



THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE AFTERLIFE

POST-DEATH EXISTENCE IN ATHENAGORAS,
TERTULLIAN, ORIGEN AND THE *LETTER TO
RHEGINOS*

David Rankin



The Early Church and the Afterlife

The resurrection of the dead was, as Tertullian says, ‘the chief article of the whole Christian faith’ (*De resurrectione* 39.3) and one of those beliefs which most distinguished Christian thought from much other contemporary thinking. This book looks at the way in which post-death existence is represented in the work of the early Church Fathers – notably Athenagoras, Tertullian and Origen – and the *Letter to Rheginos*, and how these representations compare with its treatment both in scripture and in contemporary, modern theological reflection.

Examining these attitudes to life after death, and putting them into conversation with more modern interpretations, the book asks four main questions. First, whether resurrection happens immediately after death. Second, if there is continuity or discontinuity of space and time between death and a resurrection life. Third, it explores whether post-death existence was thought to be embodied or not, and if so how might it be embodied. Finally, it addresses the issue of continuity, or discontinuity, of personal identity after death.

This book sheds light on the formation of a key doctrine of Christian faith. As such, it will be of significant interest to scholars and academics working in the history of religion, theology and patristics.

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1 Introduction

Jurgen Moltmann identifies a number of questions asked by people contemplating the matter of death: What remains of our lives when we die? Where are the dead? What he calls the ‘central question’: Where are we going? Do we await anything? What awaits us? Where is s/he now?¹

The question of post-death survival or existence, in some form of a so-called afterlife, is a complex one. It may be understood as a traditional Christian understanding of *resurrection*, of an interim, immediate survival of the soul, following the death of the body, followed at some later time² by a [re]joining of that soul with a renewed, transformed body. It may be understood as a reincarnation whereby the surviving soul or spirit is joined either immediately upon the death of the body, or at some later time, to another body. Or it may be understood as some other form of *continuation* of personal identity as depicted in many popular cinematic or other media representations, perhaps as an immaterial soul or mind.

The theme and purpose of this study

I propose in this study to see how the thought of Athenagoras, Tertullian, Origen and the author of the Gnostic *Letter to Rheginos* in particular – each of whom addresses in some detail the matter of post-death existence, particularly that of resurrection – compare with one another and how they each understand the scriptural witness to such existence and are influenced by such a witness. I propose also to include along the way some reflections of both Irenaeus and the so-called ps-Justin on the matter. The latter two writers reflect less extensively on the topic than did the other four, but their reflections are no less interesting or significant for understanding second- and third-century thought on the question.

The Church Fathers and patristic representations of post-death existence

I have chosen to deal with Athenagoras and Tertullian, both because I am familiar with their work and because they represent, as two of the earliest Church Fathers to have written whole treatises on the subject of the resurrection of the body, the fruits of second-century thinking on the subject. The second century was,

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of course, a period when this topic came particularly to the fore in presentations of early Christian doctrine, with contributions also from Justin Martyr, Tatian, Irenaeus and ps-Justin. I will also look, where appropriate, as indicated above, at the reflections of both the second century's Irenaeus of Lyons from the fifth book of his *Adversus Haereses* and ps-Justin in his *De Resurrectione*. Irenaeus deals with only some of the issues addressed in this book, and his thinking is shaped primarily, and thereby limited somewhat, by the context of his struggles with the heretics, for the most part Valentinians and Basilidians, of his day. Ps-Justin, whoever he was, is by almost universal agreement from the later second century – his writings certainly reflects the language and the issues of that era – but whether the actual author is Athenagoras³ or Hippolytus of Rome⁴ is debatable. Athenagorean authorship is possible but unlikely, while an Hippolytan one, for which Whealey makes a very plausible case, is the more likely but by no means certain. Its late second- or even early third-century provenance is, however, almost certain, and it belongs thereby in our study.⁵ I chose Origen simply because he exercised a major influence on the direction on thinking on the matter of the resurrection, as on so many others, as the foremost Christian theologian of the pre-Nicene period. I have chosen the *Letter to Rheginos* because it is a second-century writing dealing exclusively with the matter of the resurrection and because, as one sitting part way along the continuum between orthodox and heterodox during the second and third centuries, it provides an interesting comparison with the other more orthodox writings.

I have limited myself to the pre-Nicene period for two reasons. First, this assists us in understanding, along with a consideration of the biblical witness, the direction of very early Christian thinking on the subject and, second, to go into the Nicene and post-Nicene periods would be to include such a large body of writings as to be unmanageable. I could also have included Methodius from the pre-Nicene period but have not done so for reasons primarily of space. As indicated above, both Athenagoras and Tertullian wrote full treatises on the question of post-death existence and resurrection. They both wrote about it in other works as well. Athenagoras did so with a brief mention of resurrection towards the very end of his *Legatio* and Tertullian in his *Apologeticum*, the *de Anima* and elsewhere. Origen wrote his own *de Resurrectione* which is now, however, largely lost, being available only in fragments. He also made significant mention on the subject in some of his biblical commentaries – like that on *Matthew* – and in *de Principiis* and in the *Contra Celsum*.

The approaches of Athenagoras and Tertullian to the question of post-death existence – to take them first as near contemporaries – are very different. At the very least Athenagoras, as I argued in my own book on him,⁶ places his arguments for the resurrection of the body in the context of a conversation within philosophical circles with very little reference to Holy Scripture. Indeed, his scriptural references, such as they are, are largely incidental. At best, scripture seems merely to confirm what, for Athenagoras, reason has already proven. Tertullian, on the other hand, situates his arguments in the context of what is, for better or worse, a scriptural commentary, with a particular focus on key biblical passages, the 15th

chapter of the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians very much to the fore. This is so also for Origen and, as we shall see, for the author of the *Letter to Rheginos*.

A note on the authorship of the *De Resurrectione*

I addressed the matter of the authorship of the *De Resurrectione* at length in my 2009 book on Athenagoras⁷ – where I aligned myself with Bernard Pouderon⁸ and Lesley W. Barnard⁹ and the traditional position on authorship (and against the position which began to emerge in the 1950s and which has been, until recently, associated as much with Nicole Zeegers vander Vorst as with anyone,¹⁰ and which challenges this) – but it should, of course, be addressed afresh here. I said then that I believed that the latter case, beginning with Robert McQueen Grant in his 1954 paper ‘Athenagoras or Pseudo-Athenagoras’¹¹ – but whose own arguments I found ‘specious’ – that the late second-century Athenian and undisputed author of the *Legatio*, Athenagoras, was not the author of the *De Resurrectione* and that its author was an otherwise unknown person writing at any time from the early third to the mid-fourth century was, essentially, ‘not proven’; and that therefore the *status quo* position, begun with Arethas’ attribution of the treatise to Athenagoras in the tenth century, should, for the time being, prevail.¹² I took the view then that the burden of proof for moving away from the traditional ascription lay with those who wished to challenge it and not with its defenders as long as the latter could make out a reasonable *prima facie* case and not merely rely on Arethas’ attribution. While I conceded then, and concede still, that the different themes of the two works – the unchallenged *Legatio* and the disputed *De Resurrectione* – and their different styles and their consistently different use of particular words might point to another author for the latter writing, I still believed that the case for a different attribution had not been sufficiently made. I did, however, make the concession in 2009 that ‘my study of the thought of Athenagoras will be shaped, in part, by the niggling thought’ that the two treatises, *Legation* and *De Resurrectione*, might not be from the same hand’.¹³

Recently, however, I have had the pleasure of reviewing, for the journal *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*,¹⁴ a 2016 German monograph by Nikolai Kiel¹⁵ on the matter of both the dating and the authorship of the treatise. Kiel argues, rather persuasively to my mind and rather better than has any other author to date (and I am thus inclined to accept his conclusions), that the work is not from the hand of Athenagoras but from an unknown author from the period after Tertullian but before Origen. Kiel places it somewhere in the first quarter of the third century. He dismisses, again very persuasively, any suggestion that it should be placed after Origen or after Methodius. His arguments for an early third-century dating for the treatise address the matter of audience, the challenges posed by second-century pagan author Celsus, the suggestion that it might be a response to particular and named late third- and fourth-century criticisms of Christian teaching, or to the so-called chain-consumption objection to the notion of a bodily resurrection, to teachings over time on divine providence as one of the arguments for resurrection, and to the relationships between the thought of (ps)Athenagoras (as he chooses to style the author) and that of both Origen and Methodius.

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A summary of his most comprehensive set of arguments will look something like this. Our author's clear responses to the objections of Celsus link him generally to the time of Origen. His repudiation of the chain-consumption objection places his work after the time of Tatian, Tertullian and Minucius Felix but before that of Origen. Likewise, his employment of the *transformation* notion of resurrection places him after the *Letter to Rheginos* and Tertullian but again, before Origen in the development of the use of the notion. This is so also with the manner in which he both reads and employs the thought of both Philo and Galen. His obvious influence on Methodius of Olympus (d. 311), rather than the other way around, means that we cannot assign a later, fourth-century date to our treatise. There can be little doubt, for Kiel, that our treatise belongs somewhere between 180 and 245, most probably in the first half of the third century. I find Kiel's arguments most convincing. If he is right, and I believe that he is, then the author of the *De Resurrectione* is not Athenagoras of Athens but someone else writing perhaps half a century later. The writing can, however, remain under consideration in this present work as belonging to the general period under consideration. I will continue to call its author *Athenagoras* for the sake of convenience, but this must not suggest that he is necessarily the same person as the author of the *Legatio*.

Athenagoras begins his treatise on the resurrection with a treatment – as was common in philosophical writings of the time – of the nature of knowledge, of the epistemology employed by him, although as a Christian philosopher such knowledge is that which concerns God and, here particularly, misrepresentations about God. Some misrepresent from a despair of ever knowing the truth, he says. Some others distort [the truth] from what seems [likely] to themselves. And still others exercise themselves in doubting even the obvious (1.2). One engaged in such matters ought, he says, to adopt two lines of argument: one *on behalf* (ὕπερ) of the truth and directed to those who disbelieve or dispute that truth; and the other *concerning* (περι) the truth and directed to those who are well disposed to it and receive it happily (1.3). And while, he continues, it is normal to proceed first with the *concerning* and only then with the *on behalf*, in practical terms one ought, he suggests, to reverse that order. For like the farmer who removes wild growths before sowing and the physician who will first purge infections from the body before introducing health-restoring medication, the one who seeks to teach the truth must first deal with false opinions (1.4). Thus in teaching on the resurrection, one confronts those who either simply do not believe or those who dispute it or those who accept 'our basic [Christian] assumptions' yet still doubt as much as those who dispute (1.5). And this is so even when those who disbelieve or doubt have no plausible grounds for doing so. Athenagoras then continues by declaring that every attitude of disbelief which someone may adopt, not rashly or unexamined but where there are good reasons and 'out of the security provided by the truth (τῆς τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἀσφαλείας)', remains a '*probable account* (τὸν εἰκότα λόγον)' – Plato uses the phrase εἰκότι λόγῳ at *Timaeus* 57D – when the matter challenged appears unworthy of belief (2.1); but to not believe something which has no such character suggests 'unsound judgement' concerning the truth (ibid.). He then applies this to unbelief in the resurrection. He suggests that those who

do not believe in the resurrection or have doubts on the matter ought not to bring forward their *opinion* (τὴν γνώμην) on the issue if such opinion is *what ‘merely seems likely’* to themselves ‘without critical judgement (ἀκρίτως)’ or what might bring comfort to the immoral (2.2). They should then either accept that the creation of man is not dependent on any cause at all (which can be easily refuted) or ascribe the cause of existence to God and, if the latter, examine the presupposition of the doctrine [of the resurrection] and show that it is not a trustworthy one.

He then introduces his first topic of the power and will of God in relation to creation and resurrection. Here we seem to have the classic Stoic/Platonist distinction between *knowledge* and *opinion*. The classic statement of this is at *Timaeus* 51D-52A where Plato distinguishes νοῦς and δόξα ἀληθῆς. The second-century Middle Platonist Alcinous in his *Didaskalikos* – whom I and others believe was a major source for Athenagoras – makes the same distinction in his discussion of the Platonic Forms (9.4.164.2). The Stoics also distinguished knowledge and opinion but rarely if ever recognised *true* opinions, declaring that opinion was normally sourced by and grounded in ignorance.¹⁶

At 2.3 of *De Resurrectione* Athenagoras declares, therefore, that those who do not believe in the resurrection of the body will be able to demonstrate that the notion is an untrustworthy one if they can show that God is either unable or unwilling to bring together again dead bodies (even decomposed ones) and restore them as the very persons (τῶν αὐτῶν ἀνθρώπων) they once were. If, however, they cannot do this they should, he says, give up their godless unbelief and their impious blasphemy. He then declares that he will show, by his following arguments, that they do not have the truth, that is, knowledge, when they speak of God’s inability or unwillingness to raise the dead. And then, from 3.1 to 9.2 he speaks of God’s power, and from 10.1 to 11.2 of his willingness [to raise the dead]. Before this, however, he offers a brief excursus (2.4–2.6) on the notion of ‘inability’. This has, for Athenagoras, to do with God’s knowledge of what has been dissolved – every part and member of our bodies – and where it has gone, as much as his foreknowledge of what has not yet happened; and these are for God both natural and easy given his majesty and wisdom (2.6). From 3.1 Athenagoras begins his exploration of God’s power or ability (τὴν δύναμιν) to resurrect.

The creation of our bodies, declares Athenagoras, shows that God’s power is sufficient for their resurrection. Whoever can create us from nothing can easily raise us up again from dissolution, however this might have happened (3.1). This he can do however our bodies might be made up: from matter, from the elements, or from seeds (3.2). The power which can give shape to the shapeless can give order to the unstructured and disordered, can gather into one that which is many, or divide into many that which is one and simple, can give articulation to that which is undifferentiated, can give life to that which is not alive; such a power can unite what is dissolved, raise what has fallen, restore the dead to life and change the corruptible into incorruption (3.2). In chapter 4 he then restates and deals again with objections. From 5.1 to 9.2 Athenagoras seeks to rebut these objections before moving to the matter of God’s will to raise the bodies of the dead from 10.1.

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From 5.1 to 8.1 Athenagoras engages in medical arguments to rebut his [Christian?] opponents. The possibility of a reliance on Galen [Claudius Galenus, born in Pergamum in 129CE, a renowned physician and writer of medical treatises, and associated loosely by Dillon with the so-called Middle Platonist ‘School of Gaius’ with which Albinus, Alcinous, and Apuleius of Madaura are identified¹⁷] is recognised by Schoedel¹⁸ and others. In chapter 8 Athenagoras challenges any suggestion that cannibalism is not contrary to nature and sacrilegious and that its practice gives any support to the notion that the flesh of one person can be properly joined by eating to the body of another. In chapter 10 Athenagoras makes clear that what God regards as either unjust or unworthy of himself is thereby foreign to his will. It is clear, he says, beginning with the matter of justice, that no being distinct from man and of created things is wronged by the resurrection of the body [of man]. In these first ten chapters of the treatises Schoedel sees perhaps four allusions or quotations from scripture – *Luke* 8.13 at 1.3, *1 Corinthians* 15.53 at 3.2, *John* 11.25 at 8.4, and *Luke* 18.27 at 9.2 – but at no point does Athenagoras identify or acknowledge either by quote or allusion as scriptural something one would presume he would do in conversation with fellow Christians.

At 11.3 Athenagoras returns briefly to his discussion of the two forms of argument identified earlier: that *concerning* the truth and that *on behalf of* the truth. He recognises that the former is naturally foremost and primary given that it ‘supplies knowledge of reality (τὴν τῶν πραγμάτων γνῶσις)’ and the latter secondary because it is a ‘less significant thing to refute falsehood than to confirm truth’ (11.4). Yet, he says, the second is often placed first because its value is that it ‘destroys and purges away the unbelief which disturbs some people and the doubt and error which troubles those who are moving forward’ (11.5). Both modes, he says, have the same view in mind, true piety, but ‘they are not absolutely one and the same thing’ (11.6). The former is necessary for those who believe and are concerned for the truth and their own salvation, while the latter is useful at least against their opponents (11.6).

He now moves to look to the main task and provides in 11.7 a division of topics:

why the first man came into existence and those after him;
the common nature of all humans simply as humans; and
the matter of the judgement of their Creator upon them.

In chapter 12 Athenagoras addresses first the question of the fundamental reason why the human person came into existence, given that either he/she came into existence by chance, or for no purpose, or with some end in view. If, Athenagoras surmises, human existence is not accidental nor purposeless then the creation of man happened either for the sake of God himself, or for that of some other creature, or for himself (12.1–2).

At 14.1 Athenagoras declares that to offer certain proof for one’s argument one ought not to begin with points external to the debate or with the opinions and doctrines of others (ἐκ τῶν τισι δοκούντων ἢ δεδογμένων), but with a universal and natural thought or concept (ἀλλ’ ἐκ τῆς κοινῆς καὶ φυσικῆς ἐννοίας).

Ἡ κοινή καί φυσική ἔννοια is a Stoic term, as Schoedel points out, but one which the Middle Platonist Alcinous also employs when he speaks of induction being particularly useful for activating *natural concepts* (5.7.158.3) or the logical sequence which links secondary with primary principles (ἡ τῆς πρὸς τὰ πρῶτα τῶν δευτέρων ἀκολουθίας). Athenagoras then confirms that either it is a matter of primary doctrines (περὶ τῶν πρώτων ἐστὶ δογμάτων), when only a reminder (μόνης ὑπομνήσεως) is needed to stir up the ‘natural concept’, or it is one ‘of the natural consequences (κατὰ φύσιν) derived from these primary doctrines and of the natural, logical consequence and all that is needed is to take the points up in order’ (14.2).

Athenagoras then declares that those putting together the arguments for the resurrection of the body must put in the first rank the reason for the creation of man and then link it with an examination of the nature of this creature; yet this is not because the first has priority but rather because both cannot be examined at the same time (14.4). They are indeed both intimately linked one with the other. Once these arguments are established – primary arguments grounded in the creation – then can come that on providence (14.5). Athenagoras makes clear here that despite the efforts of some to put the argument from providence at the head of the debate, ‘the resurrection does not take place primarily because of the judgement but because of the will of the Creator and the nature of those created’ (14.6). Athenagoras concludes this section with the observation that while a consideration of the matter of the creation of man is sufficient to demonstrate the logic of the resurrection, it is equally right to follow the argument arising from a consideration of the nature of men given that the latter will provide equal confirmation of the matter.

From 15.2–7, then, he addresses the essential nature of man as one of a psychophysical unity. Athenagoras then deals from 16.1 to 17.4 with the matter of how one might understand the notion of ‘permanence (διαμονή)’. It is worth noting here that from chapter 12 to chapter 17, the allusion to *Genesis* 1.26 at 12.6 is the sole discernible nod to scripture, a matter of some interest when the writer is putting forth his primary arguments for his thesis. From chapters 18 to 23 Athenagoras puts forward a supporting argument for the resurrection of the body drawn from the idea of divine providence and the demands of judgement enacted justly. Athenagoras then moves from chapter 24 to the matter of ‘the argument from the final cause (τὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ τέλους. . . λόγον)’ (24.1). He then concludes the treatise by reminding his readers that a consideration of the end of man must be of that creature composed of two parts. And if this end can be explored or discovered in this present life or in that stage of existence where the soul is separated from the body, then it must be seen ‘in some other state of the same composite creature’ (25.2), that is, at the resurrection. And for the sake of continuity it must, he says, be the union of the same souls with the same bodies (25.3). And this can happen only by the resurrection of a body reunited with its own soul.

Athenagoras is clearly a philosopher-theologian but a Christian one. He alludes to the Christian scriptures but does so for the most part only indirectly, without explicit acknowledgement, and without any sense that these scriptures are the starting point or even the primary basis for his argument for the resurrection of the

body. We turn now to Tertullian, whom, we shall see, approaches the matter from a whole other direction, on a whole other basis.

Tertullian writes from the very start of his own treatise on the resurrection, and explicitly so, as a Christian theologian seeking guidance from scripture. In the first four chapters – much like an *exordium* – he writes of the centrality of the teaching on the resurrection as central and fundamental to Christian belief, of what he calls heretical ‘half beliefs’, of the opinions of philosophers, and of the prejudices of the non-Christian public. He begins with the declaration that the resurrection of the dead ‘is the confidence [or pledge] of Christians (*fiducia Christianorum*)’ (1.1). We are, he says, that which we believe (*illam credentes hoc sumus*). To believe is what the truth compels; it was the truth which God reveals (*ibid.*). He declares that the ‘crowd (*vulgus*)’ mocks, claiming that nothing exists beyond death, even though they offer sacrifices for the dead, ‘cremating’, he says, ‘to the cremated’ (1.3)! Even the philosophers sometimes join themselves to the crowd. He claims that Epicurus teaches that there is nothing after death, Seneca the Stoic – elsewhere ‘*Seneca saepe noster* (Seneca often ours)’ (*De Anima* 20.1) – that after death comes the end of all things, even death, while Pythagoras, Empedocles and the Platonists declare that the soul is immortal and will return in time to a body, though not the original one and not necessarily one human (1.4–5). Yet, he says, at least the latter accept that the soul has a ‘corporeal recurrence (*in corpora remeabilem*)’ (1.5) and alteration is better than denial. They at least, he declares, knock at truth’s door even if they do not enter the house. Thus even in error the world is not ignorant of the [notion of the] resurrection of the dead (1.6).

In chapter 2 he launches into a critique of the Gnostics, whom he describes as more like the Epicureans than the Prophets. He then alludes to *Matthew* 22.23–33 [*Luke* 20. 27–40], Christ’s challenge to the Sadducees when they put before him the matter of a woman widowed six times and marrying another brother each time and the question of to whom she might be married at the resurrection. Thus Christ, he says, proves the resurrection of the dead not only by himself [as Teacher] but also in himself [as the Risen One] (2.1). We are clearly in different territory than that occupied by Athenagoras by whom both scripture is at best only occasionally alluded to but never explicitly acknowledged and certainly not produced as evidence; and Christ, either as teacher or the resurrected one, is never mentioned either directly or indirectly. Tertullian then continues his attack on the Gnostics, the ‘other Sadducees’, who maintain a ‘half resurrection’, that of the soul, spurning both the flesh and the incarnation (2.2). Indeed, these people uphold a second deity, he says, separating their Christ from the Creator. He differentiates Marcion and Basilides – who deny any flesh to Christ – and the followers of Valentinus and Apelles – who give it its own peculiar quality (2.3). He reminds his readers that he has already written the *On the Flesh of Christ* in which he refutes this denial of Christ’s flesh and thus of the salvation of the flesh (2.5). He argues here that in disputation with the heretics, agreement must first be reached on the nature of God and that this will follow when ‘due order (*ordo*) demands that deduction should always be made from first principles (*a principalibus deduci*)’ (2.7). The heretics always begin with the resurrection of the flesh before the nature [or

number] of God ‘because it is harder to believe the resurrection of the flesh than the unity of the deity’ (2.8). For Tertullian the first principle is the very nature of God. Yet because, he says, the heretics start with the resurrection of the flesh – which they find easy to demolish without reference to the nature of God – they more easily dismiss this and then, in its turn, the divine nature as one. And thus he has written against Marcion concerning the one only God and his Christ and against four heresies concerning the Lord’s flesh (*de Carne Christi*). And he has done so to prepare the way for this present discussion on the resurrection of the flesh (2.11). Tertullian also affirms that the soul is, ‘in a primary sense (*impri-mis*)’, immortal while admitting the defection or failing alone of the flesh (2.13). Thus Tertullian places his discussion of the resurrection of the flesh very firmly within the context of received Christian teaching, and therefore its setting is very different from that of Athenagoras.

At the beginning of chapter 3 of the treatise, Tertullian admits that it is possible to be wise in the things of God on the basis of ‘common perceptions (*de communibus sensibus*)’ – and he gives examples of such things as the immortality of the soul and the existence of ‘our God’ – that can be known by nature (*naturaliter nota*), but only for proof of the truth not of falsehood, to establish what accords with the divine ordinance (*dispositionem*) but not what is opposed to it (3.1). Now, two things are noteworthy here. The first is that notwithstanding Evan’s translation of *de communibus sensibus* as *popular ideas*,¹⁹ I believe that this is Tertullian’s term for the Stoic/Middle Platonist *φυσική ἔννοια* or *common* or *natural conceptions*. The second is that while Athenagoras seems to provide some unacknowledged scriptural support [though little even of that] for what he has sought first to establish from such common or natural conceptions, Tertullian establishes first the argument first from divine sources and then lends the support of the commonplace ones. At 3.5 Tertullian declares that ‘someone cannot be a Christian who denies [that resurrection] which Christians confess (*non erit Christianus qui eam negabit quam confitentur Christiani*)’ and employs non-Christian arguments to do so. For Tertullian, if one takes away the notions which are shared with the gentiles (*ethnici*) and relies solely on the scriptures, the heretic who denies the resurrection will have nowhere to turn (3.6). The *communes sensus* derive their support, he says, from their simplicity and by the fact that they seem to agree with and be familiar with general impressions – that is, they seem in the open and obvious and commonly recognised. The divine reason, however, he says, is in the marrow, not on the surface, and frequently seems to stand over against what appears as obvious (3.6). In chapter 4 Tertullian shows how the heretics, following the arguments of the gentiles, build on a popular revulsion felt towards the flesh and its imperfections to construct their case against the idea that the flesh might be resurrected. The greatest hope for the resurrected person, the heretic suggests, is to escape a second time from the flesh (4.6).

From chapters 5 to 17 Tertullian lays out for his readers the general principles which will guide his reading of the relevant passages of scripture, the dignity of the flesh and its worthiness for resurrection (5–10), the power and the competence

of God to affect that resurrection (11–13) and the requirements of divine providence which bring about its necessity (14–17).

We are reminded here that the basis, for Tertullian, of the Christian belief in the resurrection of the flesh is in the revelation of God through the scriptures. For the teaching lives or dies, as it were, in the proper reading and interpretation of scripture. From chapter 5 through to chapter 10, he quotes or cites from, or alludes to, the early chapters of *Genesis* (5, 6, 7, 10), from *Philippians* (6), *2 Corinthians* (7 and 9), *Colossians* (7), from *Matthew* (9), *Luke* (9), *Ezekiel* (9), *Isaiah* (10), *Joel* (10), *Romans* (10), *Galatians* (10) and *1 Corinthians* (10). And these uses of scripture are not intended merely to support a position already determined from other sources but are the primary source and mainstay of his argument. In this he could not be more different from his co-religionist, Athenagoras. From chapters 11 to 13, he then moves the argument to the matter of the power and competence of God to resurrect the flesh of man. Again, to demonstrate the power of God to bring back to life, Tertullian does not employ written scripture – except for the misquote from *Psalms* 92 about the mythical phoenix and the reference at *Matthew* 10.31 to man being of more value to God than the sparrow – but he does use the record of nature – the natural scripture perhaps? – where the power of God to restore is everywhere. In chapter 12 Tertullian offers some analogies from nature to demonstrate that resurrection is, as it were, part of the natural order. These he calls ‘examples of the divine power’ (12.1). They are, in a sense, the ‘records’ of divine power which reveal as much such a power as do the written records of scripture; this is scripture written in nature. Day, he reminds us, dies into night (*dies moratur in noctem*); it is obscured in the shadow of death and revives again (12.1f.). Winters and summers return, trees are clothes which once were stripped (12.4). This, Tertullian says, is ‘a marvellous exchange (*mira ratio*)’ for by taking away God gives back (12.5). ‘The whole creation is recurrent (*universa conditio recidiva est*)’ (12.6). ‘Nothing exists for the first time. . . . Nothing perishes but with a view to salvation (*nihil non iterum est. . . . nihil deperit nisi in salutem*)’ (12.6). ‘The whole, therefore, of this revolving order of things bears witness to the resurrection of the dead’ (12.7). And God first sent nature to us as a teacher (*prae-misit tibi naturam magistratam*) [a natural scripture?], meaning to send prophecy also as a supplemental instructor (12.8).

He begins chapter 5, providing a connection between the first four chapters and those which follow, with an attack on the primary reliance of the unlearned (*rudes*) on the *communes sensus* and the disquieting of the doubters and ordinary folk (*dubii et simplices*)²⁰ through the same, and announces his intention to counter his opponents’ disparagement and vilification of the flesh with an encomium (*laudatione*) (5.1). In chapter 6 Tertullian continues his endeavour, while recognising its rather humble origins, to vindicate the dignity of the flesh. This ‘poor paltry material, clay, found its way into the hands of God’ (6.1). In chapter 7 Tertullian continues to support the original dignity of the flesh and thereby its worthiness to be raised after death and dissolution. In chapter 10 he counters those scriptures in which the flesh is seemingly disparaged with texts in which it is ‘ennobled (*inlustratur*)’, offering such as elevate against those which abase

(10.1). For example, he offers *Isaiah* 40.5 – ‘all flesh shall see the salvation of God’ – against *Isaiah* 40.7 – ‘all flesh is grass’ (10.2). He concludes this passage by declaring,

If therefore the humiliations of the flesh thrust off its resurrection, why shall not its high prerogatives rather avail to bring it about? – since it better suits the character of God to restore to salvation what for a while he rejected, than to surrender to perdition what he once approved.

