argument For the Resurrection of Jesus During the Deist Controversy** (Lewiston/Queenston: The Edwin Lellen Press, 1985), p. 573, n. 120.
32. See Boliek, *ibid.*, pp. 54-68.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
35. *Ibid.*, 59.
36. Origen, **De Principiis**, *ibid.*, 62.
37. Origen, **Contra Celsum**, 3.41 in Schaff, *ibid.* and Boliek, *ibid.*, p. 62.
38. Origen, **De Principiis** 3.6.6-9, *ibid.*
39. Kelly, **Early Christian Creeds**, *ibid.*, p. 163, emphasis added.
40. Philip Schaff, **The Creeds of Christendom**, sixth edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983): 1.12.

41. Charles Hefele, defends the authenticity of the name Origen here, pointing out that the name occurs in the extant Acts in the Roman archives, and that Origenistic monks (of the new Lama) withdrew communion from the bishops of Palestine who had subscribed to the Acts of this synod (see Schaff, **Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers**, *ibid.*, 14:314).

42. Charles Joseph Hefele, **A History of the Councils of the Church** (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895) 3:176.

43. T. Hardy ed., **The Decades of Henry Bullinger** (Cambridge, 1849), p. 26.

44. See note notes 85-88 below.

45. Rudolf Bultmann, **Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate**, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (London: Billing and sons, 1954), pp. 38-39.

46. Emil Brunner, **The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption: Dogmatics** 2:372, translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: the Westminster Press, 1952).

47. See Edward Schillebeeckx, **Jesus: An Experiment in Christology**, trans by Hubert Hoskins (New York: Crossroad Book, Seabury Press, 1979). Under ecclesiastical pressure Schillebeeckx modified some of his positions in the direction of orthodoxy, but he did not change it on the immaterial nature of the resurrection body. See Ted Schoof ed., **The Schillebeeckx Case** (New York: Paulist press, 1984, especially pp. 135-158.

48. Wolfhart Pannenberg, **Jesus--God and Man**, translated by Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), p. 75.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

50. George Eldon Ladd, **I Believe In the Resurrection of Jesus** (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 100.

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

54. Murray Harris, **Raised Immortal**, *ibid.*, p. 53.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

56. Murray Harris, **From Grave to Glory**, *ibid.*, p. 392.

57. See Murray Harris, *ibid.*, recommendations on the front page.
58. James M. Boice, **Foundations of the Christian Faith** (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), pp. 354-355.
59. A letter "To Whom It may Concern," October 15, 1991.
60. *Ibid.*
61. **The Quarterly Journal** (April-June, 1919).
62. Letter "To Whom It May Concern" from Personal Freedom Outreach, September 16, 1991.
63. In a general letter to "My dear brothers and sisters," August 24, 1991, emphasis added.
64. **Holy Spirit** (1976), p. 169.
65. Harris, **Raised Immortal**, *ibid.*, p. 54, emphasis in original.
66. **Watchtower** (4/1/47), pp. 101-102.
67. Harris, **From Grave to Glory**, *ibid.*, p. 193.
68. **The Harp of God** (1928 ed.), p. 172.
69. Harris, *ibid.*, p. 386.
70. **Watchtower** (7/15/1897), p. 212.
71. Harris, *ibid.*, p. 202.
72. **Watchtower** (6/1/590), p. 333.
73. Harris, **Raised Immortal**, *ibid.*, p. 126.
74. **Children** (1941), p. 123.
75. Harris, 75., *ibid.*, p. 53.
76. **Watchtower** (2/1/1900), p. 43.
77. Harris, *ibid.*, p. 142.
78. Harris, **From Grave to Glory**, *ibid.*, p. 406.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 405.
80. Harris, **Raised Immortal**, *ibid.*, p. 92.
81. Harris, *ibid.*, p. 92. cf. **From Grave to Glory**, *ibid.*, p. 423.

82. Harris, **Raised Immortal**, *ibid.*, p. 54.
83. *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.
84. Harris, **From Grave to Glory**, *ibid.*, p. 392.
85. **Two Creeds of Epiphanius: Second Formula** (A. D. 374) in Philip Schaff, **the Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes** (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983):2:37, emphasis added.
86. **The Thirty Nine Articles of Religion** (A. D. 1562), *ibid.*, p. 489, emphasis added.
87. **The Westminster Confession** (A.D. 1647): 8:4, emphasis added.
88. **The Fourth Council of Toledo** (A.D. 663), T. Hardy, **The Decades of Henry Bullinger** (Cambridge, 1849), p. 24.
89. John Guill, **A Body of Divinity** (Grand Rapids, MI: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1769-70, 1971 reprint), p. 610, emphasis added.