

Paul's Concept of a Spiritual Body

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It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:44

Systematic theology is constructed on a foundation of sound biblical exegesis. To ready theology for engagement with science, it needs to know what Scripture says. Our task here is to discern just what St. Paul says about the self who dies and rises in Christ.

Paul's Holistic View versus the Corinthians' Dichotomous Anthropology

In the collection of the Museo Nazionale in Rome, there is a touching relief on a pagan child's sarcophagus.¹ The living soul of the deceased infant is reclining on a bed, enjoying the pleasures of the Elysium in the iconographic center of the relief. The soul is depicted as an adolescent — as the person this child was supposed to become. Under the *klinē* (the bed), the corpse of the deceased infant is depicted, the small body stretched out, marked by death — a hollow shell, which the soul has left.

In Corinth, Paul faced the same dichotomous anthropological concept,² which was widespread in the Greco-Roman world. This typically Greek di-

1. Museo Nazionale, inventory number 535.

2. See esp. 1 Cor. 6:12-20; 1 Corinthians 15.

chotomy was different from the Jewish holistic view of the human being. Jews traditionally did not separate the physical body (*sōma*) from the immortal soul (*psychē*) or spirit (*pneuma*). Whenever traditional Jews said “body,” they did not mean just the tangible, physical parts but rather the entire person.

Paul has often been presented as a protagonist of this kind of Jewish, holistic anthropology. But things are a little more complicated. After all, he was a Hellenistic Jew, and, as such, he *could* distinguish the person’s self from his or her physical body.³ However, he saw other consequences in this dichotomy than the Corinthians did. And at the same time, he maintained a different kind of holism than traditional Jews who followed the author of the book of Daniel.

The Greek concept, which was shared by the Corinthians, could also be interpreted as a dichotomy between the inner and the outer person. The importance of the body as the exterior of the personality was then downplayed and neglected; only the inner person mattered. The Corinthian enthusiasts thought that in baptism their inner person, their soul or spirit, was endowed with the Holy Spirit, immortalized and saved. They saw this as an already present salvation that they experienced tangibly in ecstatic spiritual phenomena, especially speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 12–14). Compared to this, the outer nature — the physical body and behavior in everyday life — was of little importance to them. One could eat whatever one wanted (cf. 1 Corinthians 8; 6:13) or have sex with whomever one desired (cf. 1 Cor. 6:12ff.; also 5:1ff.); these were external matters of the physical body, *quantités négligables*, which did not affect the salvation of the inner soul. Thus, the Corinthians’ anthropological dichotomy divided the human personality into sectors that were independent of each other — sex and food for the body, Christ for the spirit. And at the moment of death, the immortalized human spirit (or soul) is freed from the perishing physical body and ascends to the Lord. Consequently, a future eschatological “resurrection” was not necessary in the Corinthians’ eyes.⁴

3. See esp. 2 Cor. 12:2–3; 5:6 below. Differently, see, e.g., Dan. 12:2 as the oldest certain testimony of Jewish belief in an eschatological resurrection of the dead: “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to . . . everlasting contempt.” Here the deceased person’s *self* is pictured as being buried together with the *physical body*. Both are inseparable. Other variants of the expectation of a resurrection of the dead can be found in, e.g., 1 *Enoch* 22–27; 51; 102–104; *Psalms of Solomon* 3:12; 13:11; 15:13; 2 *Baruch* 49–51; 4 *Ezra* 7.

4. “There is no resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor. 15:12), some Corinthians said, meaning that baptized Christians do not undergo a *future, postmortem* resurrection. What they called “resurrection” or “eternal life” is already encountered *now* in baptism and in spiritual,

In Paul's holistic perspective, on the other hand, the reality of salvation is not *another* reality apart from the outer everyday life, not just a religious reality for the *inner* life of a person. It grasps and embraces the whole of human existence, the entire personality.⁵ This principle is also applied very consistently to the eschatological concept of a postmortem life: this life will not only involve *parts* of a human being, a soul or a spirit, but the entire personality, *including* his or her bodily existence. For exactly this reason, Paul talks about "resurrection" and not of such things as "spiritual immortality" and "ascending souls." Or, in other words, without the bodily aspect there is no legitimate usage of the word "resurrection," according to Paul.