(10.5)

In chapter 12 Tertullian offers some analogies from nature to demonstrate that resurrection is, as it were, part of the natural order. These he calls ‘examples of the divine power’ (12.1). Tertullian continues the analogies from nature in chapter 13 with the example of the phoenix, a well-used image for Christian apologists. Even if, he says, all nature only faintly figures our resurrection and if creation affords no precise sign like it (for much natural phenomena rather ends than dies), yet there is ‘an unassailable symbol of our hope’, the phoenix (13.1).²¹ What could more express and be more significant for our subject, he argues (13.3)? For this demonstrates that a ‘bodily substance may be recovered from the fire’ (ibid.) and suggests the unreasonableness of any suggestion that human being might die once for all while birds in Arabia are assured of resurrection (13.4). From chapters 14 to 17 Tertullian now shows why the requirements of divine justice (providence) necessitate the resurrection of the flesh.

Having demonstrated how God speaks to the question of resurrection by both the parables of nature – that is, examples drawn from nature which reflect the divine power to re-create – and his spoken word, he looks now to God’s decrees and edicts in chapter 14. In the 15th chapter, Tertullian builds further on this theme. If our opponents are correct, he says, in severing the connection of the flesh with the soul in this present life, then the former ‘ought not to have any share in the sentence [and thus in the resurrection which enables the carrying out of that sentence], if it had none in the cause of it’ (15.2). Thus Tertullian concludes this section on the necessary place of providence and judgement in the resurrection of the flesh by asserting that

this in fact will be the reason for the judgement being appointed for the last end, that by the presentation of the flesh [by resurrection] it may be possible [which otherwise it would not be so] for the whole divine censure to be made complete.

(17.9)

Otherwise such censure would not be reserved until the end if it were reserved for the soul alone (ibid.).

From chapters 18 to 39, Tertullian deals with those passages from scripture which he believes unquestionably witness to the resurrection of the flesh, while from chapters 40 to 56, he does so with those which are often used by his

opponents to bring this positive affirmation into question through what he regards as perverse misunderstanding or misinterpretation. Given that we will, in later chapters, deal with many of these passages in great detail as we explore matters of the context, process and nature of post-death existence in Tertullian, it may be appropriate in this largely introductory chapter to move through them in rather less detail.

In chapter 20 Tertullian addresses the claims of his opponents that the prophets speak always figuratively (*per imagines contionatos*) (20.1) and that therefore, by implication, pronouncements on the resurrection of the dead must be so understood. While he acknowledges that some things in the scriptures are said figuratively, there are also any number of literal references. And furthermore, figurative language itself can have no particular reference point if it is not based on actual happenings. Indeed, much of the language – and he gives copious examples from the scriptures – of the prophets and the Psalmists can only be understood purely and simply, free from all allegorical ‘obscurity (*ab omni allegoriae nubilo*)’ (20.7). Allegory is not, he concludes, employed at all points in the scripture though it is employed.

In chapter 22 Tertullian deals with the claim of some opponents [*animales* (he will not call them *spiritalis*) – are these Valentinians, one might ask – that either the resurrection has already taken place for those who have come to a knowledge of the truth or will take place immediately upon death. But the timing of the resurrection (*our hope*, he says) has been laid down in scripture, he affirms; it will not take place before Christ’s [second] coming, and it is not permitted to Christians to believe otherwise. Tertullian declares that he would employ the words of the prophets if it were not the case that our Lord himself had pronounced on this matter. He then provides a lengthy commentary on *Luke* 21 and declares that the conditions which our Lord has declared must be fulfilled before the End – and the subsequent resurrection – have not yet come to pass (22.3f.).

Over the next seventeen chapters (23–39), Tertullian provides the witness of scripture to the reality of a resurrection from the dead. From chapters 40 to 56, Tertullian addresses what he perceives as misunderstandings seemingly drawn by his opponents from scripture and seeks to correct these. From chapters 48 to 50, by way of example, he deals at some considerable length with what he regards clearly as both a key chapter – *1 Corinthians* 15 – and a key verse within that chapter – verse 50, ‘flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God’ – in his argument for the resurrection of the flesh. In chapters 57 to 62 Tertullian offers responses to a further set of objections to the doctrine of resurrection and chapter 63 – the last – offers a *peroratio* of sorts.

Athenagoras and Tertullian

While both Athenagoras and Tertullian – possible contemporaries (see the matter of the authorship of the former earlier) although writing in different parts of the world and in different languages – both vigorously defend the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body, they do so from very different directions. The

defence of the doctrine by Athenagoras, which is situated within a conversation with fellow philosophers, hardly identifies as specifically Christian although it is theist and employs scripture sparingly but only to support an already established position. There is no systematic treatment or exegesis of scripture in the work. His argument is logical and grounded in a number of premises. Tertullian's defence, on the other hand, is part of a conversation, within a faith context, with fellow believers – even if some of these are simplistic and literalist – and heretics. Tertullian's argument is almost certainly more nuanced than that of Athenagoras and more exploratory of the intricacies of the Pauline argument in particular.

There is much controversy about the actual teaching of *Origen of Alexandria* on the resurrection. Crouzel, in his magisterial work on the Alexandrian theologian, remarks that

along with the pre-existence of souls the point in Origen's synthesis that has been subjected to the strongest attacks is his eschatological doctrine: as nearly always with these attacks have been unfair, especially where they are about the resurrection and the famous "apocatastasis", that is the final restoration.²²

We are reliant, for the most part, on four passages in Origen's extant works for his explicit teaching on the resurrection of the body. One is from *De Principiis* 2.10, and the others are from *Contra Celsum*, 5.17–19, 7.32 and 8.49–50. We will deal here with only a brief overview of these and then later in more detail as we address particular themes related to the various presentations of post-death existence. The *De Principiis* passage, for its part, is set by Origen within the context of the requirements of divine justice. This, he says, is done in order to name what it is that comes either to punishment (*supplicium*) or to rest and blessedness (*requiem ac beatitudinem*) (2.10.1.). It is here that he refers explicitly to his own lost writing on the resurrection. At *Contra Celsum* 4.57 Origen declares that Christians, as 'we believe in the resurrection of the dead, we affirm that changes occur in the qualities of bodies' – from corruption to incorruption, from dishonour to glory, from weakness to power, from natural to spiritual – as Paul in *I Corinthians* 15.40–44 declares. At 5.17 Origen declares that what the apostle says at *I Corinthians* 15.51–52 is said 'with a certain secret wisdom (μετά τίνος ἀπορρήτου σοφίας)'. At 5.19 he also speaks of the 'secret truths' and that there is something 'secret and mysterious' about the apostle's teaching here. At 5.18 he declares, against Celsus, that neither the scriptures nor the church (lit. 'we') 'maintain that those long dead will rise up from the earth and live in the same bodies without undergoing change (μεταβολήν) for the better'. At 7.32 he acknowledges that the doctrine of the resurrection is deep and hard to explain and requires a person of great wisdom to show that it is a thing worthy of God and the doctrine itself a noble idea. And then at 8.49, again in reply to Celsus' unfounded accusations against the Christian view of resurrection, Origen repeats that he has offered a reasonable view of the matter, that Celsus misrepresents the Christian view when he claims that Christians believe that there is nothing better or more precious than the material body.

Origen, Athenagoras and Tertullian

Given that we have Origen's only known systematic treatment of the matter of post-death existence, his *De Resurrectione*, merely in scraps here and there in the writings of others – and that what we do have in his extant writings on the subject is written in the context of him primarily addressing other topics – it is not easy to compare Origen's overall approach with that of either Athenagoras or Tertullian whose treatments we do have. The thought of both Origen and Tertullian on the topic – unlike that of Athenagoras – is very much scripture-based, particularly on the 15th chapter of the apostle's first letter to the church at Corinth, and is concerned, in not insignificant part on the part of both, to address the rather simplistic position of many ordinary Christians – the 'simple folk' – as well as those seen by both men as heretics, with Origen's treatment the more nuanced of the two. The only real connection between Origen and Athenagoras on this subject is that while the latter's reflections are set within a conversation with contemporary philosophical thought, some of the former's attention is devoted to dealing with the criticisms of alleged Christian positions on the topic from the pagan thinkers like Celsus. Origen's work on the subject is thereby, of course, much more adversarial in tone than that of the Athenian.

The *Letter to Rheginos*, by an unknown author, forms part of the so-called 'library' of Coptic translations of originally Greek language texts, identified with the Gnostic movement of the early years/centuries of the Common Era, discovered near the cemetery of Hamra-Doum close to the modern village of Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt in 1945 or 1946. My work here on the text is mainly based on the celebrated translation of this treatise by Malcolm Peel in 1963 (though revised as a separate monograph in 1969²³) as part of Robinson's collection of Nag Hammadi translations²⁴ and based itself on the critical edition of the work produced in the same year.²⁵ Van Unnik declares that our author's reference to Rheginos as 'my son' indicates that this is a case of 'a teacher . . . writing to his disciple'.²⁶ Ménard says that it is 'une lettre qu'un maître adresse à son disciple' but asks who the Gnostic is, the disciple or the master/teacher?²⁷

Peel argues, in a lengthy and convincing section of his commentary and exposition, that the author is a late second-century Valentinian-Christian author who has left much of his original Valentinianism behind him and indeed assimilated much orthodox thinking, a 're-Christianization of his Valentinianism'.²⁸ Peel says later that the treatise is 'couched in a Valentinian conceptual framework, echoing NT language (especially Paul), and reflecting the impact of Middle Platonic ideas'.²⁹ 'Our author', he says, 'is a Christian Gnostic teacher influenced by Middle Platonist thought as mediated through Valentinian Gnosticism'.³⁰ It does, however, Peel maintains, reflect 'a form of Valentinian thought that at some points is at variance with the forms reported upon by Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Epiphanius'.³¹ Peel also suggests, along with most commentators on the treatise, that 'the balance of probability' – based on the 'author's developed sense of NT canon', its 'teaching within the framework of controversies over the resurrection which occupied the Great Church in the second century', and

‘affinities between [the treatise] and the Middle Platonism of the late second century’ – ‘thus indicates the late second century’ as the probable date.³²

At the beginning of the work, the author offers his own epistemological framework, as have both Athenagoras and Tertullian in their respective treatises on the resurrection. Because Rheginos, unlike those who think highly of themselves in being able to find the truth for themselves, has asked ‘pleasantly’, ‘politely’ [lit. ‘sweetly’] about the status of the resurrection for the faith, our author declares that it is ‘necessary (ἀναγκαῖον)’ (44, 3–7), that is, that it is indispensable to the faith, something that he shares with all the contemporary Fathers who have written on the theme. Many persons, he says, have no faith (ἄπιστος) in it, but there are a [very] few who actually do find what they seek (44, 8–10). He then begins his exploration (λόγος) of the matter. And in this endeavour, he shapes his approach through a series of questions which he posits for answer, questions which perhaps Rheginos himself had put to him in an original letter of inquiry which we do not possess.

The first is ‘How did the Lord make use of things while existing in flesh (σάρξ) and after he had revealed himself as Son of God?’ (44.13–17). This makes clear – and it is confirmed elsewhere in the letter – that our author takes seriously the reality of Christ’s ‘sojourn’ in the flesh and demonstrates that the Gnostics may not have been uniformly docetic in their Christology. From 44.21 he employs a chiasmus – a b/b a – to describe Christ as both Son of God and Son of Man. He possessed, said our author, both humanity (ἀνθρωπότης) and divinity (θείότης or θεότης), through the latter, as Son of God, that he might conquer death and on the other hand through the former, as Son of Man, that he might see through the restoration (ἀποκατάστασις) to the Pleroma; this latter might occur because he originally was ‘from above’, a seed (σπέρμα) of Truth before this structure had come into being (44.24–36). And in this structure many dominions and deities came into existence (44.37–38).

At 44.39–45.4 our author acknowledges that he is explaining the matter of the resurrection and its relation to the person and work of Christ, the ‘solution’, in difficult terms but assures Rheginos that there is nothing [ultimately] difficult in the λόγος of Truth. But since, he continues, the ‘solution’ has appeared so as not to leave anything hidden, but rather to reveal everything openly (ἀπλῶς) concerning existence – the destruction of evil on the one hand, the revelation of the Elect, on the other – this [process of salvation] is the emanation (προβολή) of Truth and Spirit (deities of the All). The Saviour, our author goes on, has ‘swallowed up death’. And this, he says in an aside, Rheginos should already know (45.15). The Saviour, our author now says, put aside the κόσμος which is perishing (45.16f.) and transformed himself into an imperishable Aeon (45.17f.) and raised himself (or arose), having swallowed the visible by the invisible (45.19–21), and gave us the way of immortality (45.22–23). He then moves to an appeal to scripture with a composite citation of Romans 8.17 and Ephesians 2.5–6 – and speaks of ‘the Apostle’ (45.24f.):

We suffered with him, and we arose with him, and we went to heaven with him.
(45.25–28)

Then our author says:

So if we are revealed in this world wearing him, we are that one's beams, and are we are enclosed by him until our setting, that is to say, our death in this life. We are drawn to heaven by him like beams by the sun, not being restrained by anything. This is the spiritual (*πνευματική*) resurrection which swallows up the psychic (*ψυχική*) alike (*ὁμοίως*) with the fleshly (*σαρκική*).
(45.28–46.2)

Next, at 46.3–7, our author makes clear that the unbeliever cannot be persuaded [of the truth of the resurrection]. The simple claim is that 'he who is dead will arise' (46.8). There is one, says our author, among the philosophers who are in this world, who believes [in the resurrection] (46.8–9). He will at least arise [because he believes]. No-one raises themselves [or returns themselves to the Pleroma] (46.10–13). 'For we have known', says our author, 'the Son of Man and we have believed that he arose from among the dead' (46.14–17). This is the one spoken of, says our author, as the one 'became the destruction of death', as he is the great one who is believed in (46.17–20). The believers are to be found among the immortals, our author assures the apparently anxious, uncertain Rheginos (46.20f.).

'The mind (*νοῦς*) of those who have known [the Saviour] shall not perish' (46.23f.). Therefore, the believers

'are elected to salvation and redemption, since we are predestined from the beginning not to fall in to the foolishness of those without knowledge, but rather we shall enter into the wisdom of those who have known the Truth' (46.25–32). 'Indeed', says our author, 'the Truth [of the resurrection] kept by believers cannot be abandoned and has not been'.

(46.32–34)

He then quotes what appears to have been a Valentinian hymn:

Strong is the system of the Pleroma; small is that which broke loose and became the [physical] world. But the All [sc. members of the Elect within the Pleroma] is what is encompassed. Before [the world] came into being, [the Pleroma] existed.

(46.35–47.1)

On the basis of the forgoing our author then exhorts Rheginos to never doubt the resurrection (47.2f.). For if, he says, you did not [in your previous existence] exist in flesh, then you received flesh (*σάρξ*) when you entered this *κόσμος* (47.4–6). He then asks Rheginos why he thinks that he will not receive [a form of] flesh when he ascends into the Aeon (47.6–8).

What is better than flesh is the cause (*αἴτιος*) of life, he asks? He then asks Rheginos what it is that he thinks that he lacks in this world, for this is what

he [Rheginos] has been endeavouring to learn (47.14f.). He then makes clear to Rheginos that he, as living this present existence in a fleshly state, must go through the decay of old age and corruption leading to death; for this is, he says, the after-birth (*χόριον*) of the body (47.17–19). Rheginos is now assured by his teacher that he will not lose [lit. give up] the better or more authentic part of himself when he dies for the worse part [sc. his flesh] can only diminish (47.21–24). ‘Nothing, therefore’, he says, ‘redeems us from this world’ (47.24–26); that is, Rheginos must still, like all fellow believers, experience death in this life. But that which is of their essence – the All – will be preserved [saved] (47.26f.). Rheginos must continually think and reflect on this; he must understand things on this basis alone (47.29f.).

Our author then names the next question – the second problem – supposedly raised by Rheginos: whether the saved person, the elect, once he has left his body behind, will be saved immediately (47.30–36)? The answer is immediate and unconditional: let there be doubt as to this point (47.36f.). The visible members (*μέλος*) which are dead will not be saved while only the living members which exist within will arise (47.38–48.3). Then comes the third question or problem: what is the resurrection (48.3–4)? It is, says our author, the ‘disclosure of those who have arisen’ (48.4–6). He then reminds Rheginos of the story of the Transfiguration [Mark 9.2–8], though his focus is primarily on the appearances of Elijah and Moses as proof that the resurrection is no illusion (*φαντασία*) (48.6–11). It is no illusion but the truth (48.12f.). It would be more appropriate to name the [physical] world, the *κόσμος*, as an illusion, he writes, rather than the resurrection which came into being through our Lord the Saviour, Jesus Christ (48.13–19). Those living at the present time will die (48.21f.). How is it that they live in an illusion (48.22f.)? The rich become poor [in this realm], kings are overthrown and everything changes (48.24–27). The [present] world, then, is the illusion (48.27f.). Our author apologises if he has gone over the top somewhat [lit. railed exceedingly] but he could not but make clear that it is not the resurrection which is illusory [as some suggest] (48.28–32). It is the Truth which stands firm [and not this present world] (48.32f.). The resurrection, to return to the original question, is the revelation of authentic existence, the transformation of things and a transition (*μεταβολή*) into newness (48.34–38). For in the resurrection, he continues, imperishability descends upon the perishable (48.38–49.2), the light flows down upon the darkness, swallowing it up (49.2–4) and the Pleroma fills up the deficiency [that which this present realm lacks] (49.4f.). These, he says, are the ‘symbols’ (*σύμβολον*) and the ‘images’ of the resurrection (49.6f.). He [the Saviour] it is who makes the good (49.8f.).

Rheginos is then encouraged to not think in part (*μερικῶς*) nor to live conformably with this flesh for the sake of unanimity [with those with whom he shares this realm] (49.9–13) but to flee from the divisions [of this world] and its fetters (49.13–15). Having done this Rheginos will already have the resurrection (49.15f.). Why not then, he advises Rheginos, live as if arisen already (49.16–24)?

Our author then moves towards his final exhortation to Rheginos. He questions why one might have their resurrection but continue as if their impending death [which must be] defined their existence (49.25–28) and not ‘practise’ as one who should know that their life and the definition of their true existence lies beyond that death (49.28–30). It is proper, he says, to practise (ἄσκειν) in a number of ways – living an ascetic life, for example – and so free themselves from this ‘element (στοιχεῖον)’ [flesh] (49.30–33), in order that he may not be misled but receive again ‘what at first was’ [that is, his pre-existent state] (49.34–36). All this, he now claims, he has received from the Lord Jesus Christ (49.37–50.1). He now claims, demonstrating quite clearly his prior relationship as teacher with Rheginos and his fellows, that he taught them everything on the resurrection and has not [consciously] omitted anything suitable for their edification (50.1–4). If he has left anything out or left obscure, he is willing to interpret it for them on request (50.5–8). He also encourages Rheginos that he might learn from some among his fellows and to not be jealous if they can help him (50.8–11). Others from his circle may benefit from this letter, he suggests (50.11–13). To the whole circle he offers ‘peace’ and ‘grace’ (50.13f.). He greets Rheginos and those who love him [Rheginos] in fraternal love (50.15f.). The letter finishes with the ascription: “The λόγος concerning the ἀνάστασις.” I will offer particular comparisons of the thought of the author of the *Letter* with our three Church Fathers later in this work. In this study, I will also seek to look at the thought of the three Fathers and of the author of the *Letter to Rheginos*, where appropriate, against contemporary readings of the primary passages of scripture employed by them on the topic – particularly by Tertullian, Origen and the author of the *Letter*, of course – and compare, where we can, the thought of all four thinkers with modern, contemporary thought on the matter of post-death existence.

The scriptures

Given that this study is not about the particular resurrection of Christ but about notions of post-death existence of human beings generally, I explore the four canonical Gospels only inasmuch as they provide evidence of the promise of such existence, with the promise of Christ to the penitent thief on the cross (*Luke* 23.43) and the mention of the μὲναι in the afterworld (*John* 14.2) as classic examples of this. Apart from these Gospels, I will look also at passages from the Pauline corpus, at *Philippians* 1.23 and 3.20–21, *1 Thessalonians* 4.13–5.1 and *Romans* 6.10, but, of course, with most attention to the definitive Pauline passages from *1 Corinthians* 15 and *2 Corinthians* 4.7–5.10.

I will also consider the work a number of theologians and biblical scholars who have dealt with this matter of post-death existence and related topics: Tom Wright (various publications), Vernon White (*Life Beyond Death*), Miroslav Volf (*The End of Memory*), Kevin Corcoran (*Soul, Body and Survival*), Ellen Clark-King (*Theology by Heart*), John Polkinghorne (*The God of Hope and the End of the World*), Paul Badham (*Christian Beliefs about Life after Death*), John W.

Cooper (*Body, Soul and Life Everlasting*) and many others (see bibliography at the end of this chapter).

Sections within this study

In this study, I will look at the matter of (1) the number of stages which are spoken of in post-death existence (chapter 2), (2) the question of spatial and temporal continuity between this life, this existence and others beyond this existence and that of any so-called ‘gap’ and the implications of this, and the nature and form of post-death existence with respect to both (chapter 3), and (3) the matter of post-death embodiment (chapters 4–6).

Notes

- 1 Moltmann (2000: 238).
- 2 We need, of course, to recognise that any notion of ‘later’, any concept of time as we know it, when we speak of existence beyond this earthly, temporal life, is problematic.
- 3 Heimgartner (2001).
- 4 Whealey (1996) and idem (2006).
- 5 See Mark Edwards (1995b) where he speculatively recognises a possible fourth-century dating for this work but also acknowledges the widespread acceptance of second- or early third-century dating.
- 6 Rankin (2009).
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Pouderon (1989).
- 9 Barnard (1972b).
- 10 Zeegers vander Vorst (1992).
- 11 Grant (1954).
- 12 Rankin (2009): 10f.
- 13 Ibid., 23. For a detailed treatment of the arguments at that time I refer readers to pp. 17–23 of that book.
- 14 Still forthcoming.
- 15 Kiel (2016).
- 16 Cicero, *Academica* 1.41–2.
- 17 Dillon (1996), 339.
- 18 Schoedel (1972), 101.
- 19 Evans (1960), 11.
- 20 The *simplices* are, for Tertullian, consistently the ordinary Christians.
- 21 The fact that *Psalm* 92.12 actually uses the word for a palm tree here must be noted but Tertullian’s point is made, even if it is done with myth.
- 22 Crouzel (1989) 235.
- 23 Peel (1969).
- 24 Robinson (1998).
- 25 Malinine et al. (1963).
- 26 Van Unnik (1964) 144.
- 27 Ménard (1985) 167.
- 28 Peel (1969) 180.
- 29 Peel (1985) 130.
- 30 Ibid., 131f.
- 31 Ibid., 135.
- 32 Ibid., 146.

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Part 1

Moving from death to resurrection

Stages and continuity?

2 Do we pass through stages?

One of the many issues related to the question of post-death existence and one which has exercised the minds of many people – and it is a very particular issue for Christian belief – has been that of whether there is only one life beyond physical death – or one stage of life or existence rather – or whether there are more than one, such as an interim or transitional one and then a final one. It is also a theme to be found in a number of cinematic representations of the post-death experience. Is it like the poet Shelley suggests in his memorial poem for fellow poet Keats:

Peace, peace! He is not dead, he doth not sleep –
He hath awakened from the dream of life –¹

or something such as Michael Forster proposes in his hymn *Going home, moving on*² with their ideas of an immediate movement or translation post-death to a final destination? Tom Wright suggests that there are at least three main popular beliefs about death, none of which he endorses: *completion annihilation* [which he represents with Dylan Thomas' 'Do not go gentle into that good night']; some form of *reincarnation* [see Will Self's *How the Dead Live* for a modern Western representation of this view³]; and some form of *natural immortality* [e.g., *Do not stand at my grave and weep; I am not there.*]. Wright is himself clear, however, on his reading of the scriptures, that even many Christians have failed to 'distinguish between the blessed but temporary state upon which God's people enter at death and the final resurrection for which the whole creation is still longing'⁴ and condemns 'the increasingly prevalent view of a single-stage post-mortem destination' for this.⁵ He also declares that the popular view of a 'heaven' [as separated from this earth] as the final destination for the departed is not supported by scripture which actually rarely, if ever, speaks of a dead person 'going to heaven'.⁶

CS Lewis, in his fantasy novel *The Great Divorce*, offers some interesting reflections on the nature of post-death existence.⁷ In the story the narrator tells of a dream [we don't know that it is only a dream until the very end of the book and that he is himself not yet dead but only near so] in which he is transported – by bus! – from a grey and dismal place – which is apparently hell, a place located 'down a crack in the floor of heaven' – to take a look, in the company of some others, at another place which is identified as heaven, although the action actually

takes place on what are the outskirts of that latter place. The idea of the story is that the dead currently residing in hell – which is not a place of torment particularly but simply a rather grey, drab version of the world of the living – are given the opportunity – which few of them actually take – of relocating to heaven. The tone of the story – like much of what Lewis wrote – is biblical, evangelical Christianity. A mentor, whom our narrator meets there and who introduces him to the notion of heaven, in answer to a question of whether heaven and hell are just states of mind, answers rather robustly that this may be the case with respect to hell but not so with heaven. ‘Heaven’, he says, ‘is not a state of mind. Heaven is reality itself. All that is fully real is Heaven’.⁸ And when our narrator asks whether in fact people can make a ‘real choice after death’, he is told that this is the case but that many, indeed probably most, opt for some semblance of power in hell rather than of service in heaven. These, he says, are the ‘lost souls’. The mentor declares that ‘there are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “*Thy* will be done”, and those to whom God says, in the end, “*Thy* will be done”. All that are in Hell’, he declares,

choose it. Without that self-choice, there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.⁹

And the point here, with respect to the question of an intermediate state or not, is that in the representation of post-death existence on display in Lewis’ rather engaging story there is no automatic two-stage existence: life and death and then either heaven or hell, the latter depending on character or behaviour in the world of the living. In this scenario it can be a one-stop shop, and for those who choose it, the ‘grey town’, the ‘shadow of death’, hell, remains that for those who remain there by choice, hell. But for those who exist for a time in the ‘grey town’ but then choose freely to relocate to heaven, hell is and was never hell for them but rather a ‘Purgatory’¹⁰ where they remained only until the time of relocating. For some, by choice, the greyness of their chosen hell becomes their eternal location, but for the others, again by choice, this grey place is and was only ever a way stop on the way to the eternal rest and blessedness of heaven.

What I am seeking to do in this chapter is to explore how the four authors under consideration here address the matter of the stages of the after-life – the possible phases of post-death existence – and how, in part, their representations of these might both compare with and/or be influenced by the scriptural witness. The exploration or outlining of the latter, therefore, is not intended as a full study in and of itself of the topic as found there but simply an exemplifying of this so that we might see how the patristic representation might relate to and possibly be influenced by it.

Biblical representations of the stages of a post-death existence

There is little doubt, in my view, that the Judaeo-Christian scriptures tend towards the suggestion of an existence immediately post-death which is not yet the final

destination for the faithful, which is that of resurrection. How such an interim, transitional, in-between existence might be understood in the scriptures is not, however, quite so clear. As part of this exploration of the question of whether or not scripture points clearly to an intermediate state, or stage between death and the general resurrection, we will look at a number of passages from the New Testament. While there are any number of passages in the New Testament which consider the matter of post-death destinations or stages, we will look primarily only at those which are quoted, cited or alluded to by one or other of our four writers given that the latter are our primary focus in this work. These will include: *Luke* 23.43, *John* 14.2, *Philippians* 1.23b, *2 Corinthians* 4.7–5.10 and *Luke* 16. 19–31. We do so recognising, of course, that there are contemporary scholars who deny that there is support at all for the notion of an intermediate state in scripture, or whether particular passages do so, and that there are passages in scripture which seem to point to an immediate transition from death to a final destination.

Luke 23.42–43: '(42) Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come in to your kingdom". (43) He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise'.

John 14.2: 'In my Father's house there are many dwelling places'.

Philippians 1.23b: 'my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better'.

2 Corinthians 4.7–5.10: '(5.6) So we are always confident; even though we know that we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord . . . (8) Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord'.

Luke 16.19–31 (Dives and Lazarus): (22) The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. (23) In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side'.

I have chosen for much of my reflection on the understanding of post-existence in scripture to employ the work of the New Testament scholar N.T. (Tom) Wright as a starting point for much of the following reflection. I do this not because I find myself in constant agreement with Wright's arguments or conclusions – which I in fact don't – but because I believe that he, more than many other scholars, asks for the most part the right questions. And the right question is often as important, if not more so, than the right answer!

Luke 23.43 (the thief on the cross)

The expectations of the thief – judging by his initial statement to Jesus that he wishes the latter to 'remember me when you come into your kingdom' (23.42) – appear to be that what he wants from Jesus will happen at some time in the future [i.e., beyond his own death and thus, presumably, given that his death and that of Jesus are likely to be as near simultaneous as possible, that there will be an intermediate state between death and the coming of Jesus into his kingdom]. Jesus' response to the man with respect to the timing of his promise is open to

at least two interpretations: either he means ‘today I tell you, that you will be with me in Paradise’ or ‘I tell you that today you will be with me in Paradise’. The former, though favoured by some Greek scholars, is not preferred by most biblical translators or commentators. This leaves us with the second option as the reading favoured by most scripture experts. The reference to *paradise* has also caused some debate among scholars. While in Second Temple Judaism *paradise* was identified with *heaven* – and this was probably followed by some in the early church – this does not mean that this was the final destination of the faithful. Paradise was almost universally understood – in a number of different cultures and religions in the ancient world – as referring to a post-death place of rest [much like the $\mu\omicron\nu\alpha\iota$ of *John* 14 (see below)] and thus could as well be a place of transition, an interim place where the faithful await the final resurrection and judgement. It is clear that while Jesus appears to offer the thief an immediate – on death – translation to a place where he would share Jesus’ own company – this does not require that this will be a final destination but rather a staging post until the actual end might come. It is interesting that in the latter part of the second century Irenaeus of Lyons differentiated *paradise* and *heaven*, with the former a final abode for the lesser saints and the latter one for the most blessed. The broad consensus, with the odd exception, is that biblical scholars tend towards regarding this piece of scripture as confirming an intermediate state, as did Origen. It is, surprisingly, one of the few biblical passages reflecting a belief in such a stage which Tertullian does not mention. Athenagoras, of course, mentions none of them.

