

The Resurrection of the Body

by Olin Alfred Curtis

The resurrection of the body is a direct and new intention of God, conditioned by the body of the grave, and is a symbol of the new race in Christ and the solidarity of every redeemed man with Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Romans 8:23, 1 Corinthians 15:35, 2 Corinthians 5:2, Philippians 3:21, 1 John 3:2

Topics: "Resurrection Theology", "Eschatology"

Description

Olin Alfred Curtis emphasizes the importance of understanding the doctrine of the resurrection in eschatology, focusing on the positive process of redemption and the completion of the redeemed man through the resurrection of the body. He rejects various misconceptions about the resurrection, highlighting that it is a purely spiritual body made by God's direct intention, conditioned by the body of the grave, and a repetition of the earthly body with splendid additions. Curtis draws from Saint Paul's analogy of the seed-process to explain the resurrection and stresses the social and structural significance of the glorified body in maintaining personal identity and union with Christ.

Transcript

This doctrine, like that of the intermediate state, is usually discussed as an important division in eschatology. And there are reasons why it should be discussed in such a connection. Were we thinking of all men in their relation to the last things, surely we would need to treat the general resurrection as one of those last things. But according to my view, we can best understand the totality of redemption by keeping at the front its positive intention and actual accomplishments. Therefore, it is in my plan to make emphatic the redeemed, and to give merely an incidental reference to those who reject Jesus Christ. Besides all this, it is, I am confident, fairer, and more illuminating, to consider the everlasting ruin of those who will not be saved, as a problem in philosophical theodicy. As, then, my purpose is to emphasize the positive process of redemption, I wish to bring out the important fact that the redeemed man, the new man in Christ, is made complete only by the resurrection of the body. Here I will quote a striking passage from Chancellor Bernard's article on "The Resurrection": "Saint Paul's expression of Christian hope is not deliverance from the body, but redemption of the body. The redemption of the body is the last stage in the great process of adoption (*huiothesia*) by which we are made 'sons of God' " (Rom. 8.23).

Points in Personal Belief. The full discussion of the resurrection runs necessarily into such complications of detail as to be out of perspective with the plan of this book. I will, therefore, barely state my personal conclusions:

1. The body of the resurrection is not produced by the development of an indestructible germ which is within the body of this life.
2. It is not produced by a natural force which in some way belongs to the body of this life.
3. It is not an ethereal body which, before or at the time of death, was within the physical body as the shell is within the husk of a nut.
4. It is not the literal body of the grave reconstructed, whether by using all, or many, or a few, or even one, of the old material atoms. All this chasing through the universe to get the identical particles of matter, or enough of them to constitute "a proper identity," is not only an absurdity in philosophy, but a serious misinterpretation of Saint Paul.
5. The body of the resurrection is not the result of any natural law, any habitual divine volition, such as brings on the buds and blossoms of spring.
6. The body of the resurrection is a purely spiritual body (not bound by the laws of this world); made by the direct and new intention of God; but so made as to be conditioned by the body of the grave. Every glorified body is in occasional connection with a single physical body just as really as my body today is in occasional connection with the body of my childhood. The child's body conditions the man's body -- is the start, the initial indicative, the determining fundament, in God's own process of identity. The body I have now is what it is because the body of my childhood was what it was. I have lost every old particle of matter, times and times, but I have remained in my own category of identity. Not for an instant has my body leaped into another man's category. Precisely so a man's body of glory is his own body under the law of identity, and can be traced back to its conditioning clue, namely, the body which that one man had at the time of death. Every abiding element, the entire intrinsic plan and meaning of the material body, is by the resurrection brought again into fact and made glorious. Indeed, were it feasible to enter into a thorough philosophical discussion to show what matter actually is, such a discussion would, I believe, make it evident that the body of the resurrection is nothing other than God's volitional repetition of the body of the grave -- with splendid additions.

Saint Paul's Analogy. "But some one will say, How are the dead raised? and with what manner of body do they come? Thou foolish one, that which thou thyself sowest is not quickened except it die: and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be, but a bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other kind; but God giveth it a body even as it pleased him, and to each seed a body of its own" (1 Cor. 15.35-38).

Against bald literalism Saint Paul distinctly pronounces when he says, "Thou sowest not the body that shall be;" and his entire teaching may be gathered up in the phrase, "resurrection by seed-process." Here is a fair paraphrase of what the apostle says: "You place a seed in the ground; and by means of that seed you get a precisely corresponding plant, you know not how; even so you place in the ground a natural body, and by means of that, in God's own mysterious process, you get another, a spiritual body, which is to be identified with the buried body as a plant is exactly identified with its own seed."

A Catholic Union in Him. It is not necessary again specially to note the social significance of the body; or to show that the Christian doctrine of the resurrection gives the most important emphasis to that social significance. But we do need to look more closely at the structural meaning of the saint's glorified body. It is, on the one hand, a spiritual repetition of the body of his temporal v probation. Thus comes the

accentuation of the distinct person himself. Never is he to lose connection with his own past. Not only by memory, but by his very objective life itself, he is to be reminded that he is the same man who lived that life on earth. Most seriously I urge you to work out the wholesomeness of this thought that the line of identity is everlastingly sacred, that no man, in all the solemn eternities, can begin all over again.

Not only so, but this repetition of the earthly body is a perpetual objective insistence upon the fact that every redeemed man once belonged to that old Adamic race which was broken up by death and because of sin. Thus, the entire social life of the new race will ever suggest the sad history of the old race. No saint can ever make a gesture, or look into the face of another saint, without projecting large hints of the story of a costly redemption. Indeed, the whole objective life of the saints in glory is so planned that it has memorial force, like a great sacrament.

The inspiring point, though, is now to come. The glorified body is, on the other hand, made according to the type of our Lord's own glorious body. And, as you quickly see, thus comes the emphasis upon the new race in Christ. The one distinct personal individual is kept emphatic; but he is, even in his bodily life, brought into union with his Redeemer. Thus the new race is formally, as it was before spiritually, given actual solidarity with Jesus Christ. There is a mighty social republic, kingdom, church, where every item of association is a tribute to "Him who hath redeemed us." In the Gospel of the Resurrection, there is one great passage which I am eager to give you now: "In this way the doctrine of the resurrection turned into a reality the exquisite myth of Plato. ... And, at the same time the notion of civic union, in which lay so much of the strength and virtue of classical life, is freed from the dangers of party and class, and extended to the utmost limits of human brotherhood. Christianity satisfies the instinct and harmonizes the idea of a special relationship to a divine Lord with that of a catholic union in him."

The Three Cosmical Spheres

I had written a paragraph on "the three cosmical spheres," when, to my surprise, I found it almost word for word in Bishop Martensen's Dogmatics. Evidently my own work was nothing but Martensen as held in memory through a number of years. And yet my own movement in thought naturally would have reached the same conception. Here is the passage from the Christian Dogmatics: "According to the fundamental representations of revelation, the life of man is to be lived in three cosmical spheres: First, the sphere in which we dwell in the flesh, **en sarki**, our present life, whose prevailing bias is sensible and outward -- for not only is all spiritual activity conditioned by sense, but the spirit groans under the tyranny of the flesh; next, a sphere in which we live, **en pneumati**, wherein spirituality and inwardness is the fundamental feature, and this is the intermediate state; and, lastly, a sphere in which we shall again live in the body, but in a glorified body, and in a glorified nature, which is perfection, the renewal and perfecting of this world to its final goal" (comment on 2 Cor. 5.2, 8).

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