In summary, God's salvation, including the raising of the dead, grasps more than just parts of a human being, than just a soul or a spirit. It grasps the entire person and subjects this person to a transforming⁶ and newly creating act called "resurrection." Consequently, the resurrected person will have a bodily existence.

How Does Paul Envision the Bodily Side of the Resurrection of Human Beings?

If the resurrection is such a comprehensive reality, as described above, it also must be *future and eschatological*. This is a logical consequence of the comprehensiveness, because the present is imperfect, characterized by the absence of total salvation. For Paul, resurrection of humans therefore is an "eschatological" reality, that is, something at the end and outside of our present reality, something beyond our present life and death, something for which we only can hope (Rom. 8:24). Contradicting the Corinthians, Paul emphasizes this future aspect by choosing apocalyptic language when describing resurrection (1 Cor. 15:23-28, where he lays out an apocalyptic timetable). In his Christology, he also emphasizes that in the present the *crucified* Christ is central, and, correspondingly, Christians in the present are conformed to this crucified Lord (e.g., Rom. 6:3-8a). Only in the *future* will they be conformed to the resurrected Lord (Phil. 3:21; Rom. 6:5b, 8b).

ecstatic, or charismatic experiences, such as speaking in tongues or prophesying. In baptism, Christians meet Christ and participate in his resurrection, gaining new, eternal life already in the present (see similar views in John 5:24-25; Eph. 2:5-6; 5:14; Col. 2:12-13; 3:1; 2 Tim. 2:18).

5. See esp. 1 Cor. 6:12ff. The entire physical existence belongs (6:19-20) to the Lord and is grasped by him. Therefore, in Paul's view, the Lord competes directly with the courtesan with whom a Corinthian Christian unites himself physically.

6. Cf. *metaschēmatisō* (Phil. 3:21).

Now in the old aeon, characterized by death and imperfection, Christians catch only anticipating glimpses of this future reality, for example, by experiencing love (cf. 1 Corinthians 13).⁷ But it would be a poor illusion to identify anything elating in the present, such as a fantastic ecstatic-spiritual phenomenon, as a wonderful manifestation of eternal life. Speaking in tongues and prophesying belong to the old aeon and will come to an end (1 Cor. 13:8-10). Resurrection will be encountered only at the end of all times.

At first glance, the emphasis on the future eschatological aspect of the resurrection seems trivial. But it was not self-evident for the ancient Corinthians — as it might not be for modern existentialists. For Paul, however, there was no legitimate usage of the word “resurrection” *without* the future eschatological horizon. It is exactly this future eschatological perspective that might open up a common platform for discussion with natural scientists, who are familiar with linear time frames,⁸ who on the basis of quantum physics are familiar with speculations about other universes beyond our universe, and who also reckon with the finality of this universe.

The next aspect directly corresponds to the previous one. In fact, it is just the flip side of it. There is a quantum leap between the present physical body of the human being and the future spiritual body of resurrected individuals. In other words, rising with a new spiritual body does not mean returning to one’s old physical body and existence — like Lazarus was said to have come out of his grave, being restored to his previous natural human self (John 11:17-44), which was marked by mortality, weakness, insufficiency, and the capacity for suffering. “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (1 Cor. 15:50). Whoever dies and “is with Christ” is “not in the flesh anymore” (Phil. 1:23-24). Therefore, the spiritual body of the resurrected is something “unnatural,” that is, something beyond the possibilities inherent in the present creation. It will be part of a new creation with new possibilities.