Wright claims that an intermediate stage is the obvious meaning of the promise from Jesus to the thief hanging beside him on a cross that he, the thief, would be with him ‘this very day’ in ‘paradise’.¹¹ Osei-Bonsu is also clear that the Luke passage is evidence of an intermediate state. He acknowledges, however, that the meaning here of the term *paradise* is ‘not easy to determine’ and recognises also that it is often used in the scriptures as an equivalence of heaven.¹² However, given that in *Acts* 2. 27 and 31 Christ is spoken of as going to Hades after his own death, ‘it is possible that [Luke] regarded Paradise here, like Abraham’s bosom, as the blessed section of Hades, the intermediate state’.¹³ John W. Cooper sees this passage as one ‘which can carry great weight’ for an intermediate state. The word [‘today’], he says, for any number of reasons, ‘ought to be read literally’.¹⁴

Edgar, who does not accept the notion of an intermediate state in scripture at all, makes the valuable point that

if one interprets eternity in a non-temporal manner with an “immediate resurrection” – much in the same way that the notion of being ‘raised’ after death does not imply actual spatial movement – then it is possible to interpret the temporal reference to “today” in a non-literal manner . . . it then becomes a reassurance that the repentant thief will not be separated from Christ and will be in the presence of God.¹⁵

This also could be said, in my view, with respect to an intermediate state. One who accepts the reality of an intermediate state, says Edgar – which state ‘exists in

a temporal framework' (which he does not) – 'is probably obliged to take "today" as a temporal statement'. Perhaps so, but even, it must be acknowledged, the notion of 'immediate' – no less so than 'intermediate' – is a temporal notion.

John 14.2

At *John* 14.2 Jesus advises his disciples that

In the οἰκίον of my Father there are many μὼναι. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go ahead of you to prepare a τόπον for you?

An οἰκίον was a house or dwelling or could be someone's actual household. The μὼναι were traditionally the stopping places or stations employed by an army on the march. The implication is that the places which Jesus is going ahead to prepare for his disciples – following his coming death and to be occupied by them following theirs – were not permanent but rather staging posts on the way to somewhere else, presumably somewhere more permanent. This passage, then, supports the idea of the dead moving from this life to a place of transition before moving finally to their final destination and thus a form of intermediate stage. The fact that what is by now a traditional (and, in my view, mistaken) reading in English here of the notion of the μὼναι as 'rooms' or 'apartments' – suggesting that there is room for all (for once, at the inn) – is based on the translation of the Latin word *mansiones* (for μὼναι) as the English 'mansions' (which suggests size and not short stay). But the Latin word itself bears the same meaning as μὼναι – even if its English derivative does not – as a place where one merely tarries or waits for a while before moving on. This passage is employed by both Tertullian (*de Resurrectione* 43) and Origen (*de Principiis* 2.11.5) to evidence a biblical belief in an intermediate stage. Athenagoras makes no use of it at all. The author of the *Letter* may allude to it at one point, but I doubt it.

Philippians 1.23b and 3.20–21

Philippians 1.23b – *I badly want to make my departure and be with the Messiah; that would be better by far* – and 3.20–21 – *But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour; the Lord Jesus Christ. (21) He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.* These two passages from the apostle's letter to the church at Philippi could be read as suggesting either the existence of an intermediate state between death and final resurrection or an immediate transition to the latter state. For many scholars, Tom Wright included,¹⁶ it is their general reading of the New Testament as supporting the notion of an intermediate state that assists them in reading the *Philippians* passages so. I am concerned, for example, with Wright's particular reading of 3.20b which seems to suggest that the apostle is claiming that we do our 'anxious waiting' for the Saviour from the vantage point of heaven; that we

will be in heaven ourselves, post-death, there awaiting the final transformation of our bodies. But my own reading of the text – and this seems to be confirmed by most English translations, NRSV, NIV and the Jerusalem among others – suggests that the apostle speaks only of us waiting for the Saviour who resides and is himself coming from heaven for the transformation of our bodies. There is no argument here for a transitional state, nothing to counteract a possible reading of *1.23b* which might suggest an immediate translation post-death in to the final place of transformation. This placement of the risen and ascended Christ as ‘above’ – in heaven? – is common in Pauline thought, and this might be all that Paul intends here in *Philippians*. At *Colossians* 3.1 he speaks of ‘above (ἄνω)’, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ‘Above’ is where Christ waits for the end and his work of transformation. It is clear to me that if the *Philippians* passages were all that one had to go on in the New Testament with respect to the existence of an intermediate state post-death it would be difficult to argue for it. And yet Origen, however, as we shall see, clearly saw the *Philippians 1* as evidence for it (*De Principiis* 2.11.5).

The Corinthian correspondence

I can’t agree with Wright’s assertion that it is in the fifth chapter of *2 Corinthians* – in verses 6 to 8 where he speaks of us being ‘at home in the body [and] away from the Lord’ (6), of us walking ‘by faith, not by sight’ (7), and of us ‘rather being away from the body and at home with the Lord’ (8) – along with *Philippians* 1.23 – that Paul comes as close as he ever comes ‘to an account of the intermediate state between death and resurrection’.¹⁷ Much as the natural reading of the *Philippians* passage suggests an immediate translation into the presence of Christ post-death with nothing in between (see above), so the reading from *2 Corinthians*, again on the surface, appears to suggest only two states of life: one the present life in the ‘earthly tent’ and the other the divine ‘heavenly dwelling’ in which the faithful will dwell post-death forever; that is, no intermediate state.

Osei-Bonsu believes that ‘careful exegesis of this passage [from *2 Corinthians* 5]’ will reveal ‘that Paul reckoned with the possibility of the disembodied existence of the soul’.¹⁸ He argues that the use of the Greek word *ἐρχομεν* at 5.1 should be read in the futuristic sense and that this is consistent with Paul’s use elsewhere.¹⁹ Osei-Bonsu also points to Paul’s fear of being found ‘naked’ at 5.4 as an indication of an intermediate state.²⁰ He argues here that *γυμνοσ* here ‘must denote disembodiment’.²¹ He makes use of a number of extra-biblical sources – Philo, Plato and the *Corpus Hermeticum* among them – which show that in contemporary literature disembodiment is described as ‘nakedness’. ‘Thus’, he asserts, ‘Paul uses *γυμνός* anthropologically to refer to the nakedness of the soul’.²²

Osei-Bonsu’s first argument – the futuristic present sense of *ἐρχομεν* – has some merit, while the second – the use of *γυμνός* in the passage – does not. The latter argument does not reflect the fact that Paul appears to believe that he will not be found naked rather than that he will be so. For, he says: *we will not be found naked*. But Osei-Bonsu is not alone in this particular reading of this passage.²³

Osei-Bonsu also maintains that verses 6–8 of 2 *Corinthians* 5 should be read as implying that ‘being absent from the body and present with the Lord’ means being with the Lord ‘in a non-bodily form’,²⁴ that is, before the resurrection. Osei-Bonsu claims too much here. ‘Being in the body’ is clearly a reference to this present existence and ‘being at home with the Lord’ is that existence beyond this present life. The latter state could refer either to an intermediate disembodied one with the resurrection still to come, or to an immediate one with a resurrected body. It does not evidence without question an intermediate state.

In my view, while *Luke* 23.43, *John* 14.2 and 1 *Thessalonians* 4.13ff., each provides a strong indication of the presence in the New Testament of the notion of an intermediate state – the two *Philippians* passages, 1,23b and 3.20–21, and 2 *Corinthians* 4.7–5.10 do not. And yet, as we shall see, they are used by both Tertullian and Origen as evidence for such.

***Luke* 16.19–31 (Dives and Lazarus)**

Osei-Bonsu also considers *Luke* 16.19–31 – the parable of Dives and Lazarus – as support for the intermediate state argument. He argues that the use of the word *Hades* rather than *Gehenna* means that the rich man at least is in an intermediate state rather than in his final abode, given that in the New Testament – Osei-Bonsu gives as evidence of this *Revelation* 1.18; 20.13; *Matthew* 11.23; 16.18; and *Acts* 2.27 – Hades is the abode of the dead, and in *Acts* 2.27 and *Revelation* 20.13 ‘is clearly presented as the intermediate abode of the dead’.²⁵ *Gehenna*, on the other hand, Osei-Bonsu declares, is the ‘place of punishment by means of eternal fire’ in the New Testament and gives *Matthew* 5.22; 18.8–9; *Mark* 9.43–48 and *James* 3.6 as evidence of this.²⁶ That both the rich man and Lazarus are described in bodily terms in the passage ‘does not mean’, says Osei-Bonsu, ‘that they are in the final state with their bodies’; they are merely described so because ‘there is no other way in which they can be visualised’. The argument of Osei-Bonsu is hardly compelling on its own. Cooper, an advocate for the existence in scripture of an intermediate state, believes that this Lukan passage is corroboration for, though not on its own clear and irrefutable evidence of, an intermediate state. He declares that ‘at face value, the parable seems to be an imaginative representation of the intermediate state as visualised by the Pharisees and ordinary Jewish people in Jesus’ audience’ on a number of grounds; viz, that ‘the final resurrection as Luke understands it has not taken place’, that ‘the rich man is said to be in Hades, not Gehenna, the place of final punishment’ and that ‘Luke himself uses Hades to refer to an interim condition which does not hold the dead, Jesus among them (*Acts* 2:27, 31)’.²⁷ And yet, he concedes,

[t]his is a parable whose point is not to teach about death or the intermediate state, but to warn its hearers about the dangers of riches and the consequences of failing to love their neighbours. . . . it does not necessarily tell us what Jesus or Luke believed about the afterlife, nor does it provide a firm basis for a doctrine of the intermediate state²⁸

but would only, at best, provide corroboration for passages which might provide such a basis. Edgar, for his part, is doubtful that parable is evidence for an intermediate state on the grounds likewise that the main point of the story is the fate of the five remaining brothers and the matter of who will hear and thereby heed the word of God. Cooper's caution is telling here. Origen, however, is clear that the passage evidences an intermediate state.

Patristic representations of the stages of a post-death existence

In his *de Resurrectione* **Athenagoras** deals specifically in chapter 16 with the in-between, transitional, intermediate world, the place between this life-and-death and the resurrection life. He clearly envisages a two-stage post-death experience. While he recognises such an intermediate phase – one between death and resurrection – such an in-between, transitional phase does cause some problems for him with respect to the matter of personal continuity [though discussion of that particular argument must wait for chapter 3 where we will consider the matter of personal continuity from life through death to post-death existence]. The context is that of the problem of the permanence (διαμόνη) of the human person, given that existence, the existence of the person – in particular that of the body – seems ‘cut short (διακοπτομένην)’ [in his words] by death and corruption. It is clear, then, that in his view he has to demonstrate that personal existence – however ‘cut short’ or interrupted – does enjoy a form of permanence – however this might be understood – in order for it to be regarded as having continuity and thus personal identity as being preserved. Athenagoras is clear that at the moment of death, body and soul separate (16.4), the body utterly dissolving (and thereby ceasing to be) but the soul continuing to exist. He makes clear that one cannot look for such ‘undisturbed and changeless permanence that characterises superior beings’ in human beings, for the latter ‘were created to survive unchanged (τὴν ἀμετάβλητον διαμοσῆν) only in respect to the soul, but in respect to the body to gain incorruptibility through a transformation’ (16.2). Does Athenagoras here presume the sort of immortality of the soul as envisaged by Plato in the *Phaedo*? There is no evidence in the text of *De Resurrectione* for this, as there is in the writings of Origen, particularly in the *Contra Celsum*. We need to remember, of course, that the immortality of the soul in Plato is one tied to the notion of reincarnation, given that a particular soul will move from one body to others over many lives. The ‘permanence’ of human beings is not to be regarded as the ‘permanence’ of the immortals, says Athenagoras (16.3). ‘One’, he says, ‘ought not to have qualms about the fact that a certain lack of continuity characterises the “permanence” of human beings’ (16.4). And later he says again much the same when he declares that this human nature ‘has a kind of life and permanence characterised by discontinuity and interrupted sometimes by sleep, sometimes by death, and by the changes that take place at each stage of life’ (17.1). This belief on the part of Athenagoras in a ‘time’ in which the person-as-soul (even if not fully a person) continues without the body – for a time – implies a ‘space’ in which this person-as-soul ‘survives’ or ‘continues’ (16.2). And this *space*, of course, is the focus of this chapter.

But that ‘space’ or ‘world’ or ‘place’ in which the soul continues to exist between the death of the body and resurrection, as Athenagoras sees it, is one in which ‘the senses and the native faculties’ – as in normal sleep – are, for him, suspended. There is, as in sleep, an interruption (διακόπτειν) in the conscious life of the soul (16.5). This is a marked difference with Tertullian – for whom the soul ‘never sleeps’ (*De Anima* 43) and Origen, for whom the soul continues always in a contemplation of God (*De Principiis* 2.11.6). But in death, for Athenagoras at least, the soul, like in sleep, enters ‘a passive state (τῶν ὁμοίων παθῶν)’ in which it is ‘tranquil and . . . conscious of nothing that goes on around [it] or, rather, [is] not even conscious of [its] own existence and life’. The soul, then, for Athenagoras, exists immediately post-death but does not, cannot know, this itself; it is in an unconscious state. At 18. 5 he declares that ‘the composite creature no longer exists when the soul is separated from the body’. It possesses no ‘memory of any of its actions’ (18.5) (cf. *Phaedo*). When he speaks later of ‘the body [undergoing] decay and dissolution, with no further memory of what it has done or consciousness of what it has experienced (τῶν παθημάτων) because of the soul’ (20.1), he is not suggesting that the soul itself might retain such memories or consciousness in the transitional state. The intermediate state is for Athenagoras an utterly unconscious one, one known, as it were, only to God. Now while much of Athenagoras’ argument here is ultimately shaped by his need to argue for the unity of man as body and soul – and that therefore the whole, complete man is both body and soul – it is clear that he envisages an in-between, transitional stage in which a person – effectively a person-as-soul only, a ‘partial’ person – will exist but not be conscious of its own identity or even existence; it simply won’t know itself. Athenagoras concludes this discussion with the comment that

Since then this human nature has been allotted discontinuity from the outset by the will of the Creator, it has a kind of life and permanence characterised by discontinuity and interrupted sometimes by sleep, sometimes by death, and by the changes that take place at each stage of life.

(17.1)

But nowhere does he speak of the ‘space’ in which the soul ‘remains’ between the death of the body and the resurrection of the reunited person in any concrete or named way. He does not, for example, speak of ‘paradise’ or ‘hades’ as the waiting room for resurrection. His words simply imply the existence of such a space. His references are in no way biblical as are those of the other Fathers. At no point at all in this discussion of continuity and of the existence of at least an intermediate stage – at least for the soul – between this life-and-death and the resurrection does Athenagoras make use, by quotation or citation of, or by allusion to a single passage of scripture on the subject. He speaks of ‘[our] teaching on the resurrection’ at 16.3 but builds nothing on this. This absence of scriptural references is, by contrast, a feature of neither Tertullian’s nor Origen’s writings on the subject.

Tertullian in his own treatise on the matter of the resurrection – and in the particular context of his argument for a final judgement of the whole person, body

and soul (43.6f.) – declares that ‘no-one is at home with the Lord immediately on going into exile from the body (*peregrinatus a corpore statim*) except by the prerogative of martyrdom, in which case he will take up his lodging in paradise and not in hell’ (43.4). This he takes from 2 *Corinthians* 5.8 and quotes from that verse, having earlier, at 43.1, quoted the companion verses at 2 *Corinthians* 5.6–7. The Latin word *deversurus*, which we translate as ‘lodging’ here, comes from the deponent verb *deversor*, which means ‘to stay as a guest’, and is associated with the noun *deversorium*, an inn or a lodging house. This is a temporary ‘overnight’ stopping place – and therefore not a permanent destination – and reminds one of the Greek *monai* (Latin: *mansions*) from *John* 14.2 and the common word for military staging posts. Such temporary staging posts between this life-and-death and the final resurrection can apparently be found in both paradise and hell. This supports the notion of an intermediate phase between the death of the body and the resurrection itself in Tertullian’s thought.

Thus, he says, when the apostle speaks in 2 *Corinthians* 5.8 of being ‘on pilgrimage from the body (*peregrinari a corpore*)’ he signifies merely a ‘temporary absence from the body (*temporalem absentiam a corpore*)’, of ‘our being on pilgrimage from it, because one who is on pilgrimage will also return (*revertetur*) to his home’ (43.5). Tertullian therefore does not explore the matter in quite the depth of Athenagoras but does recognise an in-between world – a waiting station, a staging post to use the sort of military metaphor that Tertullian clearly appreciates – though, of course, for the soul. The soul, on temporarily separating from the body and awaiting their reunion, is spoken of here as being in exile from the body in this immediate post-death phase. It may have been, though Tertullian is hardly explicit about it, that this separation of body and soul, even temporarily, was as much a matter of concern, in terms of continuity, and therefore for apologetic explanation for Tertullian as it was for Athenagoras. I would note again, as above, that while many modern commentators would agree with Tertullian that these verses from 2 *Corinthians* 5 suggest the existence of an intermediate stage, I am not so convinced.

But again, Tertullian’s major concern here is shaped by the need to argue that the ‘whole person’ must ultimately be presented as a body-soul combination for the purpose of judgement. The popular, contemporary notion, therefore, in this treatise at least, of the disembodied soul moving about in a transitional world, engaged in communicating with others, worrying about and grieving for loved ones left behind, and so on, would probably not have occurred to either Tertullian or Athenagoras (although Tertullian’s *De Anima* 43 – see below – may suggest otherwise). Yet it is also worth noting that for Tertullian the soul, in this staging post between death and the concomitant separation from the body and then the end stage with the resurrection of the body and its reunion of body and soul, is not waiting with Christ. For that immediate post-death privilege belongs, as we have seen above, only to the martyr. There is, however, in the *De Anima* an alternative reading of the immediate post-death stage; that is, the possibility of the soul having the capacity for some form of independent activity [along with the mind as a faculty of the soul] while separated from the body in both death and sleep. At

de Resurrectione 18.9 he declares that ‘not even in sleep does the soul fall with the body, not even then is it laid supine with the flesh’. Even in sleep, he says, the soul ‘moves and stirs’; it does not ‘collapse in the image of death [=sleep] (*in imagine eius [mortis]*)’. This is expanded at greater length in the *de Anima*. In that treatise, in chapter 43, Tertullian affirms with the Stoics that sleep is ‘a temporary suspension of the activity of the senses (*resolutionem sensualis vigoris*)’. But this suspension can only apply to the body, he says. For ‘the immortality of the soul precludes belief in the theory that sleep is an intermission of the soulish spirit’. The soul ‘never succumbs to sleep . . . for nothing immortal admits any end to its operation’. ‘[T]he soul is circumstanced in such a manner as to seem to be elsewhere active [while the body sleeps], learning to bear future absence [when the body has died] by a dissembling of its presence for the moment’. It begs the question, though Tertullian does not say anything quite so explicitly, whether he might have been open to the possibility of the soul being active in some ways while the body sleeps in death. Does the soul, for example, while separated from the body by death, yet know that it still exists? Is it conscious of itself? My reading of this 43rd chapter of the *De Anima* suggests clearly to me that Tertullian intends what is said there to apply to the soul while the body sleeps – that there is no end to its own activity – applies also to death-as-sleep. Tertullian declares that while the body sleeps, the soul

cannot rest or be idle altogether, nor does it confine to the still hours of sleep the nature of its immortality. It proves itself to possess a constant motion; it travels over land and sea, it trades, it is excited, it labours, it plays, it grieves, it rejoices, it follows pursuits lawful and unlawful; it shows what very great power it has even without the body, how well equipped it is with members of its own, although betraying at the same time the need it has of impressing on some body its activity again.

He then finishes the chapter with the claim that

such, therefore, must be both the natural reason and the reasonable nature of sleep. If you only regard it as the image of death, you initiate faith, you nourish hope, you learn both how to die and how to live, you learn watchfulness, even while you sleep.

Tertullian then, in my view, offers this understanding of the nature of sleep – and of the continued activity of the soul while the senses of the body are suspended – in order to encourage belief in the primary article of Christian belief, that of resurrection, before which event, even while the body has ceased to exist (and not merely have its senses suspended), the soul continues to move and have its being.

But what is critical here is that while, for Tertullian, the non-martyred soul in transition is not yet with Christ – it has to wait for reunion with the resurrected body to achieve this – it seems, unlike in Athenagoras, to be conscious and aware of its surroundings in this space between death and the resurrection. Yet both

these late second-century Fathers share the idea that there is an intermediate phase before the final one. The only difference between them has to do with the movement and consciousness of the soul during that stage. Is there any suggestion in Tertullian – either in the *De Resurrectione* or the *De Anima* of the influence of contemporary philosophy? There is nothing explicit from Plato – from the *Phaedo* for example – and the Stoics, from whom Tertullian drew much, tended, certainly in the tradition of Zeno, with his materialism, to deny the immortality of the soul.²⁹ Seneca, however, whom Tertullian famously called ‘*Seneca saepe noster*’ (*De Anima* 20), could often say that death was final, non-existence indeed (*Letters* 54.4–5), but he could also hope or believe – Sandbach suggests ‘more often than not’ – ‘that the soul would pass on to an abode in the sky’.³⁰ We see this hope in a number of his letters – although we need to recall that for Seneca the alternatives of either total annihilation or some beautiful future for the soul are both intended to underscore for his readers that death is not to be feared but embraced as escape from the imperfection of this world – but these are more likely hope than actual solid belief.³¹ Yet this hope may have influenced Tertullian’s own thinking on the matter.

Henri Crouzel maintains that *Origen’s* presentation of an intermediate stage between death and resurrection corresponds with that of the scriptures as the latter is understood by a broad, albeit by no means universal, scholarly consensus. He declares that four questions are posed by Origen’s treatment of the matter, a treatment which is not always consistent, of this intermediate stage:³²

- Is the soul during this period without a body?
- Where is the soul located in the period post-death but before the resurrection?
- What activity does it pursue, if any, during this time?
- What is the nature of the eschatological purification that Origen claims to see in *1 Corinthians* 3.15–17?

While only the second and third questions are perhaps of direct, particular interest for our present discussion – that of a possible stage of existence between death and resurrection – we will consider each of the first three briefly here, given that the first does touch indirectly on the matter before us.

For the first – *Is the soul while in transition between the death of the body and its resurrection without a body?* – Origen gives at least two answers: yes and no. If we take literally Origen’s claim in *de Principiis* 1.6.4; 2.2.2; and 4.3.15 that only the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, can ‘exist without material substance and apart from any association with a bodily element’, that this ‘belongs only to the nature of God’, then, understood indirectly, the soul cannot be so; that is, that it must have a body. In ancient thinking, of course, ‘bodily’ or ‘corporeal’ existence does not imply material or physical existence or form. The Stoics indeed took the view that because, for them, only a body was capable of acting or being acted upon,³³ and that because death is the separation of soul from body, and that because nothing incorporeal can be separated from the body, the soul, therefore, is a body.³⁴ Diogenes Laertius reported that Apollodorus, in his

Physics, declared that body is that which has threefold extension – length, breadth and depth – but this, he said, is also called solid (στερεόν) body, presumably to differentiate it from body simple.³⁵

And yet, when Origen does address this question directly then ‘certainly most references in Origen show the soul without a body between death and resurrection’,³⁶ with one possibly notable exception. Methodius of Olympus reports in his *de Resurrectione* (3.19) that Origen – relying on the story of Dives and Lazarus at *Luke* 16.19–31 and on the appearance of Samuel to Saul courtesy of the witch of Endor at *1 Samuel* 28.7–20 – that the soul must have ‘a certain corporeal envelope’ expressed as, following a Middle and Neo-Platonist notion, the ‘vehicle . . . of the soul’, an envelope ‘made of corporeal pneuma’. Yet my own view is that one must treat Methodius’ reporting of Origen’s views with some caution.

The second question – *the location of the soul of the departed prior to the resurrection* – seems to be answered in a wide variety of places by Origen. Origen sometimes admits a measure of ignorance on this and related matters. In his *Dialogue with Heraclides* he suggests, however, that ‘before the resurrection the righteous person is with Christ and, in his soul, lives with Christ’ (23.7f.) and the less-than-righteous in Hades (7.20). This latter is the implication of the claim that the righteous soul is with Christ; the unrighteous soul must be elsewhere. It is also what Origen seems to be saying about the intermediate, transitional fates of Dives (in Hades) and Lazarus (in the bosom of Abraham) at *Luke* 16.23ff. This would also be suggested by the passage from *De Principiis* 1, *praef.* 5 where Origen declares that

after its departure from this world [the soul] will be rewarded according to its deserts; for it will either obtain an inheritance of eternal life and blessedness, if its deeds warrant this, or it must be given over to eternal fire and torments, if the guilt of its crimes shall so determine.³⁷

In the latter place is where the purification of the less-than-righteous clearly takes place while the former place – according to Origen ‘the abode in the air’ – is yet ‘situated on the earth and [is that] which the divine scripture calls “paradise” (*Luke* 23.43)’ (*De Principiis* 2.11.6). This latter place is one

of instruction, a lecture room or school for souls, in which they may be taught about all that they have seen on earth and may also receive some indications of what is to follow in the future [the latter all speculation on Origen’s part].
(*De Principiis* 2.11.6)

But then will come the resurrection of the dead, Origen continues, so that this abode of the soul either in blessedness with Christ or in fire and torment will not actually be ‘forever’. Crouzel declares that for Origen ‘the fire of eschatological purification [is] our Purgatory’.³⁸

Some saints of both covenants, then, like the Good Thief on the Cross at *Luke* 23.43, are perhaps led direct to Paradise, there to await the resurrection in comfort.

Some others, less saintly, are directed to Hades, which is, for Origen, neither Hell, nor Gehenna, but a place where a purification of sorts can take place before the resurrection and the translation to final blessedness, perhaps as Crouzel has suggested above, like some contemporary understandings of Purgatory.³⁹ Some, not at all even mildly or moderately saintly, are sent direct to the Gehenna of fire, to the outer darkness and to torments. But is this Gehenna a permanent abode, or rather a more extreme form of remediation for the extremely reprobate but one from which they may yet escape with hope?

The question of how Origen's doctrine of *apocatastasis* might impact on this matter of the stages of post-death existence – a doctrine unclear and controversial and one on which Origen seems to say *one thing* at one point and *another* elsewhere – is as unclear and uncertain as the Alexandrian's articulation of it. Does Origen believe in the restoration or reconciliation of all creatures to God? Or does he limit it to all but Satan, or to all but Satan and his acolytes? Or does he limit it to only those human beings who are virtuous and righteous? Origen's understanding of the doctrine is, Crouzel suggests, based on his reading of *I Corinthians* 15.23–28.⁴⁰ Yet Origen, declares Crouzel, most often seems to acknowledge two alternative answers to any question concerning the *restoration* 'without choosing clearly between them'.⁴¹ At *De Principiis* 1.6.3 he appears to allow for the restoration of Satan and yet in a *Letter to Friends in Alexandria*, reported by both Rufinus and Jerome, he apparently suggests that only a 'lunatic' would countenance this.⁴² As for what he calls the likelihood of a 'return to grace' for demons and the 'damned' human beings – those folk who are destined for Gehenna rather than for Paradise upon death in this earthly life – Crouzel declares that Origen is hesitant about the 'eternity of Gehenna'; does αἰώσιος mean forever or just for a long time?⁴³ What Crouzel sees in Origen on these matters – and I think that he is right – is consistent hesitation and what might be called a certain ambivalence. He declares that Origen seems to place 'imperturbable faith in the goodness of God' and 'to preserve the hope that the Word of God will attain such force of persuasion that, without violation of free will, it will in the end overcome all resistance',⁴⁴ even for demons perhaps and certainly for human beings. I suspect, however, that regardless of how the doctrine is understood in Origen, it actually doesn't impact at all on the matter of whether Origen believed that there was at least one stage of existence between death and resurrection; Origen simply believed in such an interim, transitional stage.

With respect to the third question, *the activity or movement of the soul freed from the body at the point of death*, the souls, 'although separated from the earthly body . . . are nonetheless active'.⁴⁵ A passage from the *Commentary on the Psalms* has it that 'in death as in dreaming the soul acts without the medium of the body'.⁴⁶ Its major activity, according to *de Principiis* 2.11.6, is 'the contemplation of the works of God' and the 'contemplation and comprehension of God'. And the saints, as souls, continue their care for the living on earth, offering prayer and intercessions.⁴⁷ At *de Principiis* 2.11.6, as we saw immediately above, Origen speaks of the 'abode in the air [between heaven and earth]' where 'the saints as they depart from this life will remain in some place situated on the earth (*in aliquot in terra posita*), which the divine scripture calls 'paradise' [*Genesis*

2.8 and *Luke* 23.43] . . . [which ‘will be a place of instruction and, so to speak, a lecture room for souls, in which they may be taught about all that they had seen on earth and may also receive some indications of what is to follow in the future’. Just on in their lives on earth they received ‘certain indications of the future, seen “through a glass darkly” and “in part”’, in this place they will have revealed to them such indications of the future ‘more clearly and brightly . . . in their proper times and places’. If any of the saints are

of unpolluted mind and well-trained understanding that one will make swifter progress and quickly ascend to the region of the air, until s/he reaches the kingdom of the heavens, passing through the series of those “abiding places” [of which temporary lodgings Tertullian had earlier spoken] which the divine scripture calls heaven.

Shortly thereafter Origen directly connects this idea of such abiding places with *John* 14.2 and the ‘mansions’ of which Jesus spoke in his Farewell Discourse.

The Two Resurrections: Hill and Edwards. In connection with this matter, and in relation to the question of whether Origen regarded the ‘first resurrection’ in *Revelation* 20, as Hill puts it, as ‘a spiritual resurrection *ex parte* experienced progressively in this life and associated with baptism’,⁴⁸ *Luke* 14.12–14 for Origen seems to make clear – with reference to the ‘resurrection of the righteous’ – that this resurrection ‘is obviously something beyond this life, taking place either immediately after death or at the final assize’.⁴⁹ ‘[P]articipation in this resurrection comes only at the end of one’s life’.⁵⁰ Origen’s language in a homily on *Luke* 24.2 also ‘concerns the entry of the righteous soul into paradise, that is, it concerns the intermediate state’.⁵¹ In conclusion Hill states that

from Origen we may draw the reverse inference [‘reverse’, that is, to the position of the chiliasts]: the chiliasts take these promises meant to be of instruction in an intermediate state of the blessed in heaven and transmute them into a crass hope of an earthly paradise . . . [and] in his doctrine of the intermediate state [Origen] has preserved and developed what had certainly been a widespread and very primitive Christian belief that the souls of the righteous go immediately to be with Christ in heaven at death.⁵²

Mark Edwards takes a very different view in a 1995 essay.⁵³ He sets out there to argue that

Origen envisages no end to corporeality, not even an intermission when the soul forsakes the corpse’ and does so in explicit opposition to Hill’s opinion ‘that before this date [sc. the final day] the souls of saints exist without bodies in an intermediate realm’.⁵⁴

He then seeks to provide the ‘evidence for the view [*contra* Hill] that soul and body depart together [post-death] for a paradisaical region’.⁵⁵ This might seem to

suggest that Edwards accepts an intermediate stage in Origen's thought, but this is not so. Edwards sees in a compilation of *De Principiis* 2.11.6 and 3.6.3 'an itinerary [only] for the just'. After the death of the body 'the saint remains on earth in a temporary paradise [as both body and soul], where the fire of God begins to burn away the marks of sinfulness'.⁵⁶ This might again seem to suggest an intermediate stage – indeed Edwards' words cannot literally be read otherwise – but it appears that this is only superficially so. As these marks disappear, the saint ascends 'by gradual stages', to the air, to the heavens, then to somewhere beyond the heavens and thence to a final place of blessedness which 'is mutable and God is all in all'.⁵⁷ In all this, Edwards says, the body and soul remain together. He suggests that there have been three ways or senses in which Origen's reading of *Revelation* 20.6 and the Two Resurrections might be understood: *one*, that the first resurrection begins in this life and the second after the dissolution of the body; *two*, that the first is of the righteous to life and the second the unrighteous to tribulation; and *three*, the first immediate on death and the second after an age of 'purgatorial detention', both for the righteous alone.⁵⁸

And in any case, the differences between Hill and Edwards on the matter of an intermediate state simply reflect the diversity in Origenist thought itself, for they do not deal with the same passages from the Alexandrian's pen but only with those which seem to support their respective positions. *Contra* both Crouzel and Hill, whom Edwards credits with a belief in Origen's maintaining of an intermediate state in which the soul waits without its body – or at least a body – Edwards concludes that 'there is thus no reason to postulate for Origen an intermediate state in which the soul is disembodied, or an chronological interval between the first and the second resurrections [in *Revelation* 20]'.⁵⁹ And this he argues on the basis of passages such as *I Corinthians* 15.52 where the apostle 'implies an instantaneous rapture and transformation of the body' – 'in the twinkling of an eye' is how he states it – which 'will supervene upon the soul's emancipation from its sins, not on the historical event of a Second Coming'.⁶⁰ For Origen, Edwards suggests, the first and second resurrections happen simultaneously, the former for the righteous and the latter for the unrighteous.⁶¹ And Paradise – as Edwards claims to see this in *De Principiis* – is no intermediate state where the righteous await the general resurrection but rather a mere 'first inn' on the body's [and soul's] 'route to heaven'.⁶² I need to say here, however, notwithstanding my appreciation for Edwards' overall argument, that even a wayside 'inn' – as in *John* 14.2 and in Tertullian and I believe also, in Origen – suggests an interval, a waiting 'overnight', and thus an intermediate stage. And this is not here a simply superficial reading of Edwards but what his words actually suggest. It might be a quick trip in a coach and horses but it is a journey with at least one 'overnight' wayside stop nonetheless, and that in itself suggests a space and time between death and resurrection. No-one suggests that the intermediate stage must be an interminable one.

It is my view that there is irrefutable evidence that Origen did hold to a positive position on the existence of an intermediate stage between death and the resurrection of the body and that this was a stage in which the soul does exist without its original body. And for this, he suggests, there is even explicit support from

ancient thought – especially that of Plato – unlike in either Athenagoras or Tertullian. Origen, at *Contra Celsum* 2.60 and 7.5, repudiates the suggestion of Celsus that the idea of immortality is based on a mistaken delusion and/or illusion. He does so by reference to *Phaedo* 81D where Socrates declares that ‘the souls of dead men have a real existence’. Such belief in the immortality or at least survival of the soul is not an illusory one. For Plato speaks there even of ‘shadowy apparitions’ of the dead – their souls – appearing in the vicinity of tombs (*CC* 2.60). And yet, as with our comments on Athenagoras and Plato above, we are reminded that this is merely a rebuttal to Celsus’ challenge to the notion of immortality, given that in Plato such immortality is related to the notion of re-incarnation. At *Contra Celsum* 7.5 Origen remarks that many in the ancient world – Greek and barbarian alike – maintained the continued existence and survival of the human soul after its separation from the body; the pure souls are travelling to the upper regions, ‘forsaking the gross bodies on earth and the pollutions attaching to them’, while the bad souls are dragged down to the earth by their sins to roam about without hope of recovery. But live on even the latter do. At *Contra Celsum* 7.28–30, however, Origen also challenges the claim of Celsus that the idea of the pure, immortal souls going to a better place has been taken primarily by Christians from the thought of Homer and Plato, both from *Odyssey* 4.563–5 and from *Phaedo* 109A and B. Origen demonstrates that this Christian belief comes from Moses and the prophets, from the Judaeo-Christian tradition which pre-dates both Homer and Plato. Therefore, ‘we did not take the idea of the holy land from the Greeks or from Plato’ (*CC* 7.30).

In *De Principiis* 2.11.5 Origen reflects on what the apostle might have believed he would have gained by departing and ‘being with Christ’ (*Philippians* 1.23). He knew, says Origen, that when he had gone back to Christ ‘he would learn more clearly the reasons for all things that happen on earth, that is, the reasons which account for man, for his soul or his mind, or whichever of these constitutes man’ and so on, including much about religious practices in Israel and the ways of nature and of animals. In 2.11.6, Origen speaks of this ‘interval’ – the ‘no small’ time that it will take to show all these things to the worthy person (soul) – as a time of instruction and learning which, at least in part, takes place ‘in some place situated on the earth (*in aliquot in terra posito*)’ which the scriptures – for example, *Luke* 23.43 – call ‘paradise’. The ‘saints’, he says, ‘will remain there for some time’ and he points to *1 Thessalonians* 4.17 as part of the scriptural witness to this place of instruction. And this will take the pure soul through a staged series of learnings and he declares that these stages or places are alluded to by Jesus at *John* 14.2 (the ‘abiding places’).

De Principiis 3.6.9 – which like *de Principiis* 2.11.6 also speaks of this process of instruction and teaching on the way from death to renewed life whereby souls are ‘advancing and ascending little by little in due measure and order’ – in no way discounts an intermediate state. In any case it speaks of the ‘souls’ being so instructed without necessary inference of them being embodied at all, although the very end of the passage does declare – although without any sense of timing – that ‘it follows of necessity that then even their bodily nature will assume that

supreme condition to which nothing can ever be added'. The key word there is *then* which presumes something which happens *after* the instruction of the souls. The matter under immediate consideration here is not whether the soul is embodied or not in the period after the death of the body, however – and the answer to that question relies on other considerations – but whether there is in Origen's thought an intermediate period between this life-and-death and the final resurrection. For me that answer is a very clear, unconditional yes.

The *Letter to Rheginos* is clear on the intermediate state. It does not exist. A key theme in the treatise, which can be found near its end, is that the Elect (the true possessors of the knowledge of salvation) 'already have the resurrection' (49. 15–16). The author challenges Rheginos to 'consider himself as already risen' (49. 22–23). Those who already have begun to separate themselves from the demands of the flesh are already, in effect, risen. He urges Rheginos to 'train' for this risen life; one recalls Plato in the *Phaedo* urging his listeners to 'practise dying, practise being dead' (64A and 80E). He criticises Rheginos' 'lack of exercise', his 'lack of practice' (Layton translates these as 'inadequate training'.⁶³ Layton translates 49.22 as 'why do you not examine your own [true] self and see that you have arisen?' but, in my view, this is mere interpretation or paraphrase, though probably accurate, more than translation. At 45.36–39 our author says that 'we (the Elect) are drawn to heaven by [the transformed and risen Christ] like the beams [rays] are by the sun, not being restrained by anything'. This implies an immediate transition to resurrection with no stops. Just previously, as an introduction to this notion of being drawn to the upper world, our author declares that 'if we are revealed in this *kosmos* as wearing him, we are his beams, and we are enclosed by him until our setting, that is to say, our death in this life' (45.28–35). The notion of 'wearing' Christ may well have been suggested to our author by *Romans* 13.14 ('put on the Lord Jesus Christ'), *Ephesians* 4.24 ('put on the new self'), and possibly *1 Corinthians* 15.49 ('Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven'). And then at 47.30–37 we have the decisive piece. Our author acknowledges that some ask – this may well have been one of the questions posed by Rheginos himself – whether the saved person, if he leaves his body behind [in death], will be saved immediately? The reply is unambiguous: 'Let no-one doubt concerning this'; in other words, yes. The 'visible members' which are dead will not be saved (47.38–39); by implication only the living, invisible members, the true self, will live.⁶⁴

The Fathers and scripture compared on the intermediate state

Of the Church Fathers addressed in this project, only Origen makes positive use of *Luke* 23.43 – Jesus' promise on the cross to the condemned thief – in this context. At *De Principiis* 2.11.6 – which deals with the notion of an intermediate state and which state Origen calls an 'interval' wherein 'we must suppose that the saints will remain there for some time, until they learn the reason of the ordering of all that goes on in the air, in its twofold form' – he declares that 'we may speak in

some such way also about the abode in the air'. 'I think', he continues, 'that the saints as they depart from this life will remain in some place situated on the earth, which the divine scripture calls "paradise"', a clear reference to the Lukan passage. It will be, he says,

a place of instruction and, so to speak, a lecture room or school for souls, in which they may be taught about all that they had seen on earth and may also receive some indications of what is to follow in the future.

They will see and understand things more clearly – no longer 'through a glass darkly' – than they did in this present life. Origen is very much the educator and in his intermediate state there will be no rest for the righteous!

Of the Fathers again only Origen explicitly cites *John* 14.2 – the abiding places prepared by Jesus – twice in *De Principiis* 2.11.6. He follows his statements on the educative significance of the intermediate state or 'lecture room' – here he speaks of souls 'progressing' through the region of the air until they reach the kingdom of the heavens – with reference to a 'series of abiding places' through which the student travels and passes. This notion of progression and ongoing and successive learnings he declares are indeed alluded to by the reference to 'this diversity of places' for which he explicitly cites *John* 14.2. Tertullian does, however, at *de Resurrectione* 43.4, in his reflection on *2 Corinthians* 5.8, speak of the martyr, at death, taking up his 'lodging' with the Lord in 'paradise'. The word he employs – *deversurus* – comes from the Latin word for an 'inn' or 'lodging'. There is a probable allusion to *John* 14.2 here; it is true, however, that when Tertullian does explicitly allude to *John* 14.2 – at *de Resurrectione* 41.3 – he employs the word *mansiones* for these abiding places on the way to the resurrection.

Origen at *de Principiis* 2.11.5 sees *Philippians* 1.23 as an example of what he was to explore later of the intermediate state at 2.11.6 as a time of learning about matters which were not so clear in this life. He speaks of Paul's 'desire' to be with his Christ as his desire to learn what he could of matters which now he understood only imperfectly. Thus 1.23 cannot be said to be for Origen in itself clear proof of the existence of such a state; only that Paul's desire, as expressed therein, could be that which the interval/school for souls might meet. Tertullian at *de Resurrectione* 55.11 cites the associated *Philippians* 3.21 but not at all to evidence an intermediate state. All of this only confirms my own view that these verses do not provide strong support for the existence of an intermediate state.

While few modern commentators see *1 Corinthians* 15 as evidencing an intermediate state but rather regard it as inconclusive on the matter, many do see *2 Corinthians* 5 as doing so. Tertullian, for his part, in the *de Resurrectione* begins chapter 43 by quoting *2 Corinthians* 5.6–7 (43.1) and then the 8th verse (43.3) – and speaking particularly of the fate of martyrs – and then says at 43.4 that

no-one is at home with the Lord immediately on going into exile from the body except by the prerogative of martyrdom, in which case he will take up his lodging in paradise and not in hell (*paradiso scilicet non inferis*).

He then – reflecting on the apostle’s speaking of ‘exile’ rather than of ‘death’ here – declares that Paul ‘would signify a temporary absence from the body, that he spoke of our being on pilgrimage from it, because one who is on pilgrimage will also return to his home’. He then moves on to speak of the judgement at the last. Clearly here Tertullian sees in *2 Corinthians* 5 evidence of a temporary intermediate state of existence between death and the general resurrection, with the righteous with their Lord in paradise and the reprobate in hell. Origen, for his part, makes no use of *2 Corinthians* in his key passage on the intermediate state at *de Principiis* 2.11.5–7 nor anywhere at all in the *Contra Celsum*. In the latter he makes use of *2 Corinthians* 5.4 but only to make reference to the need of the soul for a body appropriate only, if at all, for the place and context in which it finds itself.

Of the Fathers only Origen allegedly makes use of *Luke* 16.19–31 – the story of Dives and Lazarus – according to Methodius (*apud Meth.* 3.19).

Of the Fathers both Tertullian and Origen – the latter very decidedly – make use of scripture in their presentation of an intermediate state. Athenagoras, on the other hand, as ever, makes virtually no significant use of scripture for anything. Only *Luke* 23.43 and *2 Corinthians* 5. 6–8 are used by both the Fathers – two at least – and most contemporary biblical scholars are evidence for an intermediate state. The *Letter to Rheginos*, as we have seen, makes no use whatsoever of any of the biblical passages we have highlighted but does make use, often by allusion, often by direct quotation, of other passages in his writing. In this he does so more than does Athenagoras and perhaps near to the levels of Tertullian and Origen.

Irenaeus, for his part, seems reasonably clear on an intermediate state at *Adversus Haereses* 5.5.1. There, after he has spoken about the translations of Enoch and Elijah, while still in their original bodies, and declares that ‘nothing stood in the way of their body being translated and caught up’. He then speaks of the establishment by God of the garden (*paradise*) in which he placed the human being he had formed and from which he later expelled him. Then Irenaeus says:

Wherefore also the elders who were the disciples of the apostles tell us that those who were translated were transferred to that place (for paradise had been prepared for righteous men, such as have the Spirit; in which place also Paul the apostle, when he was caught up, heard words which are unspeakable as regards us in our present condition (*2 Corinthians* 12.4)), and that there shall they who have been translated remain until the consummation [of all things], as a prelude to immortality.

Notes

- 1 Shelley (1821) from stanza 39.
- 2 *Singing the Faith*. (2011) The Methodist Church Hymn 734.
- 3 Self (2000).
- 4 Wright (2008) 36.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 33.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 18.

- 7 Lewis (1946).
- 8 *Ibid.*, 70.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 75.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 68.
- 11 Wright (2008) 162.
- 12 Osei-Bonsu (1991) 176.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Cooper (2000) 128.
- 15 Edgar (2002) 35f.
- 16 Wright (2008) 226.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 369.
- 18 Osei-Bonsu (1991) 177.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 178.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 180.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 182.
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 Cullman (1946) 239, Witherington III (1995) 391, and Smith (2001) 609, maintain that the passage supports the notion of an intermediate state.
- 24 Osei-Bonsu (1991) 184.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 173f.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 174.
- 27 Cooper (2000) 124f.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 126.
- 29 Long (1996) 18.
- 30 Sandbach (1989) 157.
- 31 For example, at *Letters* 24.18; 65.18, and 117.6.
- 32 Crouzel (1989) 240.
- 33 The Antiochean Varro, speaking in Cicero, *Academica* 1.39, declared that Zeno differed from both the Platonists and the Peripatetics in saying that ‘nothing incorporeal could be the agent of anything and that only a body was capable of acting or being acted upon’.
- 34 Chrysippus according to Nemesius, 81.6–10.
- 35 Diogenes Laertius, 7.135.
- 36 Crouzel (1989) 241.
- 37 Hill (1992) 127, note 213, declares that in this Preface to the *De Principiis* Origen ‘clearly distinguishes this state from the time of the resurrection of the body’, in opposition to the chiliasts.
- 38 Crouzel (1989) 245.
- 39 See Wandinger (1996).
- 40 Crouzel (1989) 258.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 259. Gregg (2011): 31 describes ‘something of a tension in Origen’s works’ on this matter.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 262.
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 *Ibid.*, 265.
- 45 Crouzel (1989) 246.
- 46 *Commentary on the Psalms* 3.6
- 47 Crouzel (1989) 247 speaks of how Origen makes use of both *1 Kings* 28.3–25 and *2 Maccabees* 15.14–16 to support this notion.
- 48 Hill (1992) 133.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 134.
- 50 *Ibid.*
- 51 *Ibid.*, 135.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 141.

- 53 Edwards (1995a).
 54 *Ibid.*, 502.
 55 *Ibid.*
 56 *Ibid.*
 57 *Ibid.*
 58 *Ibid.*, 507.
 59 *Ibid.*, 512.
 60 *Ibid.*
 61 *Ibid.*, 509.
 62 *Ibid.*, 511.
 63 Layton (1987) 324.
 64 Both Peel (1969) 122, and Layton (1987) 323, are clear that this passage repudiates any sense of an interim period, an interval between death and resurrection.

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3 Is there a gap?

In the iconic 1960s television series set in the 23rd century and beyond – and its later spin-offs on television, in film and in animation – people are often moved or translated, teleported, from the starship *USS Enterprise*, a space exploration vessel – the primary space cruiser of the Federation’s Starfleet (the interstellar United Federation of Planets has about 150 members apparently, including Earth) and the scene of much of the action on the show – to another place – most often the surface of a planet – by a machine called a transporter. This machine was operated in the original by Chief Engineer Montgomery Christopher Jorgensen “Scotty” Scott – thus the famous tag-line ‘Beam me up Scotty’, though these words in that form were never actually uttered, as such, on the program (‘Beam me up’ was the closest) – and seems to have involved the de-constitution (of atoms) or de-materialisation of the person being ‘beamed’ up or down (to or from the *Enterprise*) and then their re-constitution or re-materialisation when arriving on board the ship or on the surface of the planet. The question then becomes whether this effective disintegration of the person’s body and the movement from place to place without connectedness or continuity or flow or coherence – they are *here* and then they are *there*, as it were – impact on the continuity of their personhood? Does the so-called gap in continuity interrupt and thereby negate this? If I am one of the persons so transported from point A to point B, dematerialised or disintegrated or deconstituted and then rematerialised or reintegrated or reconstituted, am I still *me*? Does discontinuity negate the continuity of person, of identity? Am I now someone else? Am I conscious during the transporting, thus providing some form of continuity, or not so? In the *Star Trek*-inspired spoof *Galaxy Quest* one of the transported crew complains that since his transportation, his cap no longer fits on his head!

The matters of space and of time with respect to multiple and different stages of post-death existence were discussed in Chapter 2. Here we will look specifically at the matters of spatio-temporal and personal continuity (or discontinuity) between and within such different stages of post-death existence, or even beyond or outside of the notion of time itself (given that time itself is a created thing as Augustine in his *Confessions*, at chapter 11, maintains). The lexical definitions for the notion of *continuity* are helpful here. The word is defined variously as:

- a continuous or connected whole;
- an uninterrupted succession or flow;

a coherent whole; and
 a logical sequence, cohesion or connection.

It might also be important to distinguish at once between continuity as *spatio-temporal* and as *personal identity*. In the *first*, the spatio-temporal, it is a question of how a gap in continuity – some measure of discontinuity in time or in space – might impact on the transition [or translation or movement] of the identity of an existent, particularly a human existent, from one state of existence to another. Here we pose the question of the relationship, in terms of time and space, between one state of existence and another, and particularly do so against the background of the discussion in the previous section concerning a possibly multiple number of stages of post-death existence. In the *other*, dealing with the matter of personal identity and its possible translation or transition from one plane of existence or world to another, the question will be raised as to whether a person who exists – a human existent – in this time and place and then appears to exist, in whatever form, as an existent in another [future] time and place with no discernible or observable or even measurable movement, can be irrefutably said to be the same person if there is a gap – a measure of discontinuity, particularly of time but also of space – between the two periods or places of existence?

Is, for example, the second existent merely a *replica*, an exact replica perhaps in all respects it might seem, of the first, but not the *same* existent or person? If the former existent is *me* and then I cease to exist for a time and then [re]appear to exist again in another space or time (in another spatio-temporal state) – or even in the same one [say, by teletransportation from London to New York] – then is it merely the *appearance* of identity such that the latter existent is not actually me but merely perhaps very like me (even with many if not all of my own thoughts)? What is the relationship, for example, between this present existence and any in-between, intermediate, transitional existence, or between the latter and some third or still other existence? How do these states of existence relate, if at all [and assuming, for the sake of the argument, that they do exist], one to the other, or others, in terms of time and space? And is it, in any case, appropriate or helpful to speak of the possibility of spatio-temporal – or just spatial or just temporal – continuity or discontinuity at all? Is it, for example, appropriate or even helpful to speak of non-embodied, non-spatial [that is, non-spatially dimensioned] existents actually existing in space? Or of movement or thought outside of space or time?

We might also acknowledge, as H.D. Lewis does – in his own discussion of an afterlife, or what we are calling ‘post-death existence’, routinely employing as he does the words ‘beyond’, ‘after’, ‘again’ and so on ‘quite freely and without qualification’ – when he comments that ‘it could well turn out . . . that no terms of this kind are entirely adequate’ given that ‘there is a difficult problem about the sense in which after-life will have the sort of temporal quality to which we are accustomed now’.¹ He points out that ‘[w]hen’, for example, ‘we speak of God as eternal we usually think of him as not being in time at all or being beyond time’. ‘It is not possible’, he says, ‘for us to form a clear conception, and on some views we have no conception at all, of what it would be to exist in a timeless way’.²

But this does not, he continues, prevent us from thinking that God exists. His existence in our minds is not dependent on his being in time or in space. And yet, he says further, notwithstanding that life eternal for us ‘may involve a peculiarly close relationship to God’, this does not mean that such a life, for us, ‘can be understood in a way that does not involve some kind of sequence’.³ And this idea of time usually or normally understood as involving some notion of sequence – sequence as a following of one thing after another – may also be important, if not critical, for our reflections upon the possible nature of post-death existence. Given that existence in this present world certainly seems to involve a notion of time as sequential, it might lead us to ask whether existence in any intermediate or other state of existence, or even, for that matter, the transition, translation or ‘movement’ – which latter words imply or assumes a spatial or even temporal dimension – from one state to another – from this present state of existence to an intermediate or other state of existence, or from an intermediate to a later state – might also involve the presence of time as sequential. And if existence beyond this life or state of existence does not involve existence in time as we know it – that is, for the most part as sequential and durational – (or space as we know it) and if we simply cannot comprehend time other than as sequential and durational (or space as dimensional) – which does not mean that it does not or cannot exist if it is not such, for our capacity to comprehend something is not the ultimate test of its truth or reality or possibility – can we even begin to comprehend the nature of such an existence beyond this one, beyond time and space? Or is it simply too much for us to think about?

It might be useful, for a moment, to consider briefly some of the issues raised by some other modern theologians and philosophers about matters of time and space. I say ‘briefly’, given that our focus in this work is the thought of some early church thinkers on the matter of post-death existence, and of the influence on this thinking of both scripture and occasionally contemporary philosophical thought, and not a study of modern thought. We are reminded with St Augustine, of course, that the world and time were created [by God] together⁴ and that the working of time only, therefore, begins with the creation; that eternal life ‘is an existence which is radically different from our temporal existence here and now’.⁵ ‘Time belongs to the world and the world is created in and with time . . . time and the world belong together’.⁶ Time is not, as we might say with the soul *naturaliter*, immortal. What may appear as a gap of time between death and the resurrection – from the perspective of this age – may not do so from that of the new age,⁷ though some may question this.⁸ With respect to the category of *space* a number of theologians are clear that in relation to existence after death the notion of space cannot be as we understand and experience it now.⁹

The other issue to be explored here is then that *the continuity of personal identity*, its continuing from existence in this world, through death and then into a post-death form of existence.¹⁰ It is important to explore whether what or who endures or continues is me. (The matter of the nature of personal post-death existence – *the question of embodied or what?* – will be addressed at length in Chapter 4.) Do I or can I persist in some form beyond my death – that is, die as to my physical

existence but then re-emerge into a post-death existence of some sort – and endure as myself, as me, or as someone or something else; and if the latter, can *I myself* then be said to have persisted? *Is it the same me?* How do we understand the relationship between personal identity in this world and that in a post-death existence? Is such an identity shaped by notions of physicality, or of psychology? Is it merely numerical? Is it informed primarily or at all by personal, social relationships? If there is a ‘gap’, some measure of discontinuity, even just for a moment, what implications might this have for such continuity of personal identity? Can personal identity ‘survive’ – here the word is perhaps the most appropriate one for once – such a gap? The question of *Who am I?* – and thus perhaps how this ‘I’ might persist beyond physical death – is much shaped by personal relationships. What, then, of our post-death identity? Part of the impetus behind the hope for family reunions in a post-death existence, for example, is in part shaped by our identity as persons-in-particular-relationships in this life. Davies declares that ‘[i]t is through human relationships that we come to a sense of identity and through their loss that we come to know grief’.¹¹ He cites C.S. Lewis as saying that ‘the fear of death results from an acknowledgement that we become something that we ought not to be and we [thereby] lose ourselves’.¹²

One of the major issues which arises in discussions about the persistence or endurance or survival of personal existence – the continuing existence of *me* – beyond the death at least of the body is that of a perceived ‘gap’ between life and death and life beyond death. If there is, for example, a ‘gap’ in time between embodied existence in this life and embodied existence in a resurrected life, in Christian terms, does this gap rule out the possibility of persistence, of continuity; does the gap prevent *me remaining as me*? To underline this issue, we have in Chapter 2, for example, considered the question for scripture and our Fathers as to whether resurrection existence follows straight on from death in this life or whether there is an intermediate or transitional state – usually conceived of as unembodied – and what implications this might have for personal continuity. Polkinghorne declares that

if human beings have a destiny beyond death that is much more than a mere resuscitation . . . then what is it that will connect our present life to our future life in that new world whose character will be so different?¹³

It is continuity – seen here by Polkinghorne in terms of a ‘connection’ between this life and the next – which is seemingly critical.

Derek Parfit, a British philosopher who specialises in the area of personal identity, suggests that there are two types of sameness or identity.¹⁴ A person and their replica will be ‘qualitatively identical’, or ‘exactly alike’, but may not be ‘numerically identical’, or ‘one and the same person’.¹⁵ And it is, Parfit says, ‘our numerical identity that we are concerned about [when we are concerned about our post-death future]’.¹⁶ ‘In the case of most physical objects’, Parfit continues, ‘on what I call the *standard view* [author’s italics], the criterion of identity over time is the spatio-temporal physical continuity of this object’.¹⁷ To paraphrase Parfit,

‘physically continuous spatio-temporal paths’ may be traced [Parfit actually uses the example of a billiard ball!] where ‘there is a line through space and time’ beginning where the object begins and ending where it now is, where there is ‘at every point on this line’ such an object, and where ‘the existence of [an object] on each point on this line was in part caused by the existence of [such an object] at the immediately preceding point’.¹⁸ He seems thereby to allow for no ‘gaps’. While Parfit is here speaking specifically of physical objects, his later claim that ‘we are not separately existing entities, apart from our brains and bodies, and various interrelated physical and mental events’¹⁹ would seem to suggest that a mind-only identity, separate from the brain, is not something whose existence he would entertain. But this latter, of course – the question of the nature of post-death existence – is one for consideration in Chapter 4. What is clear, however, is that the sort of problem, that of continuity both temporal and spatial, and personal, as envisaged in the *Star Trek* scenario, is real. Does a person whose physical, material being has been, albeit temporarily discontinued – through death or teletransportation – cease to be that *particular* person and be beyond retrieval or does the gap in continuity not ultimately affect this once the physical, material being is reconstituted – through resurrection or re-materialisation?