7. For another anticipating glimpse, see Romans 6, esp. v. 4: since Christ was raised, Christians in their moral behavior are capable of “walking in newness of life” already in the present, although their own resurrection remains a strictly future event (vv. 5 and 8). 2 Cor. 4:10b and 11b also seem to talk about a foreshadowing of the future resurrection. These verses probably are to be interpreted in parallel to the immediately preceding vv. 8-9 and to v. 16. Then they refer to the present favors God bestows on the apostle: God encourages him so that he does not lose heart and is being renewed every day. This loving care of God makes the “life of Jesus” manifest “in our bodies” and “in our mortal flesh” already now, although the resurrection itself remains a future event (4:14).

8. Maybe because their sciences are deeply rooted in a culture influenced by the Judeo-Christian world of thought?

Paul uses images to depict this difference in quality. Illustrating with the imagery of seeds and fully grown plants in 1 Corinthians 15:36-38, the apostle tries to answer the question about “with *what kind of body*” the deceased will be raised. He plays on a note of Greek culture when picking up the imagery of grain and sowing. The pagan Corinthian environment cultivated a strong religious interest in the world of the dead and its deities. In the Corinthian Demeter cult, for example, the dying Persephone became more and more prominent. Persephone, Demeter’s daughter and the goddess of Hades, represented not only the dying vegetation but also human mortal destiny. And as dying vegetation is always revived in the circle of nature in the spring, humans also may hope for immortality. Demeter, the goddess of the grain-bearing earth, cared for more than the seeds of grain in the fields. The crowds of deceased humans also belonged to her “seeds.” These human seeds of Demeter, called *demetrians* by Plutarch (*Moralia* 943b), thus may hope for revitalization.

This is a glimpse into the cultural milieu in which Paul spoke his verses about dying and reviving seeds. This imagery was neither particularly Pauline nor Christian. It evoked associations in the Corinthians’ minds that differed from ours. Paul met his Hellenistic readers with cultural presuppositions familiar to them. At the same time he modified this imagery by integrating it into a particularly Christian frame. For him, resurrection had no cyclical aspects at all, as the linear eschatological timetable in 15:23-28 shows. The Jewish and Christian faiths, based on the Old Testament, stress the linear perspective of history and deemphasize the religious significance of nature’s cycles — contrary to many other religions. Moreover, the only basis for all hopes for revitalization is Christ, raised by God (see, e.g., 15:23-28).

What did Paul learn from the imagery of grain and sowing? “What you sow does not come to life unless it *dies*” (15:36). This underscores the future, postmortem aspect of the resurrection and the discontinuity. You sow “a *bare seed*, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.” “You do not sow the body that is to be.” “God gives a body as he has chosen” (15:37-38). Thus, we again learn that bodily resurrection does not mean a simple return to the earthly conditions of the past. It does not entail a restoration or revivification of our present flesh, blood, and bones. Our present earthly body will not see eternity (15:50).

What positively can be learned from the imagery of seeds and grain? For Paul, the postresurrection body will transcend the earthly body in the same way that a beautiful, intricate plant transcends the plain seed of grain from which it grows. There is an enormous leap in quality from the bare seed to the full-grown plant. Analogously, there will be a huge leap in quality from

the earthly person to the postresurrection person, or, as verse 44 words it, from the “physical body” to the “spiritual body.”

First Corinthians 15:39-49 illustrates the same idea. The examples in verses 39-41, taken from creation, try to make plausible that two qualitatively different “bodies” can exist side by side (the flesh of humans differs from that of animals and from that of birds and fish; celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies are different; so are the glory of the sun, the moon, and the stars). The underlying thought runs like this: if these quality differences are possible *within* the *present* cosmos, they are all the more likely between the present and the future eschatological realities. The distinctions listed in verses 42-44 (perishable versus imperishable, dishonor versus glory, weakness versus power) emphasize the immense difference in quality between the two “bodies,” that is, between the preresurrection and postresurrection human being.