I wish to deal first here with the major biblical passages which appear to address these matters of continuity (reference to other passages by one or other of the Fathers will be dealt with when discussing their thought on the matter) – both spatio-temporal and personal continuity and the gap – and then at the particular issues – first, the spatio-temporal and then, the personal – and finally how our authors from the second and third centuries of the Common Era address these.

Scripture and the matter of continuity

Some modern theologians have argued that what appears to be, from the perspective of the present, from this time and space, a gap or a break in continuity from that present existence to a final existing state of the person, may not be so from the perspective of an eternity both beyond and apart from this present existence, an eternity which knows neither time nor space as we know them.²⁰ There is very little doubt, however, that classic, early (biblical and patristic) Christian belief normally assumes a temporal [and spatial?] gap [or at least employs temporally [and spatially] shaped language to do so]. It thereby assumes some measure of discontinuity [Athenagoras, for one, makes this explicit as we will see below] between the death of the body in this life and a resurrection of that body in some form at a future time. This is so, without doubt, with respect to the physical body – which early Christian belief takes for granted has ceased at the point of death to be alive in any meaningful way at all, indeed may well be utterly destroyed, obliterated or have ceased to exist even in the most partial way – but there is some doubt with respect to the soul or spirit; the scriptures are not always explicit about this. But the assumption seems to be that the soul survives, if only perhaps in a non-conscious state. But a gap of some sort is assumed – even if the soul/mind is regarded only as a person partially or incompletely – and yet Christian belief

seems to assume that this provides no problem for the question of continuity of space and time or of personal identity. What, then, do some of those biblical passages which we have considered above on the matter of the number of post-death stages have to say on the matter, if anything at all, about a continuity, or a discontinuity of time and/or of space between this present existence, and the intermediate and finally the place of resurrection and reunion? For it is clear that only some of them, as we shall see, address in any significant way the matter of time and temporal/spatial continuity itself. The matter of personal continuity may become a problem only if the soul which survives the death of the body does not constitute a person, not even imperfectly or partially. This is something which Athenagoras at least seems to recognise and thus address (see later).

There is very little doubt then that classic Christian belief normally, at least implicitly, assumes a temporal gap – and thereby some measure of discontinuity [Athenagoras, for one, makes this explicit] – between the death of the body in this life and a resurrection of that body in some form at a subsequent time. This is so, without doubt, with respect to the physical body – which Christian belief takes for granted has ceased to be alive in any meaningful way at all, as we noted above – but there is some doubt with respect to the soul or spirit. But a gap of some sort is assumed – even if the soul/mind is regarded only as a person partially or incompletely – and yet the writers of scripture seem to assume that it provides no problem for the question of continuity of personal identity. What, then, do some of those biblical passages, both those which we have considered above on the matter of post-death stages and others, have to say on the matter, if anything at all, of the continuity of personal identity from this present existence to that of the resurrected body reunited with its soul? I will look particularly, though briefly, at five of these.

Luke 23.42–43: The thief hanging on a cross alongside Jesus, a person aware of the justice of his own circumstances but the injustice of that confronting the latter, asks of Jesus that he might ‘remember me when you come into your kingdom’. Jesus’ reply, of course, is that ‘Truly I tell you, this day you will be with me in Paradise’. The sense of the words employed suggest that the thief is asking for a spot in a place, Jesus’ kingdom, which will not be available immediately. The use of the words *when you come* can only be read so. Jesus’ reply suggests that another place, Paradise, will, however, be made available to him with immediate effect on his death. It is also clear that for many in the early church *paradise* was a way-station, albeit a most pleasant one, and *heaven*, the final destination of the resurrected. The precise designation or meaning of the word *σήμερον* (this day or today) in the context of the promise – it could designate either the time when the promise is made or that when the promise will be realised, or even both – but it almost certainly means the time when the promise will be realised. While some Greek scholars favour the former meaning, most if not all significant biblical translators or commentators have a preference for the latter option. The passage does, however, suggest a gap in *time* and *place* between the present moment on Calvary – when the present existence at least of the body will cease to be – and its final resurrection. And yet the continuity of personal identity is assumed as long

as the continued existence of the soul, apart from the body, is enough to constitute full or at least partial but sufficient personhood. But this is a question which perhaps the scripture does not ask. The thief will be there. Continuity is apparently assumed. That is the simple message of the story.

1 Thessalonians 4.13–17: Here the apostle has, apparently, been asked about the fate of those faithful brothers and sisters who will have died before the time of the Parousia. He does not wish those still alive who have asked of the fate of the already dead to grieve as those without hope – the unbelievers presumably – grieve. He assures them that Jesus, as the one who has died and risen again, will bring with himself, at his coming and at the time of the resurrection, those who have died already. He declares that those who will not have died before the coming again of Christ will not have precedence over those already dead (lit. fallen asleep). For Christ, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and the trumpet of God, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first [to him]. Only then, he says, will those who are yet alive, those who are left, be caught up in the clouds together with them, the dead, to meet the Lord in the [upper] air. From that time, the already dead and those still alive will be alive with the Lord forever. Clearly there will not need to be, there cannot be, a resurrection of the body for those who not yet died at the time of Christ's coming and the general resurrection.

What is important in this context is the notion of a time of waiting, a period of time during which the faithful dead [and those still alive] will wait for the coming again of Christ. This is a temporal notion, a notion of a measure of duration sequential between the moment of death and that of the coming again of Christ and the general resurrection. All of this implies the existence of a temporal dimension, of that of durational, sequential time. Whatever modern commentators may think themselves of the notion of a waiting-time for the already dead, the fact remains that both the apostle and those to whom he writes believed in it. For them the dead are waiting and they do not want them left out . . . or themselves . . . when the end comes. There is no suggestion here – it probably would not have occurred to the apostle – that the gap in time and space between the death of the believers and their being taken again with Christ at the end would impact at all on their personal identity.

1 Corinthians 15: The language of 1 Corinthians 15, regardless of the state or the form of the resurrected body, also assumes that those who have died will be those who are raised to life eternal. Any gap or lack of continuity, for the body at least, between this life and death and the resurrected life, is of no apparent account to Paul. It seems indeed as if it were not even a matter thought worthy of consideration and reflection by him. The biblical witness, therefore, would seem to have no problem with the matter of some corporeal discontinuity adversely affecting or undermining the continuity of personal identity. Indeed *15.51–52* might seem to suggest that the change, the transformation, from this present life to the resurrected, re-embodied life will be, for those still alive at the time, instantaneous: *'Listen, I tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound,*

and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed'. But this, of course, is not surprising given that a resurrection of the dead will not be necessary for such as these. Transformation, yes, but not a classic resurrection of the dead. For the already dead, of course, matters would be different. Their bodies will need not only transformation but resurrection. This has echoes of *1 Thessalonians* 4.13–17 above. It is a recognition that while the already dead – as in that latter passage – will rise in imperishable bodies from their interim bodiless state, those still alive at the time will not be raised given they are not dead and cannot, therefore, technically, be raised as much as given new imperishable bodies.

2 Corinthians 5.1–3 are the key verses here. 'For we know that if the earthly tent we live in [now] is destroyed [by death], we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this [earthly] tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling – if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked'. As I earlier remarked – in Chapter 2 – I believe that this does not provide clear evidence for the existence of an intermediate stage – though neither does it necessarily gainsay such a possibility – and thereby a gap but two at least of the Fathers view it differently.

John 14.2: 'In my Father's house there are many lodging places'. This passage, as earlier, does not so much reflect a view of a gap as a journey, journey-time between death and the final destination. It is thereby a gap – one presumes for bodily, material, personal existence – but an active one. But like other passages which suggest, even demand, the existence of an intermediate stage and therefore a gap in bodily existence, it seems to have no problem with the matter of the continuity of personal identity.

Patristic representations of continuity and discontinuity

Davis suggests that Christian theologians from the second century onwards who deal with the matter of continuity, of bodily and memory continuity from life-and-death to resurrected life, put forward a view of a

temporary disembodiment . . . when I die, my body disintegrates, but I continue to exist; for an interim time I exist in the presence of God as only a disembodied soul; then on one future day God will raise my body, reunite it with my soul, and reconstitute me as a whole and complete person.²¹

But one might ask, is this the identical person? This asks the key question: but is this the *same* me?

While Tertullian barely deals with the potential problem of a gap in time between the moment of death and that of resurrection, even of conscious existence, but seems to accept this as unproblematic without need of explanation, *Athenagoras*, who seeks to address himself, at least notionally, to a primarily philosophical conversation, does see the need to both name and provide an explanation for it. It is, therefore, an issue for him. It may be, of course, because he does not choose to apply the authority of scripture, with all its potential ambiguities,

to the problem but to address it with reason and head-on. He sets the scene for his discussion of the continuity of the human person's existence in chapter 12 by arguing that while God has assigned a fleeting existence to non-human animals, he has 'decreed an unending existence to those who bear his image in themselves' (12.6), a brief allusion to *Genesis* 1.26. The human person, then, for Athenagoras, was created 'to exist forever (τὸ εἶναι πάντοτε)' (12.8). And what is more, such a person will properly hope for existence – survival – in an incorruptible form (13.1). God would not, suggests Athenagoras, have created a creature with attributes which contribute to permanence 'if he did not want this creature to be permanent (διαμένειν)' (13.1). Man was made for the eternal contemplation of God's majesty and universal wisdom (13.2). 'The reason then for man's creation guarantees his eternal survival, and this survival guarantees his resurrection, without which he could not survive as man (χωρὶς οὐκ ἄν διαμείνειεν ἄνθρωπος)' (13.2).

He argues too, as we saw above, and here makes his major argument on this aspect of the matter, that 'no-one should be surprised if we may yet call an existence cut short by death and corruption permanence (διαμονή)' (16.1). Each thing that is permanent (ἕκαστον τῶν διαμενόντων), he says, has a permanence consistent with, one that conforms to, its own nature (16.2). It is unnecessary, he says, to seek in human being the same sort of permanence that one finds in superior beings (16.2). 'Human beings', he declares, 'were created to survive death unchanged only with respect to the soul but with that to the body to gain incorruptibility only through transformation (ἐκ μεταβολῆς)' (16.2). The language may not be pure Pauline, but the idea behind it certainly is. Thus mortal permanence is not that of the immortal. We do not, he says, 'regard the permanence of human beings as the same as the permanence of the immortals' (16.3). 'One ought not', Athenagoras claims,

to have qualms about the fact that a certain lack of continuity characterises the "permanence" of human beings, nor ought one to deny the resurrection just because the separation of the soul from the body, the dissolution of parts and members, interrupts the flow of life.

(16.4)

In sleep [a sort of place one might say], he continues, 'the natural suspension of the senses and the native faculties . . . also appear to interrupt the conscious life [of a person]'

people seem at regular intervals to go to sleep and, so to speak (λέγειν), then return to life again . . . similar passive states affect both the dead and the sleeping, at least insofar as they are tranquil and are conscious of nothing that goes on around them or, rather, are not even conscious of their own existence and life.

(16.5)

No-one is unwilling to call this the same life (16.5). Sleep is properly called 'the brother of death' and similar passive states affect the dead and those asleep (16.5).

Neither is conscious of things around them. ‘Neither should we’, he continues, ‘exclude the life which follows dissolution and ushers in the resurrection with it, even though it has been interrupted for a time by the separation of the soul from the body’ (16.6). Thus continuity of existence should be not denied to a movement from the ‘place’ of sleep (bodily death) to that of resurrection. He concludes by saying that

Since then this human nature has been allotted discontinuity from the outset by the will of the Creator, it has a kind of life and permanence characterised by discontinuity and interrupted sometimes by sleep, sometimes by death, and by the changes that take place at each stage of life.

(17.1)

Whatever the merits or otherwise of the argument, it is clear that Athenagoras at least recognises the problem of discontinuity in the matter of the path from the death of the body to its re-embodiment at the resurrection. He does not seek to explain it with reference to scriptural authority but, as elsewhere in the treatise, by reference to the will and the power and the authority of the Creator. For him there is no problem because he sees none. He recognises and names a discontinuity from death to the resurrected life – he regards, unlike Tertullian (see below) and others, the interim life of the disembodied person, the soul, as inactive, but this could be otherwise as regular sleep is not necessarily inactive – but repudiates any suggestion that this might constitute a fatal lack of permanence and thereby discontinuity of place, time or person.

First-person perspective, memory and personal identity Two of the issues which arise consistently in serious scholarly reflections on the possibility of a post-death existence are those of personal identity as *subject perspective* and such identity as evidenced by *memory*. This is the case whether the ‘person’ is embodied or not, whether that ‘body’ is identical to the present one, or is an entirely new one, or something or somewhere in between. Philosophers speak of the first mentioned in terms of *reflective self-relation* or of *first-person perspective*, either being essential to any serious notion of personhood, embodied or not. In Polkinghorne’s discussion of what provides the continuity of personhood from previous to the next stage of existence, he declares that ‘whatever the human soul may be, it is surely what expresses and carries the continuity of living personhood’.²²

In his monograph *The End of Memory* Miroslav Volf declares that ‘memories do not merely replicate pleasure or pain; they also decisively shape our identities’.²³ ‘Inwardly’, he says, ‘in our own self-perception, we are much of what we remember about ourselves. . . . Memory . . . is central to identity’.²⁴ But, he continues, [w]e are not just shaped by memories; we ourselves shape the memories that shape us’.²⁵ Yet, he says also, ‘our identities cannot consist simply in what we remember’ but also how.²⁶ ‘We are larger than our memories’. ‘To the extent that we are psychologically healthy, our identities will consist largely in our free responses to our memories, not just in the memories themselves’.²⁷ The question might then become: if memory or at least the way in which we deal with memory

is crucial to our identity as persons, what might this mean for our existence and identity post-death? And what do we require to retain memories? Volf also points out that we are both spatially and temporally limited and that, living not only in the ‘here’ but also the ‘now’, ‘we ‘can perceive and remember only from within that ‘now’, which is always moving forward’. This then begs the question of whether, if we cannot remember being neither spatially or temporally located, what might this do to the continuity of identity between this life and one beyond? Volf then reiterates that memory is ‘so fundamental to our being human that we would not be able to function [as human] without it’.²⁸ Such memory, he repeats, is not only fundamental to our functioning as humans ‘but also to our sense of identity’. ‘[N]o memory, no human identity’.²⁹

Athenagoras, first-person perspective and memory

Athenagoras remarks that

[i]f mind (νοῦς) and reason (λόγος) have been given to human beings to discern intelligibles (πρὸς διάκρισιν νοητῶν), not only substances but also the goodness, wisdom, and justice of him who endowed humans with these gifts, it is necessary (ἀνάγκη) that, where the realities because of which rational discernment has been given are permanent, the discernment (κρίσιν) itself which was given to be exercised on them should also be permanent (διαμένειν).

(15.5)

He then adds, to underline his determination to maintain the necessity of the flesh also being raised,

[b]ut this [discernment] cannot be permanent unless the nature [sc. the flesh] which received it and the faculties in which it resides (τὰ [Wilamowitz; τῆς A] ἐν οἷς ἐστί) are permanent. It is man – not simply soul – who received mind and reason. Man, then, who consists of both soul and body must survive forever.

(15.5–6)

Is there here a suggestion of some continuity of first-person perspective from one life to the next? I believe that there is such a suggestion here and that later comments confirm this. At 18.5 Athenagoras comments that just judgement which ‘requires the composite creature for his deeds’ clearly, from observation, does not take place in this life – where the wicked appear unpunished and the virtuous live in misery

[n]or does it happen after our death; for the composite creature [body and soul] no longer exists when the soul is separated from the body and when the body itself is again dispersed among the elements from which it came and no

longer preserves anything of its previous form or shape, still less any memory of its actions (τὴν μνήμων τῶν πεπραγμένων).

Only, he asserts, ‘when the dead are revived through the resurrection and what has been separated or entirely dissolved is reunited, may each receive his just recompense for what he did in the body, whether good or evil’ (18.5). The implication of the earlier comment is that memory is necessary for judgement and that when the body is reunited to the soul, such memory is restored. The soul, then, may not retain all the memories of the one who has died to the body; these memories are restored fully only on reunion. And memory, one would think, is a necessary ingredient of first-person perspective. And again, at 20.1, Athenagoras observes that ‘the body [at death] undergoes decay and dissolution, with no further memory of what it has done (ὄυτε μνήμην τῶν εἰργασμέζων) or consciousness of what it has experienced because of the soul (οὐτ’ αἴσθησιν τῶν ἐπ’ αὐτῇ Παθημάτων)’. Does this suggestion that in the intermediate stage of life in which the body is dead and indeed non-existent there is no awareness (or limited awareness at the very most), by way of memory, of personal identity on the part of the person – though what of the soul? – and carry with it also the implication that a consciousness of personal perspective and identity and thereby of memory will need to be restored at the resurrection? This does seem to be the clear implication of Athenagoras’ language. Does it mean then, for him, that mind and memory are stored or preserved in the soul during the immediate phase – for he does regard the soul during that time as inactive – or that they are simply restored at the time of reunion at the resurrection? This does at least surely imply that personal memory and recollection – first-person perspective – are necessary for just judgement and that this is restored when body and soul are reunited. Justice would require that the about-to-be-judged remember that for which he or she is judged. Justice and judgement otherwise might make no sense. Such justice would seem to unreasonable if the body were not aware, by way of remembrance, of just what it was being recompensed, for good or evil, for. At 21.1 Athenagoras declares that the body ‘will be wronged . . . if it [itself] deprived of participation in the reward for virtuous acts for the sake of which it endured the labours of this life’. This presumes surely an awareness of what it has done, and this presumes actual remembrance. He also later comments that

the end (τέλος) of a life capable of prudence and rational discernment is to live eternally without being torn away from those things which natural reason has found first and foremost in harmony with itself, and to rejoice unceasingly in the contemplation of their Giver and his decrees. . . . [that] the great number of those fail to reach their appointed end does not invalidate their common destiny.

(25.4–5)

Such can surely, again, only be present with a first-person perspective enduring from this present life to the life beyond death and resurrection. It implies some

continuity of psychological identity – even with a gap in the intermediate stage – and a remembrance of the past essential to that identity.

For Athenagoras continuity, duration and permanence are issues to be addressed, but in the end, they are of no great concern to him as the requirements of justice, both the perspective of fairness and memory, assure that any gap in the existence of the person-as-both-body-and-soul, as opposed to the person-as-soul-alone, does not compromise the matter of personal identity.

Tertullian, in chapter 4 of his own treatise on the resurrection, says that the resurrection brings concreteness out of vacuity, fullness out of emptiness, ‘somethingness’ out of nothingness (*in aliquid ominino de nihilo*), and speaks of ‘this same flesh which has disappeared’ as returning (4.3–4). Is this nothingness not a gap and an absence of continuity, one might ask? In chapter 11 he asks whether God ‘is not great enough to be competent’, a question he quickly answers in the affirmative, ‘to rebuild and restore the tabernacle of the flesh after it has fallen down or been swallowed up or in whatsoever manner been dismantled?’ (11.3). Later he says that

if out of nothing God has built up all things, he will be able also out of nothing to produce the flesh reduced to nothing: or if out of material he has contrived things other than it, he will be able also out of something other than it to recall the flesh, into whatsoever it may have been drained away.

(11.9)

‘Certainly he who has made is competent to remake’ (11.10). It is indeed easier, declares Tertullian, to recreate than to create. Thus Tertullian implies a gap, a gap in continuity, and yet it presents for him, as for Athenagoras, no problem which is not resolvable. Even his belief that God can reinstitute flesh devoured by wild beasts and torn apart and scattered to the four winds implies a sense that a body can effectively cease to exist and then, after an interval, be restored by God. This is clearly a gap and an absence of continuity. Yet for Tertullian, it is no real problem. In chapter 43 he explores 2 *Corinthians* 5.8 and the idea of the dead as being ‘on pilgrimage from the body’. ‘This being on pilgrimage from the body’, Tertullian suggests, signifies ‘a temporary absence from the body’, being away from a home to which one will in time return (43.5). The context of the latter passage is the idea that no-one will be ‘at home with the Lord immediately on going into exile (*peregrinatus*) from the body except through the prerogative of martyrdom, in which case he will take up his lodging (*deversurus*) in paradise rather than in the infernal region’. The gap, then, the lack of continuity with respect to the body, is temporary. And the identification of the person pre-death with the one who is either in paradise with Christ or in hell is clear and unambiguous. Here again is a gap which for Tertullian presents no problem. For both Athenagoras and Tertullian, then, there may be a gap – certainly in bodily existence – but this cannot for them constitute a lack of continuity. Davis says it well when he remarks that

[m]ost theologians from the second century onward combined the two [resurrection and the doctrine of the immortality of the soul] in a view that can

be called temporary disembodiment. Based on mind-body dualism, the basic idea is this: when I die, my body disintegrates, but I continue to exist; for an interim time I exist in the presence of God as only a disembodied soul; then on one future day God will raise my body, reunite it to my soul, and reconstitute me as a whole and complete person.³⁰

Tertullian then remarks in chapter 53 that ‘nothing rises again but what has already been (*non enim resurgit nisi quod fuit*)’ (53.8). This implies that what is resurrected must be [exactly] what has died previously.

From chapter 55 Tertullian begins to explore what it means by saying that the risen body is a ‘changed’ one (*I Corinthians* 15.52) and to show that ‘the very same flesh will rise again [as has died]’ (55.1). He addresses the question of whether something – in this case the body – can change and yet remain essentially the same thing; that is, either remain itself, or whether something which is changed is thereby destroyed? He explores ‘more fully’ the matter of the ‘force and implication of change (*et vim et rationem demutationis*)’ (55.2). This is the question, ultimately, in terms of the matter of continuity of identity, of whether the one who has died is the same one who is resurrected. From chapter 55 Tertullian leaves behind his consideration of the primary scripture dealing with the matter of resurrection – principally *I Corinthians* 15 – and begins to address theological and philosophical perspectives. He seeks to explore [and then to refute] the claim that the implication of ‘change’ is to suggest ‘that it is another flesh that will rise again (*alterius carnis resurrecturae praesumptionem*)’, the claim being ‘that to be changed is totally to cease to exist, to be destroyed in respect of what originally was (*de pristino*)’ (55.2). ‘But’, he says, ‘change must be distinguished from everything that argues destruction: for change is one thing, and destruction is another (*discernenda est autem demutatio ab omni argumento perditionis: aliud enim demutatio aliud perditio*)’ (55.3). For that will ‘be destroyed when changed [which] does not during the change remain the same (*peribit autem demutata si non ipsa permanserit in demutatione*)’ (ibid.). ‘There is’, he says, ‘no possible means of combining the opposites, change and destruction (*mutatio atque perditio*), which are directly opposite in their effects (*operibus*). The latter destroys, the former changes’ (55.5). On the basis that that which is destroyed – as opposed to that which is merely changed – ceases to exist, Tertullian continues:

As then that which is destroyed is not changed, so that which is changed is not destroyed. For to be destroyed is for a thing, which has existed, totally to cease to exist (*est in totum non esse quod fuerit*): to be changed is to continue to exist, in another form (*mutatum esse aliter esse est*). But while it exists in another form it can continue to be itself (*porro dum aliter est, idipsum potest esse*): for it possesses an existence which is not totally destroyed, since it has undergone change, not destruction. And, for a proof that a thing can be changed and nonetheless be itself (*et ipsum esse nihilominus*), the man as a whole (*totus homo*) does during this life in substance remain himself, yet changes in various ways, in outward aspect (*habitu*) and in the very

constitution of his body (*ipsa corpulentia*), in health and circumstances and honour and age, in occupation, business, craft, in means, abode, laws, and morals, yet loses nothing of his manhood (*nec quicquam tamen amittat hominis*), nor is so made into someone else (*alius*) as to cease to be himself (*ut cesset idem esse*): in fact he is not made into someone else but into something else (*immo nec alius efficiatur sed aliud*).

(55.5–7)

That is, he retains his personal identity. This is crucial for understanding the position which Tertullian takes, that a person may become *something* else without becoming *someone* else. This is one more piece of evidence that Tertullian is not committed to the idea that the physical/corporeal form of the resurrected body must exactly be that of the original. And yet he or she remains him- or herself; the identity remains. This is, of course, the commonplace modern understanding that we change throughout our lives, so that we possess nothing physically, at the end, of that with which we started out.

Tertullian then points to a number of scripture references – ones not dealing with resurrection – which evidence this notion, ‘this law of change (*hanc formam demutationis*)’ (55.8). He points to a number of biblical passages where persons have been changed, transfigured or converted as to their appearance but have remained who they originally were, that is, the same: to Moses and his changed hand at *Exodus* 4. 6–7; Moses again and his glorified face at *2 Corinthians* 3.7, the transfiguration of Jesus and the appearances of Moses and Elijah at *Matthew* 17.2–8; Saul’s being ‘turned into another person’ at *1 Samuel* 10.6; and even Satan transfigured into an angel of light at *2 Corinthians* 11.14. Tertullian’s point is that change, transfiguration and conversion do not equate to a removal of essential substance. Tertullian declares by way of conclusion: ‘Thus also, when the resurrection takes effect, it will be possible to be changed, converted, and reformed, while the substance remains unimpaired (*mutari converti reformari licebit cum salute substantiae*)’ (55.12). This is, in some ways, Tertullian’s version of Athenagoras’ argument about what constitutes *permanence*.

In chapter 56 Tertullian’s oft-made claim that the whole person (*totus homo*) must be restored for the application of justice implies that it must not only be both body and soul which face together judgement for the deeds committed by both together but the same person who does so. At 56.3–4 he comments that

it is not credible that either the mind (*mentem*) or the memory (*memoriam*) or the conscience (*conscientiam*) of a person who today exists, [to be] abolished (*aboleri*) by reason of that festal garment of immortality and incorruption, since in that case the revenue and usufruct of resurrection, and the stability of divine judgement upon both substances, would be ineffective. If I do not remember that it is I whose deserts are, how shall I give glory to God (*si non meminerim me esse qui merui, quomodo gloriam deo dicam*)? How shall I sing to him the new song, if I am unaware that it is I from whom thanks are due (*quomodo canam illi novum canticum, nesciens me esse qui gratiam debeam*)?

And he might have made more explicit, what is the quality of righteous judgement where the punished/rewarded do not know, through first-person perspective, that it is their deeds which are dealt with by God? Tertullian here, then, makes explicit what Athenagoras only made implicit, that the demands of judgement, properly executed, requires a *first-person perspective* and the *memory* of the restored/reconstituted/re-created person. Continuity is both indicated and guaranteed by memory. Otherwise the condemned (or the rewarded) might properly ask: *why me?*

In chapter 57 of the treatise Tertullian deals with the claim of his opponents that if in the resurrection ‘the very same substance (*ipsa eademque substantia*) is recalled to existence, along with its own shape, outline and quality (*cum sua forma linea qualitate*), then it retains also the rest of its distinguishing marks (*insignibus suis*)’ – blindness, perhaps, lameness, palsy – ‘and that however one was marked at his decease, so will he also return’ (57.1). But, replies Tertullian, ‘What is belief in the resurrection, unless believing it entire (*integram*)? For if the flesh is to be restored from dissolution, much more will it be recalled from discomfort’ (57.2). ‘If we are changed into glory’, he declares, ‘how much more into health? The defects that accrue to bodies are an accident: their integrity is a property (*propria est*)’ (57.3). Does *propria* here equate to substance? Tertullian argues that our bodies, no matter how mutilated before or after death, will recover their perfect integrity in the resurrection. ‘To nature, not to injury are we restored; to our state by birth, not to our condition by accident do we rise again’ (57.5). And ‘God does not raise the dead, if he does not raise them up entire’ (57.6). ‘For a dead man to be raised again is precisely the same as for him to be made entire’ (57.6).

In chapter 59 he argues that our flesh in the resurrection is capable, without losing its essential identity, of bearing with the changed conditions of eternal life (or of eternal death) and in chapter 60 that all the characteristics of our bodies will be retained, whatever their change in function may be. In chapter 61 he continues this argument and declares that

how much more, when [humankind’s] salvation is secure, and especially in an eternal dispensation, shall we not cease to desire those things [like matters associated with our stomachs and our generative organs], for which, even here below, we are not unaccustomed to check our longings.

(61.7)

In chapter 62 he discusses our Lord’s words at *Matthew* 22.30 about the dead being ‘like angels’ and argues that this dominical claim does not deprive the dead of corporeal substance (62.4). In the concluding chapter, Tertullian declares that ‘the flesh shall rise again, wholly in every person, in its own identity, in its absolute integrity’ (63.1). He declares also that ‘both natures has [Christ] already united (*foederavit*) in his own self’ (*ibid.*). But his opponents, in repudiating the resurrection of the flesh, in fact repudiate her creator (63.6). Thus does he conclude the most comprehensive, if not the most impressive, defences of a primary article of classic Christian belief.

Thus, for two Fathers so far, Athenagoras and Tertullian, there is a gap and a measure of discontinuity between the state of being dead and that of resurrection but it hardly matters. For Athenagoras discontinuity does not mean impermanence, while for Tertullian that God can both create and re-create out of nothing solves any problem. Thus for neither does there seem to be a problem at all, or at least not one that is resolvable.