Verses 45-49 illustrate the same difference in quality by picking up the Adam-Christ typology and its category of “corporate representation.” Adam represents our earthly selves; we bear “the image of the man of dust.” The resurrected Christ represents our future, heavenly selves; “we will bear the image of the man of heaven.” Thus the difference in quality between my preresurrection and postresurrection existence will be as huge as the difference between Adam and Christ.

Surely, there is continuity between the seed and the full-grown plant. However, two important things happen in between: the *dying* of the seed and an act of *creation* by God (15:38). Our whole perishable person will be transformed (*metaschēmatisō*, Phil. 3:21) into a new and imperishable heavenly personality that will be qualitatively different from our first. It will be — thank God — much better! This transformation, called “resurrection,” will be a new and powerful act of creation by the sovereign God (compare also Rom. 4:17).

What Does Paul Mean by “Spiritual” or “Pneumatic” Body (1 Cor. 15:44)?

The word “spiritual” — and this may come as a disappointment to modern readers — does not say anything about the material or energetic structure of this new body. It does not try to describe a *Lichtleib*, some sort of concentration of light or other energy. Nor does it convey that this new body is composed of miniature particles of matter, as the Stoics would have described the *pneuma* (spirit). All this would be misunderstanding Paul, who refrains from such speculations and stays with simple metaphors.

For him, the term “spiritual” emphasizes that God’s Spirit is the *only* force that creates the new body. The creation of this new body is totally *beyond* all the possibilities of the present nature and creation. That is all that Paul wants to convey with this term. Therefore, I do not see how the natural sciences could help us to understand the totally different “nature” of this future body — unless natural science were able to transcend the nature of this universe.

Paul asserts that our spiritual body will be very similar, even “conformed” (*symmorphon*), to that of the resurrected Christ (Phil. 3:21). But he refrains from giving further details, which later evangelists pretend to “know” by describing the resurrected Christ.⁹ The apostle only affirms that our spiritual body “in heaven” will be a “body of glory” as opposed to the “body of lowliness” in which we now live (Phil. 3:20-21).

For Paul, Christ’s resurrection included his elevation to a position of Lordship and sovereignty over “every authority and power,” even death.¹⁰ Correspondingly, Christians after their resurrection will participate in Christ’s heavenly glory and reign (1 Cor. 4:8),¹¹ although they will not be elevated to quite the same majesty as the risen Christ (15:23-27).

This Christocentrism of the early Christians’ hope for resurrection is crucial. Since God raised Christ from the dead, and since Christ is the representative of a whole new aeon, all people of this new aeon — Christians (1 Cor. 15:23b) — will also be raised by God. The hope for resurrection is anchored exclusively in the Christ event. Paul therefore talks only about the resurrection of “those who belong to Christ” (15:23). He does not speculate whether or not non-Christians will be raised. This remains an open question in Paul’s writings (also in 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 2:16, contrary to Daniel 12, for instance).

Is this all that we can say about Paul’s concept of the “spiritual body”? We can be a little more specific about one particular point. God’s Spirit (*pneuma*), which is the only force that creates the new spiritual (*pneumatic*) body, *already dwells in Christians now* (Rom. 8:9–11:23). This pneumatological statement presents an interesting piece of realized eschatology — in spite of all the emphasis on the future aspect of resurrection, the external force that *will* resurrect us *is already in us*. However, although perceived as a force inherent in the Christian, the *pneuma* is not a human force, not an anthropological

9. According to Luke 24:43, e.g., the resurrected body of Christ can consume fish!

10. Cf., e.g., Rom. 15:24-27; 1 Cor. 1:4. Only later Christians began to differentiate between resurrection and ascension to heavenly power as two separate events (Luke 24; Acts 1).