Origen appears at least to touch on the matter of the continuity of time and space in the *De Principiis*. That he understands that earth and heaven – and does so in company with most in the ancient world – somehow occupy the same spatial and temporal dimension is reasonably clear. At 2.11.6 he speaks of the ‘air between heaven and earth [not being] devoid of living and even rational beings (as in *1 Thessalonians* 4.17)’ – which living and rational beings, he says at 2.11.1, must ‘be always engaged in some movement or activity’, which movement and activity presumes, in my view, both time and space – and of this ‘abode’ to which the saints depart from this life being ‘in some place situated on the earth (*inaliquo in terra posito*)’, called in the holy scripture ‘paradise’. One then presumes that he regards this earth as the realm of the now living and ‘paradise’ as the transitional abode of the newly departed saints as being in the same, if adjacent, time and space. Indeed, his language in this section on the ascent of the saint from death through the various ‘abiding places’ (*John* 14.2) region of the air into the heavens themselves seem to presume this sameness of time and space from life/death to heavens. At *de Principiis* 3.6.8 Origen refers to the place where the righteous departed are given further instruction and clarification on matters which they understood but imperfectly in this life – in ‘this earth’ – as ‘that other earth’ which

when it receives all the saints, first imbues and educates them in the precepts of the true and eternal law [as in the first ‘earth’ the law ‘was a kind of school-master’] in order that they may with greater facility accept the precepts of heaven which are perfect and to which nothing can ever be added.

He repeats this reference to ‘that other earth’ at 3.6.9. Thus there is for Origen a kind of continuity between ‘this earth’ and ‘that other earth’ which implies that they might exist on the same spatial and temporal plane? At *Contra Celsum* 7.32 – where Origen is discussing the type of ‘body’ required for the soul to inhabit a particular realm, a ‘material’ body for a ‘material’ realm – he declares that the soul, ‘in its own nature incorporeal and invisible’, requires ‘a body suited to the nature of the environment’ in which it might find itself and that the body worn in this life ‘is now superfluous in its second state’ and thus it will put ‘a body on top of that which it possessed formerly, because it needs a better garment for the purer, ethereal, and heavenly regions’. The matter of the continuity between this place and that other, however, he does not make at all clear. It is, of course, not the issue with which he is then dealing.

He also, while clearly wishing to make clear that the body in which we die and which will decay or be scattered is that in which we are raised from death – albeit transformed in the way in which the apostle describes in *1 Corinthians* 15 – does

not appear in his extant writings to be concerned about the matter of any [temporal] gap in continuity, or of its implications for a continuity of personal identity, between life-and-death and resurrection existence. He may well have addressed this matter in his now largely lost *De Resurrectione*. It is apparent, however, that this was not an issue which Celsus had raised in his writings against the Christian doctrine of resurrection. This is unusual in some ways given that both Athenagoras and Tertullian recognised it as a matter with which they were required to deal. Yet Carolyn Bynum Walker says of Origen that he ‘thus solved the problem of identity more successfully than any other thinker of Christian antiquity’.³¹

The *Letter to Rheginos* is in large part about personal identity. It is about what constitutes authentic personhood, what constitutes the authentic self in the context of life in this world and that in the next. The purpose of the letter is to address the question of what it means to be restored to the Pleroma (44.31–32), about how the Saviour Christ gave the elect, and only them, the way of immortality in the life beyond this one (45.22–23). This latter passage has possible echoes in it of *John* 14.3–6. The continuity of the person, that elect person, that is, who will experience resurrection, is not a problem recognised by our author. The authentic self of the elect person has a seamless existence of sorts from his or her predestined beginning until his or her restoration to the Pleroma. The only change to this on the way is his or her enfleshment in this life which will be shed in time. There is no gap, as it were, to acknowledge and explain or resolve. At 45.31–40 – as we saw in Chapter 2 – the elect are described by our author as the ‘[sun]beams’ of Christ – they are revealed in this life as ‘wearing him’ (45.29–31) (and its echoes of *Romans* 13.14; *Ephesians* 4.24; and *1 Corinthians* 15.49) – who are ‘held fast’ by him until their death [lit. their setting] [echoes of *Ephesians* 5.14?] and then ‘are drawn to heaven by him, as rays are by the sun, being unrestrained by anything’ and this is the ‘spiritual resurrection’ (with echoes of *1 Corinthians* 15.42–46). There is no break – apart from the sojourn of the elect in this life – and no gap in continuity. At 46.21–24,

The thought of those who are saved shall not perish. The mind (νοῦς) of those who have known [Christ] shall not perish.

Here we find a declaration of the authentic self – with echoes of *Colossians* 3.2–3 and possibly, too, of *Romans* 8.6 – and that only part of the enfleshed elect destined for salvation as they were predestined from the very beginning (46.27), predestined from that beginning not to ‘fall into the foolishness of those without knowledge’ but rather ‘to enter into the wisdom of those who have known the Truth’ (46.27–32).

At 47.12–13 our author asks Rheginos whether that which is his does not exist with him – after he has made clear to him that he existed before he was enfleshed on entering into this world (κόσμος) (47.4–6) – and declares that what is better than flesh (mind, thought?) is ‘the cause of life’ (47.9–10). It is possible here – the translation is difficult – that our author suggests to Rheginos that in his resurrected

state he will receive a form of flesh when he ascends into the Pleroma: ‘Why, then, will you not receive flesh (σάρξ) when you ascend into the Aeon?’ (47.6–8). This may suggest, in Peel’s words, a ‘new transformed flesh’.³² What is the elect person’s – and his or her body would be this – will go with him or her. It certainly provides an echo of *1 Corinthians* 15.44. But for our present purposes, it is clear that, regardless of whether elect take with them to the Pleroma no body or a transformed one, there is a seamlessness to their progress and thereby no gap or lack of continuity with which to deal.

At 47.17–20 our author perhaps suggests to Rheginos that because his bodily existence in this life is corruption, the ‘absence’ of this corruption will be a gain for him when he ascends. When he departs [to the Pleroma] he ‘will not give up what is better’ – his mind and thought – but even that which is worse has ‘grace for it’. This means perhaps that he will take a transformed, graced body with him on his ascent to what is better. Or does it mean that the corrupt body has merely been graced in this life? At 48.2–3 he declares that only the ‘living [members] which exist within the Elect will arise’. For the visible members (μέλος) which are dead, he has already said, will not be saved (47.38–48.1). This ‘living member’ is clearly the mind or thought. He then – in almost certain response to a question previously from Rheginos, ‘*what is the resurrection (ἀνάστασις)?*’ – answers that ‘it is always the disclosure or revealing of those who have arisen’ (48.4–6). There are here, of course, possible echoes of *Romans* 8.19 – the revealing of the children of God – and of *Colossians* 3.4 – the revealing of the faithful with Christ in glory at the resurrection. He then employs the story of the Transfiguration with Elijah and Moses (*Mark* 9.4 et al) as examples that this resurrection is no illusion. But of course, it is clear here that this resurrection is not that of something – or someone – which has fallen, like a body. It is a disclosure, a revelation. And there is no gap; there is continuity with the life of this world. The new life is a transformed one, or at least one in which the imperfections have been shed, but it is continuous.

At 48.34–38 he asserts that the resurrection – which, unlike the material world, is no illusion (φαντασία) – is ‘the revelation of that which exists and the transformation of things and a transition (μεταβολή) into newness’. Are there echoes here again of *Romans* 8.19 – and its reference to the ‘revealing of the children of God’ – and of *Romans* 6.4 – and ‘newness of life’ in which the resurrected walk? ‘That which exists’, authentic existence, is the mind and thought and the transition from life-and-death to new-life is clearly immediate. At 49.13–16 – as we saw in Chapter 2 – our author urges Rheginos to flee from the divisions (μερισμός) and fetters of this life – a very Platonic view of this age – and thereby ‘you have already (ἤδη) the resurrection’. For here the ‘resurrection’, as our author understands, is not so much the rising of the dead as the realisation of a life freed from the bondage of the flesh. This, of course, is perhaps the heresy – that the resurrection has already taken place – that the apostle has challenged at *2 Timothy* 2.18. The fact is that in this scenario there is not only gap-less continuity for the Elect between this life, in fetters, and the Pleroma, resurrected, but a degree of potential

overlap. He urges Rheginos, therefore, to consider himself [his authentic self] ‘as risen and [already] brought to this [resurrected life] (49.22–24)’. He urges him to ‘practise’ this new way of life, to practise (in effect) the resurrected life (49.31). The *Letter to Rheginos* sees no gap, or discontinuity, which needs explanation and employs scripture to demonstrate the orthodoxy of his argument.

Athenagoras, Tertullian, Origen and the *Letter to Rheginos* compared

We have noticed how Athenagoras and Tertullian both recognise the potential problem of personal continuity – the former particularly – but both deal with it, from their own perspective, with relative ease. For Athenagoras the requirements of providence, of justice – from the perspectives of both fairness and memory (the body and soul both bear responsibility for deeds in this present life, and the judged person must be able to remember what it is that he or she has done) – suggest that what might seem a case of discontinuity is not so. For Tertullian, dealing with the matter of providence also, and of God’s creation (and re-creation) out of nothing, declares that change (in the body) does not mean destruction but merely transformation. Origen, like Tertullian but unlike Athenagoras, sees the soul in the inter-world as active. For Origen this is an activity of learning, of instruction, in order to learn both what was in the previous life and what will be in the eternal. For the author to the *Letter to Rheginos* the matter of continuity, in one sense, does not arise. For him the almost seamless transition for the elect from this life to the Pleroma means that the resurrection is not so much the restoration of those who have died in this life but the revealing of the Elect and of the restoration – for there is an *apocatastasis* – of those Elect to the Pleroma. Three of the writers – Tertullian, Origen and the author of the *Letter* – make much use of scripture – though differently, it must be said, to suit the different needs of their arguments – while Athenagoras, at best, only makes fleeting allusions to *1 Corinthians* 15.

Notes

- 1 Lewis (1973) 8.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 *Confessions* xi.14.
- 5 Brunner (1951) 4.
- 6 Ibid., 6.
- 7 Torrance (1976) 102.
- 8 Cullman (1946), 232, declares that ‘even the bodily resurrection of the individual is bound to the temporal course of this [general redemptive] process, and therefore it cannot coincide with the time of death of any given individual’.
- 9 See Wandinger (2010) 233 and White (2006) 57.
- 10 See also Nichols (2010) 122, Hick (1976), Corcoran (2010) 202, and Davis (2010) who identifies three approaches to the problem of ‘the numerical identity between the person who once lived on earth (as it were) and the person who exists post-death’: the ‘memory criterion’, the ‘bodily criterion’, and the declaration by some philosophers

‘that it is effectively impossible to establish necessary and sufficient conditions of personal identity’ and go, for example, with ‘the ‘closest continuer’ or ‘psychological continuity’ (21f.). ‘Christians’, he says, ‘cannot go this third route’ (23), given that the Christian belief is ‘that we who live now will live again’ (ibid.).

- 11 Davies (2005) 25.
- 12 C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (London, Geoffrey Bles: 1947) in Davies, ibid., 136.
- 13 Polkinghorne (2002) 103.
- 14 Parfit (1986) 201.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid., 202.
- 17 Ibid., 203.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid., 216.
- 20 Lewis (1973) 102, Edgar (2002) 27–45, (2002) 109–121, and Polkinghorne (2002) 121f. are among those who discuss this question.
- 21 Davis (2010) 23.
- 22 Polkinghorne (2002) 105.
- 23 Volf (2006) 24.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid., 25.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid., 147.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Davis (2010) 23.
- 31 Bynum Walker (1995) 66.
- 32 Peel (1969) 42.

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Part 2

**Will I have a body,
and is it still me?**

4 The nature of post-death existence in Athenagoras

Having explored the possible contexts and settings of post-death existence – and in particular its possible successive stages and the implications for identity of any apparent discontinuity of spatio-temporal and personal existence, the ‘gap’ between death in this life and the resurrection – it would now be appropriate to explore the matter of the nature or form of such existence. Might post-death existence be embodied, for example – however such embodiment might be understood – or unembodied? Might post-death existence be only of the soul or of the mind? Might a soul or mind be existent and give expression to itself, be aware or conscious of itself, as unembodied, after the death of the body with which it has been associated in this life, in an either intermediate or final state? And then, how are we to understand the matter of the ongoing identity of such an existent or person? Is it ‘I’, ‘me’, who has died in this life but whose existence continues regardless of whether it is as embodied or as unembodied? And if so, how do we understand that identity? Is some form of continuity necessary? Is it merely numerical? Or is it psychological? Is such identity informed – at least in part – by past and [and therefore] by present relationships, by memory? This matter of personal identity and that of its possible [gap-less] continuity from state to state we have, of course, already explored in Chapter 3 above. Here we address particularly the nature of such existence, embodied or unembodied.

Visualisation, if not comprehension, requires embodiment.

Embodiment, it is said, gives *substance* to our being, enables self-awareness so that we can *feel* ourselves, enables us to have interaction and contact with our immediate environment and with other entities, existents or persons, and enables us to *locate* ourselves in relation to that environment and to other such entities, existents or persons. If this is true for our present living existence – as one assumes that it is – how true might it be for a possible post-death existence?

A comment by Elizabeth Johnson in her book *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints*,² which comment begins her exploration of the matter of post-death existence, among other things, is worth noting here:

A cardinal rule that governs this exploration is that language about what happens after death can never be taken literally because *the human mind simply*

cannot conceive existence that is set beyond dimensions of time and space [italics are mine].³

In his introduction to *Personal Identity and Resurrection: How Do We Survive our Death?* Georg Gasser comments that

*[e]mbodiment suffices for conceiving of the human person as an individual who was fundamentally embedded in relationships on earth and still is so in the afterlife,*⁴

that

*[t]he basis for human personhood is not physical reality but embodied existence which is able to participate in a communal reality created and maintained by God,*⁵

and that

[e]mbodiment indicates, so to speak, that human persons are not isolated "pure" souls but subjects whose nature is to forge experiences by entering into relationships and taking up a determinate perspective toward the world they occupy [italics are mine].⁶

In Ellen Clark-King's study of Christian women in Newcastle, England, the women interviewed understood the existence of the departed '*as entirely separate from that of the material body that they had inhabited* [italics are mine][during their earthly existence]'.⁷ They expressed the view that the spirit, '*the true essence of the person*', was somehow set free, but that '*something of their essence would still identify them as the person they had once been*'.⁸ One interviewee said that 'Yeah, I think there'll be a recognition, but it won't be as it is now'.⁹ Some of the women interviewed for the project believed that they had been visited by the spirits of the dead relatives but there was no suggestion that the visits were necessarily in an embodied state. The matter of recognition, either in this life or the next, was assumed but not explained in terms of embodiment.

In C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*¹⁰ the narrator takes a day trip in a bus from a rather grey, overcast hell to a much lighter and brighter heaven with some of his fellow departed to see whether he would like to stay in the latter permanently. As he alights from the bus in meadows on the outskirts of heaven, he sees his fellow dead in a new light for the first time:

I gasped when I saw them. Now that they were in the light, they were transparent – fully transparent when they stood between me and it [sc. the light], smudgy and imperfectly opaque when they stood in the shadow of some tree. They were in fact ghosts: man-shaped stains on the brightness of the air. . . . I noticed that the grass did not bend under their feet: even the dew drops were not disturbed.¹¹

He then discovers, as he tries to interact with the surrounding environment – with a small flower, with a leaf and with the grass beneath his feet – that he can see ‘the grass not only between my feet but *through* them. I also was a phantom’.¹² He later makes reference to ‘my unsubstantial feet’.¹³ He then catches sight of people from heaven who have come to meet the travellers on the bus. They are ‘bright’, the earth shakes ‘under their tread as their strong feet sank into the wet turf’, they crush the grass and scatter the dew. Some are naked, some are robed. But all exhibit ‘the massive grandeur of muscle and the radiant smoothness of flesh’.¹⁴ Some are bearded but above all, unlike his unsubstantial self, they are ‘the solid people’.¹⁵ Yet our narrator also calls one of them a ‘solid spirit’.

In Will Self’s oddly engaging *How the Dead Live*¹⁶ the main character, the dead Lily Bloom, living with other deceased persons in a London borough, Dulston – a district given over to ‘those no longer breathing’ – travels around the city among the living and the dead accompanied always by what the book dusk jacket describes as ‘her calcified, pop-obsessed foetus’ who never leaves her side; by her dead, foul-mouthed son who died in a traffic accident while still a young boy; and by sundry other ‘creatures made of her own unwanted fat’. She, who is also the narrator, describes the dead as spirits ‘unable to touch another’ whether that other is dead or alive. The inability of the dead to make (physical) contact with another person or physical object is a source of great disappointment and frustration to her: ‘When you’re dead you can hold yourself against a thing, you can rub up and down, intent upon a precise degree of resistance the surface presents, but you won’t *feel* it; it doesn’t *touch* you’.¹⁷ She speaks of how her son likes to play among the traffic of the living world in order to taunt her – playing a game which he was playing when he was killed by an automobile – but of how the cars simply ‘drove clear through him – like he was a will-o’-the-wisp bonnet magnet’.¹⁸ And then she describes how ‘[i]n Piccadilly there were unquiet spirits aplenty, the futile shades of dead junkies and drabs and auto-accident victims, who make it their business to whirl distractedly around Eros’s standard’.¹⁹ And when she meets with the bureaucrats of the dead – the deatheaucrats, she calls them – in an office situated in the premises of a failed business – an apt locale for the dead of this story to assemble – she declares that ‘we shades gather among the shadows in the waiting room’.²⁰

Thus contemporary literary culture assumes an embodiment of sorts for any possible post-death existence, given that a perception of such an existence without such embodiment seems somehow impossible. Yet this, of course, is as seen from the perspective of this present, living world where embodiment, for the purposes of communication and personal interaction, seems mandatory. What one cannot conceive of from this perspective might not be so from the other in a state beyond or other than this one. We, in this world, cannot make the rules for the governance of the other.

First, however, before I address the thought of the Church Father with whom we will deal in this present chapter, Athenagoras – we will address the thought of Tertullian in Chapter 5 and that of both Origen and the author of the *Letter to Rheginos* in Chapter 6 – I would like to explore the major texts of scripture which deal with the nature of post-death existence, in particular that of the resurrection.

Biblical representations of the nature of post-death existence

The obvious place to begin in a brief exploration of the position of scripture on the nature of the post-death existence is *1 Corinthians* 15, given that it is the most extended treatment of the matter in the New Testament, and then later *2 Corinthians* 4 and 5, as well as the story of the faithful departed being ‘like angels, neither marrying nor being given in marriage’ found across the Synoptic Gospels at *Matthew* 22.23ff, *Mark* 12.18ff, *Luke* 20.27ff and *Luke* 16.19–31, the story of Dives and Lazarus, which passages constitute the range of biblical references employed by our writers in their dealing with the nature of post-death existence, including resurrection existence.

In the first 11 verses of the 15th chapter of *1 Corinthians* Paul addresses the matter of Jesus’ own resurrection but says merely, without elaboration, that the risen Jesus ‘appeared (ὤφθη)’ to Cephas, the Twelve, the five hundred, then to James and to the other apostles, and finally to Paul himself’. There is nothing said about the form of his appearance, merely that he ‘appeared’ to all these people. Paul does not speak explicitly of Jesus being raised in the flesh, merely that he has been raised or raised from death. Only at verse 35 does the apostle begin to explore the questions of how the dead are raised and of the kind of body (ποιῶ σώματι) with which the dead are to be so raised. The latter question itself implies both that post-death, or more properly in this case resurrection existence, is embodied – as do more explicitly the statements found in verses 42 to 44 – but also hints that the form of embodiment may not be as we know it now. He famously contrasts the natures of the sown and the raised body (vv. 42–44) as perishable/imperishable, dishonoured/glorified, weakness/power, physical/spiritual, though the physical (ψυχικόν) here means ‘soul-ish’ rather than ‘material’. In this life we bear the image of the ‘man of dust (τοῦ χοικοῦ)’, in the other life that of the ‘man of heaven (τοῦ ἐπουρανίου)’ (v. 49). In verse 50 Paul makes his somewhat controversial statement – controversial in the sense that it would seem, as we have seen in earlier chapters, to contradict the notion of the resurrection of the body – that ‘*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor the perishable the imperishable*’. The statement, especially for those early Christ theologians who wished to argue for an embodied resurrection, was therefore problematic, and they spent much time dealing with it. Irenaeus, who covers the matter of the resurrection in the first 15 chapters of his *Adversus Haereses*, devotes five of them to this particular verse. But again, the implication of this particular verse, at the very least, is that the form of existence, the form of embodiment, will not be as we know it now. The apostle here speaks of the dead being raised imperishable, of this mortal [body] putting on immortality (vv. 53–54). He says that we will be changed (ἀλλαγησόμεθα) (vv. 51–52). The dead will be transformed. This language much exercised the Fathers, many of whom were committed to the raising not only of the dead, but of their bodies.

At 15.35 Paul declares: ‘*But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?”*’ In fact, Paul deals almost exclusively only in the remainder of the chapter with the second question. Sampley points out

that the questions in verse 35 comes from a fictive τις (someone) whom Paul is only concerned to rebuke, although the second question – with what kind of body will the raised come? – ‘becomes the focus of Paul’s reflections’.²¹ Martin makes clear that what Paul’s Corinthian opponents objected to in how they understood his teaching – whether they understood this teaching correctly or not is another matter – ‘was not the future aspect of the resurrection but that it was to be a bodily resurrection’.²² They did not object to the notion of resurrection itself but to that of embodied resurrection. Hays agrees, declaring that ‘[t]his is especially clear in verses 35–37, whose entire purpose is to counter objections to the notion of an embodied resurrection’. Their ‘skepticism’, he says, ‘their denial of the resurrection was based on an aversion to the idea that the body could be reanimated after death’.²³

N.T. Wright argues in his *The Resurrection of the Son of God* that much of the argument in *1 Corinthians* up to chapter 14 leads to the need to say something ‘about the continuity between the present life and the one believers are promised in the coming age’.²⁴ In Wright’s view, and he makes a strong case, ‘there can be no doubt that Paul intends this entire chapter 15 [of *1 Corinthians*] to be an exposition of the renewal of creation, and the renewal of humankind as its focal point’.²⁵ ‘“Resurrection”’ for Paul, argues Wright,

does not refer to some part or aspect of the human being not dying but instead going on into a continuing life in a new mode; it refers to something that does die and is then given a new life.

‘When Paul spoke of “resurrection”’, Wright argues, ‘he meant “bodily resurrection”’.²⁶

After Paul has employed the commonplace idea of the sown seed as an analogy for the resurrected body (15.36–37), he declares at 15.38 that ‘God gives it [the seed] a body as he has chosen and to each kind of seed its own body’ and at 15.39 that ‘not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish’. He then, after speaking of the differing glories of heavenly and earthly bodies, and the differences between that of the sun and the moon and the stars, and even between different stars, declares at 15.42–44 that

so it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. (43) It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. (44) It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.

First Corinthians 15.42–44 is intended, Wright says, to make clear how different, how other, the new, resurrection body will be from the present one.²⁷ He properly challenges many of the translations of *psychikon* and *pneumatikon* against the widely held notion that ‘physical’ and ‘spiritual’ are apt translations in this (or

any) context. This, he says, is to venture into Plato's 'ugly ditch'.²⁸ 'This multi-faceted disjunction', he says of translations of 15.44, 'is simply untrue to ancient thought in general and to Paul's thought in particular'. 'Physical' and 'spiritual' are simply inappropriate as translations, he contends.²⁹ Challenging the popular translations found in the RSV, the NRSV, the REB and The Living Bible, by way of example, he commends that of the Jerusalem Bible as nearer the apostle's intentions: 'when it is sown it *embodies the soul*, when it is raised it *embodies the spirit* [the italics are mine]. If the soul has its own embodiment, so does the spirit have its own embodiment'.³⁰ Gordon Fee, in his extended commentary on the epistle, believes that the three sets of contrasts in verses 42–44 – perishable/imperishable, dishonour/glory, and weakness/power – 'are not intended to describe the "dead body" that is buried, but to contrast the present body with its future expression'.³¹

The transformed body, therefore, is not composed of "spirit"; it is *a body adapted to the eschatological existence that is under the ultimate domination of the Spirit* [the italics are mine]. Thus for Paul, to be truly *pneumatikos* is to bear the likeness of Christ (v. 49) in a transformed body, fitted for a new age.³²

Wright and others also deal with what is regarded widely as one of the more difficult verses in *I Corinthians* 15 – and found as such, as we shall, by all of our early church writers – and perhaps that which leaves open, in the view of some, the possibility that Paul did not believe in the resurrection of the body-as-flesh. In *I Corinthians* 15.50 the apostle declares that "flesh and blood" cannot inherit God's kingdom, nor can corruption inherit incorruption'. Paul's normal use of the Greek word for 'flesh' would indicate, says Wright, however, that 'flesh and blood' here

is a way of referring to ordinary, corruptible, decaying human existence. It does not simply mean, as it has so often been taken to mean, "physical humanity" in the normal modern sense, but the "present physical humanity (as opposed to the future one), which is subject to decay and death".³³

How do other contemporary theological and biblical scholars view this verse, particularly as it relates to the matter of the resurrection of the flesh once dead? Barrett took the view that 'flesh and blood' here refers only to 'living men' in contrast to corpses in a state of decomposition.³⁴ Fee, for his part, maintains that in the verses leading up to verse 50 Paul is concerned with the question from verse 35, 'With what kind of body?'.³⁵ Yet, he says, verse 50 does not complete verses 45–49 but rather introduces the final section of the chapter from verses 51–58.³⁶ This, it does, as part of making Paul's point there that the body raised is a transformed expression of the body that was sown in death.³⁷ My own view is that it is not a case of either/or; verse 50 both concludes the verses which precede it and introduces the ones which come after it. It is a connecting verse. Verse 50 is, in my view then, a link sentence which effectively summarises and concludes

the previous 15 verses – Paul begins with the words ‘What I am saying, brothers and sisters [from 35–49]’ – and then introduces the argument from verse 51–58. Fee doesn’t address quite the same issue as does Wright nor, for that matter, as do the other scholars mentioned. Whatever the phrase ‘flesh and blood’ may mean precisely for Paul, it is clear that it does not equate with embodied or bodily form, as we know it in this life and existence, and thus verse 50 in its entirety does not, and cannot, rule out embodied existence in the afterlife.

The story, told variously at *Mark 12.18–27*, *Matthew 22.23–33* and *Luke 20–27–40* about the woman successively married to each of seven brothers after each sibling, in his turn, dies, offers, both in the question asked by the resurrection-non-believing Sadducees of Jesus, and of the answer which he gives, as ‘[f]ar and away the most important question about resurrection in the whole gospel tradition’.³⁸ *In the resurrection whose wife will she be? For the seven had all married her.*

What is of interest, of course, is not the question but Jesus’ response: in Mark it is that those raised from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage but rather are like (ὡς) unto angels in heaven (12.25), as does Matthew at 22.30. Luke’s account agrees that those raised neither marry nor are given in marriage but because they do not die any more are equal to the angels (ισάγγελοι) and are children of God, being children of the resurrection (20.35ff.). Wright points to the fact that when the Sadducees and the Pharisees were engaged in controversy about the resurrection, two questions, one ‘ultimate’ and the other ‘penultimate’, shaped that discussion: the first was about whether ‘there would be a final re-embodiment’ and the other about the ‘sort of existence those awaiting re-embodiment would have in the meantime’.³⁹ He also observes that ‘[t]his is the one time that any of the evangelists have Jesus say anything substantial about what resurrection from the dead actually involves’.⁴⁰ He then concludes that when Jesus speaks of those who are raised being ‘like the angels in heaven’, he means this not ontologically, nor locationally, but functionally in the sense that ‘the angels do not marry’. Nowhere, he says, is it suggested anywhere in early Christian writings ‘that resurrected people have turned into angels’.⁴¹ Edwards takes the view that this passage from Mark’s Gospel shows that ‘[t]he resurrected life is not a prolonged earthly life but life in an entirely new dimension’, as *1 Corinthians 15.40–44* suggests.⁴² He also seems to accept that the phrase ‘like angels in heaven’ refers to the resurrected existence itself and not merely to a state of the absence of marriage there: ‘The idea that resurrected existence would be angelic in nature was not unknown in the first century (*1 Enoch 15:4*; *2 Apoc. Bar. 51:10*)’.⁴³ He even declares that these two ‘categories [of resurrected existence]’, marital existence and angelic existence, ‘repeat those of *Genesis 6.1–2*’.⁴⁴

2 Corinthians 5.10: *For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.* Here it is clear that Paul regards that one of the purposes of the resurrection is to provide for judgement. And the implication is clear, given that it is for things done in the body in this present life which are the subject of that judgement, that it would be both just and reasonable for that body, in whatever

form and however transformed, to be present, with the soul, for that moment of judgement.