11. The Corinthians mistakenly assumed that they were ruling with Christ already in the *present*. This is what Paul contests in 4:8, not the idea of ruling itself.

factor of the natural person, but given to him or her as a gift of grace. This inherent and at the same time external force will overcome death and revive the person to eternal life.

Continuity

If there is so much discontinuity, do we have to go by the *Ganz Tod* theory, according to which the entire person dies? Continuity then would be guaranteed only by God's memory: God remembers me and therefore can re-create me in new ways. According to Paul, things are more complicated than that because more factors of continuity are involved.

Paul describes the status of a deceased person *before* the eschatological resurrection of the dead as that of not being in the physical body anymore but as "being with Christ." It is a status for which Paul is longing (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23-24; cf. 2 Cor. 5:6). He does not specify this status, which Luke will do later.¹² Nevertheless, we gain several important insights from these Pauline passages.

Even Paul espouses a certain dichotomy after all: a separation of the physical body and the self, the "me," during this temporary stage after death and before resurrection. In order to verbalize the "me," Paul simply uses personal pronouns and not terms such as "spirit" or "soul."

The most important information we get about this intermediate stage is that the "me" is "with Christ" (*syn Christō*) — not "in his memory" or anything like that. *Syn Christō* is a relational term. The existence of the "me" in this intermediate stage is stripped of any substance. It is stripped of the old physical body, which decays in the grave, *and* it has not received the new spiritual body yet. In other words, it is stripped naked (regardless of how we want to interpret 2 Cor. 5:3). Thus, the "me" of this stage *cannot* be described in substantial terms.

The existence of the "me" during this intermediate stage can only be described in *relational* terms. In fact, the "me" is reduced to *a single* relation; it is reduced to the *syn Christō*, to being "with Christ." Paul describes this reduced relational existence as "sleeping," again using a metaphor.¹³ Was the idea of sleep and rest the reason why he yearned for this status? Was he longing for rest from all his apostolic troubles? Or did he expect to "see" Christ already during this stage? He did not go into these details. Maintaining his Christocentrism, he was totally content to state: I will be with Christ after my

12. See below, and also the essay by Prof. H.-J. Eckstein in this volume.

13. Cf. 1 Cor. 7:39; 11:30; 15:18, 51; 1 Thess. 4:14.

individual death, even much closer to Christ than was possible during my pre-mortal, physical existence (2 Cor. 5:6). This is the only thing that matters, and I do not care *how* this will take place.

The mode is irrelevant. In this intermediate stage, the lack of a body and the lack of relations except for one go hand in hand. For Paul, a multitude of relations apparently requires bodily existence. Thus Paul has not only two but rather *three* stages or qualities of life in mind: a premortal life, a postmortem but preresurrection stage, and a postresurrection eternal life. The second phase can be described only in terms of a relational ontology.¹⁴

If we combine our passages here with Romans 8:11, which was quoted earlier (God's Spirit already dwells in us *before* our death), then we may conclude that the dormant postmortem *syn Christō* status will also be surrounded by this divine *pneuma*, this force through which God will resurrect the deceased and create anew. Interestingly enough, in 2 Corinthians 3:16-17 the *pneuma* is even *identified* with Christ as *kyrios*. In other words, to be *syn Christō* specifically means to be with the *pneuma*, God's life-giving power.

One might be tempted to interpret the *syn Christō* of the intermediate stage also in other ways. To be "with Christ" could possibly mean to be with the future eschatological judge. The *syn Christō* relation then would imply that the "me" is still encumbered with its past and its shortcomings; the "me" remains responsible and awaits the final judgment. On the other hand, to be "with Christ" could mean to be with the redeemer. However, Paul does not spell out such specifications of the intermediate *syn Christō* relation. They might suit the systematic theologian, but not the exegete.

The reason that Paul insists that his "me" or "self" will be separated from his physical body at the moment of his death¹⁵ seems to lie in his ecstatic experiences. In 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, a highly important text because it is our only firsthand autobiographical account of such an experience from the Second Temple period, he reports: "I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago — whether in the body (*sōma*) I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows — was snatched up¹⁶ to the third heaven. And I know that such a person — whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know; God knows — was snatched up into Paradise." As in 2 Corinthians 5:6 and 1 Corinthians 5:3, *sōma* here denotes the present physical body

14. An analogy for the three qualities of life can be found in biotic systems, described by Prof. Schloss in this volume.

15. Differently, e.g., Daniel 12. See above, n. 3.

16. The same term is used as in 1 Thess. 4:17, where the eschaton is described! For the "third heaven" and "Paradise" cf., e.g., 2 *Enoch* 8. According to this text, God can be seen in this heavenly place when "taking a walk" there and "taking a rest" under the tree of life.

in which the self “lives” as in a dwelling (2 Cor. 5:1, 6). According to Paul, the self *can* already leave this dwelling in premortal ecstatic experiences.¹⁷

We would like to know more about Paul’s concept of an intermediate stage, but he refrains from further speculations and specifications. He left this to later generations. Luke, for example, used the Hellenistic and dichotomous categories of the human spirit (*pneuma*) and the physical body in order to depict the intermediate stage more clearly. He thinks along these lines: the dying Jesus committed his *pneuma* into the hands of the Father, so that at the moment of his death, it left the physical body and was welcomed into paradise. Only the physical body was buried. Christ’s resurrection then meant that his *pneuma* and physical body were reunited on Easter Sunday.¹⁸ Paul was not yet so specific. According to Romans 8, the *pneuma* dwelling in Christians is *not* human but external and divine.

The Question of the Empty Tomb

Now let us ask: Was there an empty tomb at Easter, and will there be empty graves at the eschaton? For Luke and the other evangelists, the answer was Yes. During the resurrection, the physical body is “snatched up” from the grave and transformed. An empty tomb is left behind.

Paul was less clear in this respect. Already at the moment of death, his “me” will be with Christ. At the moment of his individual death, the “me” will be “stripped” of the physical body (2 Cor. 5:3-4) and will be “naked” until the moment of resurrection, when it will be “dressed” with a new body, which will be vastly different in quality from the first physical body. Then “we will not be found naked” anymore (cf. 2 Cor. 5:3). Thus, the present physical body will be “destroyed” and replaced with an eternal one of heavenly origin (2 Cor. 5:1).¹⁹ All of these mainly metaphorical statements do not necessarily

17. Cf. also 1 Cor. 5:3: Paul physically (*sōmati*) is in Ephesus, while at a decisive moment he mentally (*pneumati*) is present in Corinth, excommunicating somebody in Corinth “as if” he were physically present. This is not a dramatic ecstatic split of the person into physical and mental existence; it is just an everyday experience. But it foreshadows the split that happens in the moment of death.

18. See Luke 23:42-43, 46, 55; 24:3, 23, 39-43; and cf. Ignatius, *Ad Smyrnaeos* 3; Justin, *Dialogue* 80:5. In late medieval times, William of Ockham, e.g., taught that between death and bodily resurrection souls are able to see God’s glory. However, the perfect vision of God will not be possible until after the resurrection and the final judgment, when the soul is given a body again (*Dialogus* 2; Dr. Annette Weissenrieder, Heidelberg, kindly pointed me to this reference).

19. I translate 5:2-4 in this way: In the present body “we groan, longing to be further

presuppose an opening of graves and a transformation of remnants of physical bodies into these new heavenly bodies. The spiritual body of the resurrection can be created *with or without* transformed particles of the old one! For Paul, this question seems to be irrelevant. Only later theologians, such as Luke and the other evangelists, decided that they needed to know more at this particular point. Nevertheless, are there clues that Paul may have leaned in one direction or the other?