Luke 16.19–31, the story of Dives and Lazarus: Whether this story in Luke is set in the context of some interim, transitional stage between death and the final resurrection or rather at the end of things (see Chapter 2 above for a discussion of this question,) the fact remains that the scene is represented by the writer in bodily terms. It speaks of Lazarus being asked – and it is possible, of course, that the account is meant to be understood metaphorically, and the torment experienced by the rich man is meant to be understood psychologically and not in a bodily sense – to dip his finger in water and to offer some cooling relief to the rich man. White makes the comment that ‘when we say, for example, “I believe in the resurrection of the body”, we do not mean it woodenly and literally as if some exact resemblance of our present material bodies is brought back out of the grave’.⁴⁵ This comment is one which is clearly consistent with the scriptural view, at least that espoused by the apostle in *1 Corinthians* 15. White says that traditional biblical doctrine ‘commits us to using images of recognizable continuity with this life’, ‘to commit us to a heaven which includes recognizable reality, at least in some sense’.⁴⁶ He also points to how we ‘instinctively’ speak of ourselves ‘having a body’ rather than ‘being a body’, recognising somehow that we are is more than our embodied state.⁴⁷

Athenagoras’ representation of the nature of post-death existence

Athenagoras, Tertullian and Origen – the thought of the latter two on the nature of post-death existence will be addressed in Chapters 5 and 6 respectively – are quite clear that the form of the resurrected person must be in both natures, body and soul, though each writer has a distinct position on the form of the resurrected body and even, to a degree, on the form of the soul which survives the death of the body and which may exist for a time post-death apart from it. Athenagoras’ view of the nature of the post-death existence of the human being is at least in part determined by the requirement of a righteous divine judgement, although this is not for him, as we will see, the primary reason for resurrection. His thinking on the matter of resurrection generally, and on the nature and form of the resurrection body, is not particularly informed by scriptural exegesis. There are a few possible allusions to *1 Corinthians* 15 and *2 Corinthians* 5. The references to seeds at 3.2 of his *De Resurrectione* have nothing to do with Paul’s analogy in *1 Corinthians* 36–38. That at 18.5 to ‘this corruptible and dispersible body, according to the Apostle, needing to put on incorruptibility’ clearly, however, does reflect *1 Corinthians* 15.53 as does ‘each receiving his just recompense for what he did in the body, whether good or evil’ in *2 Corinthians* 5.10. The ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’ at 19.3 may be an allusion to *1 Corinthians* 15.32, or to *Isaiah* 22.13, even if it was also a commonplace in antiquity. His argument for the resurrection of the body-as-flesh, however, generally places no reliance on scripture at all. Allusions where they occur are supportive but not the primary source of argument.

At 3.1, as part of his argument that God has the power to raise the dead, whatever their circumstances, Athenagoras declares that ‘if when [God] first gave [bodies] form (σύστασιν), he made bodies of men and their principal constituents (ἀρχάς) from nothing, he will just as easily raise them up again after their dissolution, however it may have taken place’. But all this, and much of Athenagoras’ opening chapters – from chapters 3 to 9 to be precise – have to do with the *can* and not with the *did* or the *does*; whether it is possible but not whether it will. And yet it is clear that Athenagoras takes the view that God will, in fact, do these things. The creation of our bodies, declares Athenagoras, shows that God’s power is sufficient for their resurrection. Whoever can create us from nothing can easily raise us up again from dissolution, however this might have happened (3.1). This he can do however our bodies might be made up: from matter, from the elements or from seeds (3.2). The power which can give shape to the shapeless can give order to the unstructured and disordered, can gather into one that which is many or divide into many that which is one and simple, can give articulation to that which is undifferentiated, can give life to that which is not alive; such a power can unite what is dissolved, raise what has fallen, restore the dead to life and change the corruptible into incorruption (3.2). From this it follows, he argues, that God can, having reconstituted them, raise bodies parts of which may have been devoured by animals, one or many (3.3). In chapter 4 he then restates and deals again with certain objections. Some object that dead bodies from shipwrecks or river drownings are sometimes devoured by fish while others resulting from warfare or other calamities are left in the open to be devoured by animals. These bodies, his opponents say, are then united to the bodies of these creatures and thus separation would be impossible (4.1–2). Some parts of such animals might then be devoured in their turn by other men and thus united with their bodies (4.3). Such opponents sometimes speak of acts of cannibalism – even of children by their parents – and for this and like reasons resurrection of particular bodies would seem impossible (4.4). At the very least the reconstitution of some bodies in the resurrection would be incomplete. The matters raised in 4.3 and 4.4 are concerned with the so-called ‘chain-consumption’ problem. From 5.1 to 9.2 Athenagoras seeks to rebut these objections before moving to the matter of God’s will to raise the bodies of the dead from 10.1.

At 8.2 and 8.3 Athenagoras challenges any suggestion that cannibalism is not contrary to nature and sacrilegious and that its practice gives any support to the notion that the flesh of one person can be properly joined by eating to the body of another. Athenagoras then moves to the conclusion of this section on the power of God to raise the bodies of the dead. Such parts of the body eaten by others lose their nourishing power and are in time dispersed to the elements out of which they arose and remain united with them only for a time. And then, at the resurrection, by the wisdom and the power of him who links every kind of animal with its appropriate properties, all the parts of a body will be reunited, wherever and however they have been scattered, and there will be restored the harmonious composition of the body raised (8.4). Athenagoras challenges and dismisses the employment of parallels and analogies from the works of man in relation to

restoration and re-creation. To compare God's possibilities with human endeavours is to mock God, he declares (9.1). He concludes this consideration of the power of God to raise the dead with the quotation: '*What is impossible with men is possible with God*' (9.2). This saying would appear to come from *Luke* 18.27 – '*What is impossible for mortals is possible for God*' – but such a source is not acknowledged by Athenagoras.

Chapters 10 and 11 (the latter only in part) deal with the will of God to resurrect the dead and with the question of whether the resurrection, by way of a reconstitution of dead bodies, is worthy of him. At 10.1 Athenagoras makes clear that what God regards as either unjust or unworthy of himself is thereby foreign to his will. It is clear, he says, beginning with the matter of justice, that no being distinct from man and of created things is wronged by the resurrection of the body [of man]. It cannot, he says, wrong purely rational creatures [like the angels?], for there is thereby no affront or injury to their own existence, and neither can it be so to creatures without reason or soul, for they will not exist after the resurrection (10.2). No existence means no injustice. And even if the animals were to exist beyond the resurrection their present subservience to man will be replaced by freedom, for man will then have no need of their service (10.3). Their inferior status in the present time means that it would be no injustice at the resurrection to deny them what would be granted to man (10.4). And there can be therefore, he continues, no injustice in the resurrection for men. In this present life the soul lives with a corruptible and passible body; how could it complain to be joined with an incorruptible and impassible one at the resurrection (10.5)? As to the alleged unworthiness of the resurrection of the body, Athenagoras declares, a Creator who makes a corruptible and passible body cannot be said to be acting unworthily when creating an incorruptible and impassible one (10.6). Athenagoras concludes this consideration of the power and will of God to raise the body with the observation that because each point of his examination has been demonstrated from the 'first natural principles (τῶν κατὰ φύσιν πρώτων)' and 'what flows from these points logically (τῶν τούτοις ἐπομένων)' it is clear that the resurrection of decomposed bodies is a work that is, for the Creator, possible, willed and worthy' (11.1). Objections to them and the absurd opinions (παράλογον) of unbelievers are thereby false. Indeed, he concludes, what is possible is willed, what willed by God thereby possible and worthy of him (11.2). In these first 11 chapters of the treatises Schoedel sees perhaps four allusions or quotations from scripture – *Luke* 8.13 at 1.3, *I Corinthians* 15.53 at 3.2, *John* 11.25 at 8.4 and *Luke* 18.27 at 9.2 – but at no point does Athenagoras identify or acknowledge explicitly any of these either by quote or allusion as scriptural, something one would presume he would do in conversation with fellow Christians.

Athenagoras next explores the primary reason for the coming into existence of human being (11.7–13.3) and follows this with an investigation of the nature of that being (14.1f.). At 11.7 he signals his intention to now deal with three matters: the purpose of human existence; the nature of human being; and providence/judgement. At 12.1 Athenagoras asks whether, with respect to the purpose of human being, whether it was 'that after his creation he should live and remain and existence in accordance with the nature with which he was created or should

exist for the use of another’? He then establishes that God did not, could not (being) make human being in vain (12.3). He establishes, too, that God did not make human being for his own use – for God needs nothing – nor for the sake of any of his other created works (ibid.). ‘Indeed’, he says, ‘reason can find use [external to human being] which is the cause of the creation of human being’ (12.4). Given, therefore, that the human being was not made for God’s own use or for that of any other created thing and that God does not create, does not act, in vain, he concludes that ‘God made human being for his (sc. human being’s) own sake and out of the goodness and wisdom which is reflected throughout creation’ (12.5). Indeed, he says, ‘God made human being simply for the survival of such creatures themselves [human beings] that they should not be kindled for a short time, then entirely extinguished’ (12.5). God has assigned a ‘fleeting form of life’ to irrational creatures – snakes, birds, fish, and so on – but he

has decreed an unending existence to those who bear his image in themselves, are gifted with intelligence, and share the faculty for rational discernment so that they, knowing their Creator and his power and wisdom and complying with law and justice, might live without distress eternally with the powers by which they governed their former life, even though they were [then] in corruptible and earthly bodies.

(12.6)

God intended eternity for such human being. Athenagoras continues,

As to that which was created simply for the sake of existing and living in accordance with its own nature, there can be no reason for it ever to perish entirely since the very reason for its existence is comprehended by its nature and is seen to be simply and solely this – to exist,

(12.7)

‘to exist for ever’ (12.8). Thus is the resurrection of the body necessitated at the very least by the very God-given nature of human being itself. Human being provides its own rationale for its own resurrection.

At 12.8 Athenagoras affirms that ‘the soul continues to exist [as is, as it were]’, while the

body is moved by nature to what is suitable for it and is receptive to the changes decreed for it, including, along with the other changes affecting age, appearance, or size, also the resurrection. For the resurrection from the dead and the transformation (μεταβολή) for the better which will affect those still alive at that time constitute a form of change and indeed the last of all.

(12.8–9)

It is noteworthy here that for Athenagoras the ‘transformation for the better (πρὸς τὸ κρεῖττον μεταβολή)’ seems only for those still alive at the time of the resurrection and not those already dead.

At 13.1 he speaks of the form of hope for survival in an incorruptible form. He declares, too, that we put our hope and trust in ‘an infallible security, the will of our Maker’, knowing that ‘he would not have formed such an animal [human being] and adorned him with all that contributes to permanence (πρὸς διαμονήν) if he not wanted this creature to be permanent (διαμένειν)’ (13.1).

The Creator of our universe (the Platonic phrase τοῦ παντὸς δημιουργός) made man that he might participate in rational life and, after contemplating God’s majesty and universal wisdom, remain in existence and make them the object of his eternal contemplation, in accordance with the divine will and the nature allotted to him.

(13.2)

‘The reason then for man’s creation guarantees his eternal survival, and his eternal survival guarantees his resurrection, without which he could not survive *as man*’ (13.2). But why is the resurrection of the body necessary for this survival? In a word, *providence*.

Athenagoras then moves to a consideration of the third reason for resurrection, that of the righteous judgement of body and soul as one [cf. 2 *Corinthians* 5.10]. This is not at all, however, as Athenagoras makes clear, the primary reason for the resurrection of the body along with the soul. For he is adamant at 14.6 that ‘the resurrection does not take place primarily (κατὰ πρῶτον λόγον) [nor certainly not solely] because of the judgement but because of the will of the Creator and the nature of the created’. And further, he makes clear at 15.1 that the argument from creation is itself sufficient to establish the resurrection of the body. From 15.2–7 he addresses the essential nature of man as one of a psycho-physical unity. Essentially he argues here that

human nature universally considered (πᾶσα κοινῶς ἢ τῶν ἀνθρώπων φύσις) is constituted by an immortal soul and a body which has been assigned to it at its creation . . . one living being (ένος ὄντος ζώου) composed of two parts (ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων).

(15.2)

All this means that everything – the creation, nature, existence, deeds and experiences and way of life of the human person, and an end proper to his nature – ‘might be fully integrated into one harmonious and concordant whole’ (15.2). It is appropriate and necessary that everything to do with the human being – its creation, nature, existence, deeds and experiences and way of life, and an end suitable to its nature – ‘might be fully integrated into one harmonious and concordant whole’ (ibid.). And thus ‘the end will truly be one if the same living being whose end it is remains constituted as before (τοῦ αὐτοῦ ζώου κατὰ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σύστασιν ὄντος)’ (15.3), that is, as body and soul.

The living body will be genuinely the same (τὸ αὐτὸ . . . καθαρῶς) if everything remains the same which serves as its parts (τῶν αὐτῶν ὄντων πάντων

ἐξ ὧν μερῶν τὸ ζῶον). And these will remain the same in a union appropriate to them (κατὰ τὴν ἰδιάζουσιν ἔνωσιν) if what has undergone dissolution is again united (πάλιν ἐσωθέντως) to reconstitute the living being (πρὸς τὴν τοῦ ζῶου συστασιν).

(ibid.)

‘It is man – not simply soul (οὐ ψυχή καθ’ ἑαυτήν) – who received understanding and reason. Man, then, who consists of both soul and body must survive forever’ (15.6). In chapter 16 Athenagoras addresses the matter of continuity [and the gap] with which issue we dealt in chapter 3 of the present work. He then returns in chapter 18 to the argument for the resurrection of the body/flesh on the basis of divine providence and justice. Here he looks at ‘the reward or punishment due to each person in accordance with just judgement and of the end that befits human life’ (18.2). And this will be grounded in God’s providence and his care for his creation (18.2–3). For Athenagoras ‘just judgement requites the composite creature (τοῦ συναμφοτέρου) for his deeds. . . . it is man, the combination of both [body and soul], who receives judgement for each of his deeds’ (18.5). And this judgement, this justice, declares Athenagoras, clearly does not happen while a person is alive in this life, nor immediately after death – for then the soul is separated from the body for a time – but can only happen once these are reunited at the resurrection (18.5). For Athenagoras what is raised must be exactly that which had died in all its component parts. For him, therefore, the resurrected person must be presented in all his or her previous physicality, and this requires both numerical and personal identity. Through chapters 19 to 23 he expands this argument with examples of the inappropriateness of rewarding or punishing in the afterlife the soul alone for deeds or vices committed while a whole person as both body and soul, but adds nothing essentially new. From chapter 24 he concludes his argument for the resurrection from the perspective of the final cause.

He moves, therefore, to the matter of ‘the argument from the final cause (τὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ τέλους. . . . λόγον)’ (24.1). ‘Every natural thing and every artefact has an end proper to it’ and this is both a natural concept shared by all (τῆς κοινῆς πάντων ἐννοίας) and something confirmed, he says, by our own observation of life’ (24.2). But there are therefore different ends for different creatures and there will not be, for example, the same end for creatures who have a share in rational discrimination (λογικῆς κρίσεως) and for those who act in accordance with an innate rational law (τὸν ἔμφυτον νόμον) and can exercise prudence and justice (24.4). A virtuous life directed to no end would be proper only to animals and beasts and not to human beings gifted with an immortal soul and rational discernment (λογικῆ κρίσει) (24.5).

Athenagoras then concludes the treatise by reminding his readers that a consideration of the end of man must be of that creature composed of its original two parts. And if this end can be explored or discovered in this present life or in that stage of existence where the soul is separated from the body, then it must be seen ‘in some other state of the same composite creature’ (25.2), that is, at the resurrection. And for the sake of continuity, it must, he says, be the union of the same souls with the same bodies (25.3). And this can happen only by the resurrection

of the body reunited with its soul. For the end of the human person – ‘to live eternally without being torn away from those things which natural reason has found first and foremost in harmony with itself, and to rejoice unceasingly in the contemplation of their Giver and his decrees’ (25.4) – must be considered as an end ‘not of one of the parts which constitute man, but of the creature made up of both parts (ἀλλὰ τοῦ συνεστῶτος ἐξ ἀμοιβῶν)’ (25.1). ‘For there is no happiness (μακαριότης) for the soul in a state of separation from the body’ (ibid.). It is clear then that Athenagoras takes the view that not only will the body be raised at the resurrection and there reunited with its soul but that it will be the same body in all its constituent parts. The idea of this body as being resurrected with a transformed nature apparently does not occur to him – although he will have been aware of the apostle’s view in *I Corinthians* – but he appears reluctant to seem even to compromise the nature of that sameness (which the more nuanced representations on the matter of the resurrected or restored body of both Tertullian and Origen, and others, as we shall see below, seem able to do). The basis for this form of resurrection is both the nature and purpose of creation itself, the power and the will of God, the very nature of the human person from creation, and the requirements of divine justice.

Summary of Athenagoras’ presentation

Athenagoras’ argument for the reality of the resurrection and the requirement for it to be a bodily one, and with the body the same as that which the person had in their pre-death existence, is based – with the first two taking precedence – on the purpose for human existence, on the nature of that existence, and on the requirements of divine justice. 1) He argues, *first*, however, that God has the power to affect a resurrection, that God can surely as easily (if not more so) recreate what he has first created. God’s power is sufficient for resurrection. ‘The power which can give shape to the shapeless, can give order to the unstructured and disordered, can unite what is dissolved, can change the corruptible into incorruption’. The last reflects the Pauline testimony but does not explicitly cite this. He addresses the so-called ‘chain consumption’ problem but sees it providing no obstacle to what God can do. In this act Athenagoras says that ‘all the parts of the body are reunited’; there is restored the harmonious composition of the body so raised. ‘What is impossible with God is possible with God’. 2) And he argues, *second*, that God does both will the act of bodily resurrection of the human being and it is worthy of him. Neither the angels nor the creatures inferior to human beings are wronged, dealt an injustice, by the resurrection of such a human being. There is no unworthiness surely in the God who makes a corruptible and passible body and (re)creates it as both incorruptible and impassible. The reconstitution of decomposed bodies is possible, willed and worthy of God.

He now presents the primary arguments for not just the capacity, desire and worthiness of resurrection on the part of God but its very necessity: the purpose of human being, its nature and the providence of God. He argues, *first*, that the human being was created not for the sake of God nor for that of any other created

being but for the sake of human being alone: to enable their survival for its own sake. God has decreed such ‘unending existence’ to human beings – as those who bear his image in themselves, as those gifted with reason, as those who share [with God] the faculty for rational discernment – that they might ‘know’ or contemplate God’s power and wisdom and comply with his law and justice. The purpose, in short, of human existence is to exist. Human being was, then, *second*, made that ‘they might participate in rational life and the contemplation of the majesty and universal wisdom of God’ in accordance with their nature. Athenagoras then argues, *third*, that such persistent, enduring human being must – for the sake of judgement at the resurrection at the very least – be composed, is composed, of an immortal soul and the body assigned to that soul at creation. For this is ‘the essential nature of man as one of a psycho-physical unity’. ‘Just judgement’, he declares, ‘requires the composite creature’. And for Athenagoras, what is raised must be ‘exactly’ that which had previously died in all its constituent parts. The resurrected person must be presented for judgement in all his or her component parts, requiring both numerical and personal identity. What has died must be raised in its entirety. For Athenagoras anything less is not the whole person. The notion of a ‘transformation’ – except for those still alive at the time of the end – has no obvious part in Athenagoras’ presentation of resurrection.

Notes

- 1 I have chosen to speak here of unembodied rather than of non-embodied existence.
- 2 Johnson (1998).
- 3 *Ibid.*, 181ff.
- 4 Gasser (2010) 12.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 13.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Clark-King (2004) 157.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 158.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 Lewis (1946).
- 11 *Ibid.*, 20.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 *Ibid.*, 25.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 24.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 25.
- 16 Self (2000).
- 17 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 17.
- 21 Sampley (2002) 987.
- 22 Martin (1995) 106.
- 23 Hays (1997) 253. Thiselton (2000), 1261, agrees, adding that the $\pi\omega\delta\varsigma$ of the first question is probably more in the sense of how is it possible than merely in what manner.
- 24 Wright (2003) 313. Notwithstanding the sometimes understandably critical comments that meet the reflections of Wright on the matter of the resurrection (and to be honest, on a wide range of other topics), his work is yet a good place to start in this exploration

of the biblical teaching on the topic. One is never in any doubt as to what Wright thinks and his literal-historical approach – which does, it must be said, offer much food for thought and is not at all without significant merit – provides, in my view, a most useful benchmark by which to consider the reflections of others and one’s own.

- 25 Ibid.
 26 Ibid., 314.
 27 Ibid., 347.
 28 Ibid., 348.
 29 Ibid., 349.
 30 Ibid., 352. Wright also points out with much regret that the NJB has reverted to ‘natural’ and ‘spiritual’ (ibid.). Barrett (1971), 372, agrees that the common translations of these words are not ‘very happy rendering[s]’. Hays (1997) 272, also shares this concern, describing the Jerusalem Bible’s translation of verse 44 as ‘most graceful’. Thiselton (2000), 1275, also agrees, declaring that such translations as are found in the NRSV and the REB, with particular reference to the notion of spiritual, ‘prejudices and probably distorts our interpretation’.
 31 Fee (1987) 784.
 32 Ibid., 786.
 33 Wright (2003) 359.
 34 Barrett (1971) 379.
 35 Fee (1987) 788.
 36 Ibid., 797.
 37 Ibid., 798.
 38 Wright (2003) 415.
 39 Ibid., 418.
 40 Ibid., 420.
 41 Ibid., 422.
 42 Edwards (2002) 367.
 43 Ibid., 368.
 44 Ibid.
 45 White (2006) 6.
 46 Ibid., 43.
 47 Ibid., 52f.

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5 The nature of post-death existence in Tertullian

In the previous chapter, where we introduced the question of the nature of post-death existence in the thought of our four writers, we posed a number of questions which might assist and guide us in delineating or sketching the outline or specifications of the topic before us, or give us a working framework in addressing it. We also then considered some key biblical passages on the question, before we looked particularly at Athenagoras of Athens' representation of such nature. The questions posed included:

- Might post-death existence be embodied or unembodied and how might we understand these latter notions?
- Might such post-death existence be solely, even if only for a time, of the soul or mind?
- Might such a soul or mind give expression to itself, or be aware or conscious of itself, after its separation from that body which had been its companion in this present life?
- How are we to understand the matter of the ongoing identity of such an existent or person? Can an unembodied soul be regarded as a *person* at all?
- Can and does such an existent, which was *me* in this present life, remain *me* in post-death existence?
- Is some form of continuity necessary in order for *me* to still be *me*?
- Is such identity merely numerical or psychological or informed, for example, significantly by memory or particular relationships?

We were reminded here, too, of the suggestion from many contemporary thinkers that 'visualisation, if not comprehension, requires [some form of] embodiment'. From scripture we considered particularly *1 Corinthians* 15, *2 Corinthians* 5, *Matthew* 22,23f./*Mark* 12.18f./*Luke* 20.27f. (the story of the woman with seven husbands), and *Luke* 16.19–31 (Dives and Lazarus).

Tertullian's end view is similar to that of Athenagoras although his approach is more shaded and nuanced in meaning – and of course, more biblical – and he seeks to take more seriously the apostle's view that the resurrected body is a transformed one and thus not necessarily exactly as it was in this present life. He begins chapter 5, providing a connection between the first four chapters (which deal, *inter alia*, with the central place which the resurrection of the dead has in

Christian teaching, with some matters epistemological, and with certain heretical views on the place of the flesh in the scheme of salvation, which all impact somewhat on the topic before him) and those chapters which follow it. He accomplishes this first with an attack on the primary reliance of the unlearned (*rudes*) on the *communes sensus*¹ and the disquieting of the doubters and ordinary folk (*dubii et simplices*) through the same. He then announces his intention to counter his opponents' disparagement and vilification of the flesh with an encomium (*laudatione*) of it (5.1). He notes that even the heretics assume that 'this trivial fragile body' is the handiwork of secondary deities – angels perhaps – and therefore that even the patronage of the latter 'would have sufficed for the dignity of the flesh' (5.2). And even the 'supreme god (*summus deus*)' of the heretic would have forbidden it – in this case the creation of the body – 'if he had not desired it to be made' (5.3). He also observes that the majority of the sects – one presumes he means the heretical Christian ones (the differentiation between which by him is not without significance) – especially what he calls the more durable ones (*duriores*), concede the whole formation of man to our God (*totam hominis figulationem deo nostro cedunt*) (5.4). And yet, his opponents say, this concession (that God is the creator of human being) does not prove the resurrection of the whole of such a being given that God is also the creator of this world (*mundus iste*). And no-one claims that it [the world] will be restored after its decease (*post decessum*); why then should one find proof in creation for a portion of that world (that is, man) (5.5)? Yet, replies Tertullian, while the world apart from man was made by the word (*sermone*) of God, the flesh came into being both by the word of God and through the hand of God: God formed man (*finxit deus hominem*) (5.8), he says, quoting from *Genesis* 2. Thus man cannot be compared with the world. Thus the world is inferior to man; it was made for him [and not, by implication, him for it] (5.7). And he recalls his readers to the knowledge that 'man' in the strict sense means the flesh (*hominem autem memento carnem proprie dici*) for the flesh was the first possessor of the designation 'man' (5.8). Thus was 'man' as first formed as flesh and afterwards only the whole man (*dehinc totus*) (5.8). Thus the promise of God to man was to the flesh as much as to the soul (5.9). Thus is Tertullian's understanding of the resurrection of the body grounded first, as it was by Athenagoras, in an understanding of the nature of the body and in that of its relationship to the soul in constituting 'man/human being' properly understood. And its nature is of such dignity that it is clearly worthy of being saved, of being raised.

In chapter 6 Tertullian continues his efforts, while recognising its rather humble origins, to vindicate the dignity of the flesh. This 'poor paltry material, clay, found its way into the hands of God' (6.1). 'Recollect', he says, 'that God was wholly concerned with it (*recogita totum illi deum occupatum ac deditum*)' (6.3). And whatever form or expression was given then to the clay by the Creator, 'Christ was in God's thoughts as one day to become human, because the Word, too, was to become flesh' (6.3). And when the clay and flesh is reviled, thought should be given to 'the dignity of the Creator . . . who even by his selection (*eligendo*) of its material deemed it, and by his management made it, worthy' (6.5). In summary, concludes Tertullian here, 'the possibility has been granted to the flesh to

be nobler than its origin (*datum est esse aliquid origine generosius et demutatione felicius*)' (6.8). In chapter 7 Tertullian continues to support the original dignity of the flesh and thereby its worthiness to be raised after death and dissolution. At 7.6 he affirms, against those who would suggest that the flesh is merely a coat given to Adam and Eve at their expulsion from Paradise – and thus associated with the Fall, and thereby unworthy for resurrection – that the skin, not the flesh, is a coat (*tunicam cutem confirmavit*). The clay out of which human flesh is formed is made glorious by the hand of God and the flesh more glorious still by God's breathing upon it, giving it soul (7.7). Would God, he asks, have commingled the soul with the flesh in a union which is intimate and thus consigned to some vilest sheath the shadow of his own soul, the breath of his own Spirit, the operation of his own mouth (7.8f.)? And in the end the flesh 'which is accounted as the minister and servant of the soul, turns out to be also its associate and co-heir (*consors et coheres*). And, if so in temporal things, why not also in things eternal?' (7.13).

And Tertullian extends that argument into the next chapter by declaring that 'there is not a soul that can at all procure salvation, except it believe while it is in the flesh, so true is it that the flesh is the very condition on which salvation hinges (*adeo caro salutis est cardo*)' (8.2). The soul only indeed is rendered capable of the service to God for which it is chosen because of the flesh (*ibid.*). The flesh is washed that the soul may be cleansed, anointed that it may be consecrated, signed that it may be fortified, shadowed with the imposition of hands that it may be illuminated by the Spirit, feeds on the body and blood of Christ that the soul may likewise fatten on its God (8.3). 'They cannot then be separated in their recompense when they are united in their service (*non possunt ergo separari in mercede quas opera coniungit*)' (*ibid.*). God forbid, exclaims Tertullian, that God should abandon to eternal destruction that which he has created with his own hands (9.2) and earlier, constructed in his own image (9.1); this flesh, the receptacle of his own Spirit, the queen of his creation, the priestess of his religion, this sister of his Christ (*ibid.*). He will surely love this flesh, which is, in so many ways, his neighbour (9.4). Indeed, if the flesh had not disabilities 'God's kindness, grace, mercy, every beneficent function of God's, would have remained inoperative (*vacuisset*)' (9.5).

In chapter 10 he counters those scriptures in which the flesh is seemingly disparaged with texts in which it is 'ennobled (*inlustratur*)', offering such as elevate against those which abase (10.1). For example, he offers *Isaiah* 40.5 – 'all flesh shall see the salvation of God' – against *Isaiah* 40.7 – 'all flesh is grass' (10.2).² He concludes this passage by declaring,

If therefore the humiliations of the flesh thrust off its resurrection, why shall not its high prerogatives rather avail to bring it about? – since it better suits the character of God to restore to salvation what for a while he rejected, than to surrender to perdition what he once approved.