(a) 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 consider those persons who will still be alive at the time of the eschatological *parousia*. In this particular case, the physical bodies — with all their energy and particles of matter — will be “snatched up . . . in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air,” and in that moment they will be “swallowed up by life” (cf. 1 Cor. 15:54; 2 Cor. 5:4) and “transformed” (1 Cor. 15:52) into the new resurrection existence, so that those who are raised and those who are still living at the time of the *parousia* will not be distinguishable from one another anymore (cf. 1 Thess. 4:15). The analogy between these two groups might point us in the direction that Paul indeed had in mind, that in the resurrection process energy and particles of matter were also taken from the graves and “snatched up,” “swallowed up,” and “transformed” into the new heavenly body.²⁰ The tombs then would be empty.

(b) In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul argues that God will resurrect the Christian's physical body, and therefore, he concludes, one should not defile this body by playing around with prostitutes. This nexus between ethics and the concept of resurrection seems to hint at some kind of continuity between the present physical body and the totally transformed resurrection body — in spite of all discontinuity.

clothed with our dwelling from heaven in addition (to our present body); being clothed we will not be found naked” . . . “we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.” These sentences do not attempt to present eschatological “facts.” They describe human longing. Human beings long to be “further clothed” in their heavenly body. They do not want the present body to die and to be separated from them, but they want it to be “swallowed up” by the new body. However, this is an unrealistic hope for most people because most Christians die before the resurrection; they *are* unclothed and stripped naked in death. Only a few will be living in their present bodies when Christ comes again. They, indeed, will not be stripped but “further clothed” with their heavenly body, while the present physical body will be transformed (*metaschēmatisō*, Phil 3:21; *allassō*, 1 Cor. 15:51) and “swallowed up” by the new life. 1 Thess. 4:17 describes this transfiguration of the still living: “Then we who are alive and remain will be snatched up . . . in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord” (see also 1 Cor. 15:51-52).

20. Cf. also possibly the *pantes* in 1 Cor 15:51: not all die, but “all” will be transformed, both those who will still be alive *and* those who will be raised.

(c) The oldest certain Jewish statements about an eschatological resurrection of the dead presuppose empty tombs. Daniel 12:2, for example, reads: “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to . . . everlasting contempt.” Although the apocalyptic author from the 160s before Christ does not specifically say it, he surely presupposes empty graves in this statement. Therefore, one could argue that Paul hardly deviated from this Jewish tradition. On the other hand, however, we could argue that Paul *did* deviate in a Hellenistic manner from Daniel 12:2 in that he could distinguish between a person’s self and the physical body — which the author of the book of Daniel was unable to do. The apostle also differed from Daniel 12 by avoiding the notion of a resurrection “to everlasting contempt.” Why couldn’t Paul also deviate in an additional aspect? Again, Paul leaves us with a *non liquet* in matters unimportant to him.

Conclusion

In summary, a person’s “self,” his or her “me,” continues to exist throughout death and resurrection.²¹ God carries it through three stages of life. Temporarily, between individual death and resurrection, the self exists even without a “body,” without the first physical one, which is stripped off in death, and without the future spiritual one, which will be given at the resurrection. Paul calls this status “sleep.” Later Hellenistic theologians were ready to define this self as an immortal nucleus within us, whether a divine spark, as the Gnostics described, or an immortal spirit or soul.

Paul, however, avoids all these terms. He stays with simple personal pronouns. The “me,” the self, continues to exist as a relational entity between death and resurrection. But Paul does not spell out in detail *how*. His renunciation of detailed speculations is impressive — especially considering all the related speculative concepts that abounded in the Hellenistic world. Maybe we should learn to appreciate this kind of “theological asceticism,” which abstains from trying to take all mysteries from God. All ecumenical dialogues would benefit from such humility.

God is *faithful*, and we will be *with Christ*. These two promises are the only consolation a dying person really needs to know about his or her immediate future.

21. Among the texts quoted, see esp. 2 Cor. 5:1-4 with its personal pronouns and its metaphors of unclothing and clothing of the self.