(10.5)

In chapter 11, once he has suggested that those who deny the resurrection of the flesh are the more likely to live in accord with it (11.1) – and quotes the

Montanist prophetess Prisca to this effect (11,2) – and confirmed that he has supplied sufficient warrants to guarantee the dignity of the flesh and its worthiness for resurrection (chapters 5 to 10), he then moves to establish the capacity of God to effect the resurrection of dissolute flesh (11.3f.).³ The belief that God can restore the flesh once dead must, he declares, be based on the notion that God can do all things and he speaks here of God ‘publishing’ on the public record his capacity to rebuild and restore (11.4). Some of the ‘philosophers’ to whom his opponents allegedly appeal maintain, he says, that the world is without beginning or creator (11.5). But even most heretics, he responds, hold that the world has both an origin and a creator and that this Creator is our God⁴ (11.5). Moreover, he says, God created the world wholly out of nothing (*illum totum hoc ex nihilo protulisse*) (11.6). Some however, he continues, are ‘too weak’ to maintain this and believe instead, in line with the philosophers, that the universe was in the beginning made out of ‘underlying matter’ (11.7). In the face of this he maintains his own position [that the world was created out of nothing] but declares that even this supposed underlying matter was itself produced out of nothing (11.8). Thus, both positions, he says, support the notion of an origin out of nothing and thus his own argument (11.9). For if flesh was created from nothing then it can be recreated from that nothingness into which it goes at the time of death; if, on the other hand, it is moulded out of pre-existing matter, then God can clearly recall it from whatever abyss into which it has gone (11.10). And surely, he declares, God is competent to re-create whom he has once created (*et utique idoneus est reficere qui fecit*) (ibid.). For the creation is a far greater work than re-creation.⁵ Indeed, the ‘restoration of the flesh is easier than its first formation (*ita restitutionem carnis faciliorem credas institutione*)’ (ibid.). Tertullian neither quotes nor cites scripture here but it is more logical for him to argue here on the grounds of his opponents. In chapter 12 Tertullian offers some analogies from nature to demonstrate that resurrection is, as it were, part of the natural order. These he calls ‘examples of the divine power’ (12.1). They are, in a sense, the ‘records’ of divine power which reveal as much such a power as do the written records of scripture; this is scripture written in nature. Day, he reminds us, dies into night (*dies moratur in noctem*); it is obscured in the shadow of death and revives again (12.1f.). Winters and summers return, trees are clothes which once were stripped (12.4).⁶ This, Tertullian says, is ‘a marvellous exchange (*mira ratio*)’ for by taking away God gives back (12.5). ‘The whole creation is recurrent (*universa conditio recidiva est*)’ (12.6). ‘Nothing exists for the first time. . . . Nothing perishes but with a view to salvation (*nihil non iterum est. . . . nihil deperit nisi in salutem*)’ (12.6). ‘The whole, therefore, of this revolving order of things bears witness to the resurrection of the dead’ (12.7). And God first sent nature to us as a teacher (*praemisit tibi naturam magistratam*) [a natural scripture?], meaning to send prophecy also as a supplemental instructor (12.8). The God who is the restorer of everything (*omnium restitutorem*) is also the reviver of the flesh (*carnis resuscitatorem*) (ibid.). And surely, he says, as all things created for the use of human being rise again, the flesh itself would not perish utterly (12.9).

Tertullian continues the analogies from nature in chapter 13 with the example of the phoenix, a well-used image for Christian apologists. Even if, he says, all nature only faintly figures our resurrection and if creation affords no precise sign like it (for much natural phenomena rather ends than dies), yet there is ‘an unsailable symbol of our hope’, the phoenix (13.1). What could more express and be more significant for our subject, he argues (13.3)? For this demonstrates that a ‘bodily substance may be recovered from the fire’ (ibid.) and suggests the unreasonableness of any suggestion that human being might die once for all while birds in Arabia are assured of resurrection (13.4). And having demonstrated how God speaks to the question of resurrection by both the parables of nature – that is, examples drawn from nature which reflect the divine power to re-create – and his spoken Word, he looks now to God’s decrees and edicts (14.1). Having spoken of the dignity of the flesh – that it is capable and worthy of restoration – and of the power of God to restore the once destroyed (14.2), he now moves to examine the possible cause of resurrection, to see whether there is ‘sufficient weight to claim the resurrection of the flesh as necessary and as conformable in every way to reason’ (14.3). For a cause for the restoration of the flesh must exist. The flesh may be capable of resurrection and God capable of bringing it about, but there must, declares Tertullian, be a purpose for this to happen. From 14.3 to 17.9 Tertullian now shows why the requirements of divine justice (providence) necessitate the resurrection of the flesh. It is worth noting here that in the *Apologeticum* Tertullian also points to judgement as a prime cause for such a resurrection. At 48. 4 of that treatise he declares that

since the reason for restoration (*ratio restitutionis*) [= resurrection] is preparation for judgement, it must necessarily be the very same person (*idem ipse*), who once was, that will be produced, so as to receive judgement from God upon the good he has done or the opposite . . . ; whatever souls deserve in the judgement of God to suffer, they did not earn it without the flesh.

As a just God he must both succour the good and punish the evil (14.5). Against Marcion, for example, God must be seen to be necessarily judge because he is Lord, and necessarily Lord because he is Creator (14.6). And so it ‘is suitable [against Marcion and others) for that one who is God and Lord and Creator to summon human being to a judgement’ (14.8). Thus the entire cause or rather the necessity of the resurrection will be the arrangement of the final judgement as most suitable to who and what God is (ibid.). We note here that for Athenagoras the providence of God was only a secondary ground for resurrection. Now does this divine judgement involve an examination of both natures of human being, both soul and body (14.9)? For what is a suitable object to judge must be such to be raised (ibid.). The judgement of God must needs be plenary and absolute and final and therefore irrevocable. It must not, says Tertullian, bear less heavily on any particular part [of human being] (14.10). It must be complete and definite. The fullness and perfection of divine judgement must represent the interests of the complete human being (ibid.). And given that the complete human being

consists of the two natures [soul and body], this is how it must appear [for judgement] (14.11). It must be judged in its completeness. It passed through life in its complete state; so it must be judged. Life is the cause of judgement and thus the examination must be of the two natures it possesses. '[T]he plenitude and completeness of judgement', he says, 'can be assured only by the production [in court] of the whole man (*totius hominis*), in fact that the whole man appears [in court] in the assemblage of both substances (*totum porro hominem ex utriusque substantiae congregatione parere*)' (14.11). For each together – soul and flesh – is a partaker (*participem*) of Kingdom and of judgement and of resurrection (33.9). The resurrection is for him 'the restitution of the whole person (*totius hominis restitutionem*)', 'a resurrection with nothing left out' (34.11). Tertullian declares that the resurrection of the human person is 'corporeal' and 'not corporeal in some unusual sense (*non aliter corporalem*)' (39.8). He makes clear that neither the soul by itself is man (*homo*) nor the flesh without the soul (40.3). Thus for him a continuity of identity of the person into the next life – primarily but by no means solely for the purpose of a just judgement, a judgement of both body and soul – requires a survival in an embodied state, but one which may [indeed will] be a transformed form of embodiment.

In the 15th chapter Tertullian builds further on this theme. If our opponents are correct, he says, in severing the connection of the flesh with the soul in this present life, then the former 'ought not to have any share in the sentence [and thus in the resurrection which enables the carrying out of that sentence], if it had none in the cause of it' (15.2). Yet, he rejoins, 'the soul alone no more departed from life, than it ran through alone the course from which it departed – I mean this present life' (*ibid.*). For 'whatever is done in the human heart is done by the soul in the flesh, and with the flesh, and through the flesh' (15.3). Our Lord himself, says Tertullian, associates the thought of the man with the flesh, with the heart, and he quotes *Matthew 9.4 – Why do you think evil in your hearts?* – and *5.28 – Whoever looks for the sake of lust has already committed in his heart* – to this effect. 'Even the thought, without operation and without effect, is an act of the flesh' (15.5). The flesh is still, he says, the thinking place of the soul (*animae cogitatorium*) (*ibid.*). The sinful conduct must be subject to punishment [and its resurrection is necessary for this] and rewarded for its acts of virtue (15.7). God would be unjust indeed if he excluded the flesh from reward for its association in good works (*sociam bonorum*) and idle (*inertem*) if from punishment for being an accomplice in evil ones (*sociam malorum*) (15.8).

At 16.1 Tertullian speaks again of the companionship (*sociam*) of the flesh to the soul. According to his opponents, however, the flesh is spoken of as though it possessed no discretion, no sentiment, no power of its own of willing or refusing, as if it stood in relation to the soul as a vessel (*vasculi*), an instrument rather than as a servant (16.3). In such a case, the soul alone would stand in need of judgement, particularly in terms of how it has employed the otherwise innocent vessel of the flesh (16.4). Yet even here, retorts Tertullian, if we accepted that the flesh was innocent [as his opponents apparently claim given that they seem to leave the soul alone to face judgement], would it not be liable to salvation on the basis of

this innocence (16.6)? For would it not be more consistent with the divine goodness, with the character of the most bountiful (*optimi*), to deliver the innocent (*ibid.*)? But in any case, the flesh is not the mere vessel [despite what the apostle appears to say at *1 Thessalonians* 4.4] or instrument of the soul but at the very least its servant, for ‘the flesh, being conceived, formed and generated along with the soul from its earliest existence in the womb, is mixed up with it likewise in all its operations’ (16.10). It is a servant (*ministerium*) and not a mere instrument (16.12).

Both rebuke and exhortation [such as the flesh receives from the Apostle at respectively *Romans* 8.3 and *1 Corinthians* 6.20] would be alike idle towards the flesh, if it were an improper object for that recompense which is certainly received in the resurrection.

(16.15)

At 17.2 Tertullian reminds his readers that in a previous treatise⁷ he has argued that the soul is corporeal (*corporalem*), possessing a peculiar kind of solidity in its nature, such as enables it both to perceive and to suffer. Yet,

in its own nature it has simply the ability to think, to will, to desire, to dispose: for fully carrying out the purpose, it looks for the assistance of the flesh. . . . it also requires the conjunction (*societatem*) of the flesh to endure suffering.

(17.4f.)

Thus Tertullian concludes this section on the necessary place of providence and judgement in the resurrection of the flesh by asserting that

this in fact will be the reason for the judgement being appointed for the last end, that by the presentation of the flesh [by resurrection] it may be possible [which otherwise it would not be so] for the whole divine censure to be made complete.

(17.9)

Otherwise such censure would not be reserved until the end if it were reserved for the soul alone (*ibid.*). Thus, as for Athenagoras, while there are any number of arguments for the necessity of the flesh being raised, the simple demands of justice – that both soul and body face the judgement of God together at the end, given that in life they together did such things as require judgement – require that the body be raised at the resurrection to be reunited with the soul with whom it journeyed this life.

Having now in turn laid the foundations for the proper reading of scripture which promises the resurrection of the flesh – the dignity of the flesh, the power of God, the many analogies of this drawn from nature, the reasons for judgement and the implications of these – Tertullian urges that the advocacy of those authorities which support these foundations and not the devices of the heretics should

shape that reading (18.1). Had even these things not have been preached by God they would yet be believed; but the divine words only add credence to them. Yet, it must be said, Tertullian relies almost exclusively on the preaching of God, in word and in deed. From 18.4 he moves to explore the scriptural witness. He embarks on what some might call a rather tedious argument that in the phrase ‘*the resurrection of the dead*’ – the one divine edict visible to all people (*apud omnes*) (18.4) – each word refers solely to the flesh and not at all to the soul. Indeed, in the fifth book of his *Adversus Marcionem* Tertullian offers a similar argument concerning that which can be said to rise, indeed that will alone can rise as that which has ‘fallen’ or died.⁸ There he says that

the fact that the expression used is “resurrection of the dead” demands insistence on the precise meaning of the terms. So then “dead” can only be that which is deprived of the soul by whose energy it was once alive. . . . so that the term “dead” applies to the body. So if the resurrection is of something dead, and the dead thing is no other than the body, it will be a resurrection of the body. So too the term “resurrection” lays claim to no other object than one who has fallen down.

(5.9.3)

Here in the *De Resurrectione*, for its part, Tertullian declares that ‘[j]ust as the term *resurrection* [my italics] is predicated of that which falls – that is, the flesh [alone] – so will there be the same application of the word *dead* [my italics]’ (18.11). ‘When the “resurrection of the dead” is spoken of, it is the rising again of human bodies that is meant’ (18.12). In chapter 19 Tertullian addresses what are clearly Gnostic objections to the resurrection of the flesh. He speaks at 19.1 of the ‘obscurity our adversaries throw over the subject under the pretence of figurative and allegorical language’, of interpreting otherwise clear [to Tertullian] statements in the scriptures on the resurrection in a spiritual sense (19.2). He speaks of the claim that they ‘who have by faith attained to the resurrection are with their Lord [now] after they have once put him on in their baptism’ (19.5). They speak of the condemnation of those who have not risen in their present body (19.6); here is a clear reflection of the position espoused in the *Letter to Rheginos* (see below in Chapter 6) where the teacher says to his pupil that the resurrection has taken place already. Some maintain, he says, that ‘going out of the sepulchre’ means ‘escaping out of the world’ since this world is the habitation of the dead (19.7). Indeed, some claim that it actually means escaping from the body itself since the body is understood to detain the soul, that the soul is shut up in the death of a worldly life as if in a grave (*ibid.*).

In chapter 20 Tertullian addresses the claims of his opponents that the prophets speak always figuratively (*per imagines contionatos*) (20.1) and that therefore, by implication, pronouncements on the resurrection of the dead must be so understood. While he acknowledges that some things in the scriptures are said figuratively, there are also any number of literal references. And furthermore, figurative language itself can have no particular reference point if it is not

based on actual happenings. Indeed, much of the language of the prophets and the psalmists – and he gives copious examples from the scriptures – can only be understood purely and simply, free from all allegorical ‘obscurity (*ab omni allegoriae nubilo*)’ (20.7). Allegory is not, he concludes, employed at all points in the scripture though it is employed in places. In chapter 21 he engages with the claim that if, as he admits, allegory is used from time to time in the scriptures, it cannot be understood as being employed there in order to read the phrase ‘resurrection of the dead’ in a spiritual-only sense (*spiritaliter*) (21.1). Tertullian provides two primary reasons for this claim. *First*, so many of the texts in scripture which attest to the resurrection of the body do so unambiguously and simply cannot admit of a figurative interpretation. And this will apply even to passages which may appear on the surface as uncertain and obscure. And this is so on the principle that uncertain and obscure statements must be interpreted in the light of the more certain (*incerta de certis et obscura manifestis praeiudicari*) and the clear and plain (21.2). And *second*, it is highly improbable that the ‘very mystery’ on which our trust wholly depends (*ea species sacramenti in quam fides tota committitur*) (21.3) might appear ambiguous and obscure. This is particularly so given that the whole structure of divine reward and punishment is associated with the resurrection. And given that the divine condemnations against cities, nations and kings are so clear and unambiguous, how could it be that the promises of divine rewards, grander than the former, be any less so? Otherwise God might be represented as characterised by guile, envy, inconsistency and artifice, which cannot be (21.6).

Over the next six chapters (23–28) Tertullian provides the witness of scripture to the reality of a resurrection from the dead. He employs *Colossians* 2 (in chapter 23) to demonstrate that even a witness to a spiritual resurrection in the present time evidences a bodily resurrection. He employs *Galatians* 3.11–12, *Philippians* 3.13–14 and *Galatians* 6.9 for the same purpose. In chapter 24 he employs *1 Thessalonians* 1.9–10 and 4.13–17 similarly. In chapter 25 he refers to *Revelation* 20.4–6 and 12–14 to associate the resurrection of the dead with the coming judgement and therefore its necessity and sees, once more, a bodily resurrection presumed in the announcement of a spiritual one. In chapter 26 he associates references to the ‘earth’ in *Genesis* 3.19, and elsewhere, to the flesh and thereby applies a wide variety of sayings to do with the restoration of the earth with that [resurrection] of the flesh. He declares here that he will refute the earlier objection to the resurrection of the dead – that the scriptures are to be understood allegorically – by looking at the figurative language of the prophets, for example, at *Genesis* 3.19 where God is said to declare that

Earth you are, and to earth you will return.

Here, Tertullian says, ‘earth’ is meant as ‘human being’, at least as regards the fleshly substance of human being, for this substance was first taken from the ground and was first there called ‘human being’. For the matter of the anger and the judgement of God and of God’s gracious mercy as applied in the scriptures to the ‘earth’ is actually intended to refer to the flesh of human being. For

the 'earth', he says, never having done either good or evil, cannot be thereby exposed to the divine judgement. Tertullian then identifies a number of scriptural passage – *Psalm* 97.1; *Isaiah* 1.19; and others – in which references to a judgement on the 'earth' can only refer to human flesh. He then criticises the Jews for the loss of their celestial blessings through them confining their hopes to earthly ones, 'being ignorant of heavenly bread' (26.10) and so on. He condemns their referring to the land of Judaea as 'the holy land', declaring that this phrase should be employed (*interpretandam*) solely of the flesh of our Lord (26.11). One is not a Jew, he declares with the apostle (*Romans* 2.28–29), who is so only outwardly. This particular title will apply only properly to those who are inwardly so. Salvation, he says, is not confined to one land or region alone (*sed nec ulli omnino terrae salus repromittitur*) (26.13); for even such a land must pass away in time with the rest of the world. Tertullian then moves to advise that other allegorical terms in the Old Testament are actually references to the flesh, indeed to the resurrection of the dead. In chapter 27 he says that when *Isaiah* speaks of garments arising (58.8), he actually means the rising of the flesh. He says, too, in chapter 28, that 'things', by which he means actions, contain allegorical references to the resurrection of the flesh. He speaks of plain comments which must be taken as references to the resurrection of the flesh and offers *Isaiah* 38.12f. as an example of this. That Tertullian primarily bases and develops his doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh in his reading and interpretation of the scriptures is clear from this section of the treatise, as it is elsewhere, both in this treatise and in others.

In chapters 29 to 30 he introduces the well-known passage from *Ezekiel* 37.1–14 on the bones in the valley as clearly referring to the resurrection of the flesh. Indeed, even if it were employed merely as an allegory or metaphor, he says, it must be something which is in itself real. In chapter 31 he offers other passages from the Old Testament which, he says, refer clearly to the promise of the resurrection of the flesh; for example, *Malachi* 4.2f.; *Isaiah* 64.14, 27.19 and 64.24. In chapter 32 he declares that the story of *Jonah* points to the promise of resurrection. In chapter 33 he moves from his consideration of the 'prophetic scriptures' as providing witness to the promise of the resurrection of the flesh to an exploration of the New Testament Gospels, specifically to our Lord's teaching in parables. He deals first with the claim of his opponents that Christ spoke always in parables and that these effectively bear the same [questionable] value as allegory. Tertullian claims in response that Christ does not actually always speak in parables but did so in his speaking to the Jews. Yet, he says, Christ does speak simply and plainly, and this is true of his speaking to the resurrection of the flesh. This is so at *Matthew* 11.22 and 10.7, and at *Luke* 14.14 where the resurrection is associated with the promise of judgement, on the basis that since both body and soul are liable to judgement, so both must be subject to resurrection. In chapter 34 Tertullian argues that Christ himself witnesses to the resurrection of the whole person – body and soul – and not of the soul alone. In the parable of the Lost Sheep, he contends, it was the entire sheep which was carried to safety on the shoulders of the Good Shepherd (34.2). The whole person is marked with the transgression of the Fall.

Christ has received from the Father both body and soul; neither part which he has thus received will he allow to perish.

In chapter 35 he argues that in the ‘resurrection of the body’ it is the physical body which is intended and not the corporeality of the soul. ‘I understand’, he says, ‘by the human body nothing else than that fabric of the flesh which, whatever be the kind of material of which it is constructed and modified, is seen and handled, and sometimes indeed killed, by men’. And it is the purposes of judgement, righteous judgement, which are met by the resurrection of the entire person. In chapter 36 Tertullian argues that Christ’s dealing with the objection of the Sadducees to the resurrection – their questioning of him about to whom will the woman successively married to and widowed by seven brothers (*Matt.* 22.23f.; *Mk.* 12.18f.; *Lk.* 20.27f.) be married after a resurrection – involves his affirmation of not only a resurrection of both natures – body and soul – of the whole human being, but what the ‘Christian Sadducees’ themselves deny, the resurrection of the ‘entire person’. At 37.1 he acknowledges the words of Christ at *John* 6.63 that ‘[it is the spirit that gives life while] the flesh profits nothing’. But the meaning of this, he says, ‘must be regulated by the subject spoken of (*ex materia dicti dirigendus est sensus*)’. This spirit, he maintains, are the words that Christ speaks. His word is ‘the life-giving principle because that word is spirit and life (*sermonem constitutuens vivificatorem, quia et sermo et vita sermo*)’ (37.3). It is the Spirit that gives life to the flesh (37.6) and Christ himself at *John* 5.25 says that ‘the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live’ (37.7). These ‘dead’, he says, are the flesh. And at *John* 5.28f. Christ has said that all in the grave will hear the voice of the Son of God and come forth, the good to the resurrection of life and the evil to a resurrection of damnation (37.8). At chapter 38 Tertullian argues that the raising of dead persons by Christ during his earthly ministry was not the mere demonstration of his own power nor ‘temporary favours [to friends] of a restoration to life’ (38.1). It was intended rather ‘to put in secure keeping people’s belief in a future resurrection’ and prove that this ‘resurrection will be a bodily one (*illa corporalis*)’ (38.2). He argues that the concerns of his opponents that God had need to raise the body here, as an example only of the resurrection of the soul, because he could not [visibly] demonstrate the restricted resurrection to be groundless (38.3f.). In conclusion to this section he declares that ‘those examples of dead persons who were raised by the Lord were indeed a proof of the resurrection both of the flesh and of the soul, a proof in fact that this gift was to be denied to neither substance’ (38.7). Yet, he also warns, these were examples of something greater ‘for they were not raised [themselves] for glory and immortality [as will characterise the future resurrection], but only for another death’ (*ibid.*).

Tertullian then moves to the witness to the resurrection of the flesh provided by the *Acts of the Apostles*. These apostles, he declares, had nothing other to do, among the Jews at least, than to explain the Old Testament, to confirm the New, and to preach God in Christ (39.1). ‘They introduced nothing new concerning the resurrection’ but only what they had received in simple yet intelligent faith’ from the tradition and this involved the sort of resurrection involved (39.2). Paul in

Acts is seen to confess his belief in the resurrection of the dead before the chief priests (39.3) and likewise before Agrippa (39.4). In this, and in his opposition to the Sadducees, but in agreement with the prophets and the Pharisees, he spoke to what Tertullian declares to be ‘the most important article of the faith (*de praecipuo fidei totius articulo*)’ (39.3), the resurrection of the dead. Paul claims indeed to preach on the resurrection nothing but what the prophets had announced (39.4). And this Christian hope, Paul affirmed in *Acts*, was a resurrection in the body and ‘not in a body of a different kinds from ours (*non aliter corporalem*)’ (39.8).

In the next section (chapter 40 to 52) Tertullian draws from the apostle’s own writings to provide confirmation of his teaching on the resurrection of the flesh. He deals at 40.2f. with the assertion of the apostle at *2 Corinthians* 4.16 that ‘though the outward man decays, yet the inner man is renewed day by day’ which his opponents ascribe to the flesh and soul respectively (40.2). Yet, he argues, the soul by itself is not solely ‘man’ nor is the flesh without the soul so (40.3). ‘Thus’, he says,

the designation *homo* is, in a certain sense, the bond between the two closely united substances . . . they cannot but be coherent natures (*ita vocabulum homo consertarum substantiarum duarum quodammodo fibula est, . . . non possunt esse nisi cohaerentes*).

(ibid.)

In any case, Tertullian declares, the apostle usually – and he provides a number of biblical examples – by ‘inner man’ means the mind and heart and the heart itself involves bodily substance (40.4). And later, ‘since it is through the flesh that we suffer with Christ . . . to the same flesh belongs the recompense which is promised for suffering with Christ’ (40.12). ‘Both [body and soul] will be glorified together, even as they have suffered together’ (40.14). At 41.1 he says of the passage from *2 Corinthians* 5.1 about the dissolution of the earthly tabernacle being recompensed by a house not made with hands, but eternal in heaven, that here the apostle does not deny the restoration of the flesh for the ‘recompense is due to the same substance to which the dissolution is attributed, namely, the flesh (*cum ipsi compensatio debeatur, cui dissolution reputatur, scilicet carni*)’ (41.2). He concludes this chapter with a quote from *1 Thessalonians* 4.15–17 which clearly attests to the resurrection at the coming of Christ, the first of those already dead in Christ and then the faithful then still living (41.7).

In chapter 43 he argues that the apostle does not intend to disparage the flesh when he declares at *2 Corinthians* 5, 6–7 that ‘while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord; for we walk by faith, not sight’ (43.1). This is rather, Tertullian says,

an exhortation to disregard this present life (*et hic enim exhortatio fastidientiae vitae huius obvertitur*), inasmuch as we are in exile from the Lord as long as we live, advancing by faith and not by sight, that is, hope and not in reality.

(43.2)

Concerning 2 Corinthians 5.10 –

We therefore earnestly desire to be acceptable unto God, whether absent or present; for we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ Jesus –

the apostle suggests that ‘if all of us, then all of us wholly; if wholly, then our inward man and outward one too, that is, our bodies no less than our souls’ (43.6). Here Tertullian clearly confuses the ‘all’ in the text – by which the apostle indicates ‘all people’ – with the ‘all’, the everything, of our individual being. For Tertullian the apostle in this passage clearly supports the notion of the resurrection of the flesh. In chapter 45 Tertullian explains the distinction drawn between the ‘old man’ and the ‘new’ in the apostle as not being between body and soul. His opponents, he says, declare that when the apostle at *Ephesians* 4.22–24 enjoins us to ‘put off the old man’, he means the body. But, says Tertullian, the ‘new man’ cannot solely be the soul (45.2). For Adam himself was ‘wholly a new man’ and ‘of that new man there could be no part an old man’ (45.4). ‘The flesh and the soul’, he declares, ‘have had a simultaneous birth . . . the two have been even generated together in the womb’ (ibid.). ‘Contemporaneous in the womb, they are also temporally identical in their birth’ (ibid.). ‘We are either entirely the old man or entirely the new’ (45.5). But when the apostle speaks of the ‘old man’ – as he also does implicitly at *Galatians* 5.19 – he clearly enjoins us to put off not the flesh itself but the [sinful] works of the flesh (45.6). ‘The whole of faith is to be administered in the flesh and indeed by the flesh’ (45.15). References in the apostle to the ‘old’ and ‘new’ ‘man’ have to do, Tertullian concludes, with differences in moral conduct (*ad moralem*) and not to any difference of nature (*non ad substantialem*) (ibid.).

In chapter 46 Tertullian continues his argument from before that it is the works of the flesh and not the flesh itself which the apostle condemns. He recalls the use by his opponents of the sentence from *Romans* 8.8 where the apostle declares that ‘they who are in the flesh cannot please God’ and the following verse ‘you are not in the flesh but in the spirit’ (46.2). This he explains by saying that by denying those who clearly are ‘in the flesh’ to be not ‘in the flesh’ the apostle is declaring that ‘they who could not please God were not those who were in the flesh but only those who were living after the flesh’ (46.3). In any case, Tertullian says, it is not necessary to interpret difficult passages from the writings of the apostle given that elsewhere the latter speaks with ‘perfect plainness (*absolutius*)’ on the matter of the resurrection (46.6). For example, at *Romans* 8.11 the apostle says that ‘[the God] who raised Jesus from the dead will also quicken your mortal bodies’ (ibid.). With the apostle, Tertullian concludes, ‘it is no longer the flesh which is an adversary to salvation but the working of the flesh’ (46.9) and indeed that ‘the condemnation of sin is [actually] the acquittal of the flesh’ (46.12). In chapter 47 Tertullian argues that the apostle consistently speaks of eternal life being offered to the body, and this is so, particularly in *Romans* 6. He begins by declaring that ‘it must be living after the world, which, as the “old man”, he declares to be “crucified with Christ”, not as a bodily structure but as moral behaviour’ (47.1). He

points to *Romans* 6.11 (47.2), 6.12–13 (47.3) and 6.19–23 (47.4–7) and declares that the apostle ‘undoubtedly promises to the flesh the recompense of salvation’ (47.8) and that it would ‘not at all have been consistent that any rule of holiness and righteousness should be especially enjoined for the flesh, if the reward of such a discipline were not also within its reach’ (47.9). This is so particularly with respect to baptism and he quotes *Romans* 6.3–4 to this effect (47.10). And ‘if the dominion of death operates only in the dissolution of the flesh, in like manner death’s contrary – life – ought to produce the contrary effect, even the restoration of the flesh’ (47.13). And finally he quotes from *I Thessalonians* 5.21 – ‘And may the very God of peace sanctify you wholly (*totos*)’ (47.17) and ‘and may your whole body, and soul, and spirit be preserved blameless unto the coming of the Lord’ (47.18) – as evidence that here we have ‘the entire substance of human being destined to salvation’ (*ibid.*).

In chapter 48 of the *De Resurrectione* Tertullian begins an exploration of *I Corinthians* 15. At 48.1 he commences his refutation of the allegation that the key verse *I Corinthians* 15.50 – *flesh and blood cannot obtain by inheritance the kingdom of God* – constitutes a denial of the resurrection of the body/flesh. This notion of ‘flesh and blood’ he regards as ‘in very truth the whole state of the question (*revera totius quaestionis*)’ (49.1). In other words, he must deal with concerns over this verse or potentially lose the argument. He begins his critical explanation of this verse 50 with his linking of the resurrection of Christ to that of the faithful [as does the apostle]. ‘Therefore’, he continues,

if we are to rise again after Christ’s example (*ad exemplum Christi*), and he rose again in the flesh – well, we shall not be rising again after Christ’s example if we are not ourselves also to rise again in the flesh.

(48.8)

And at *I Corinthians* 15.21 – when the apostle declares that

since death came by a human being, the resurrection of the dead also by a human being – by distinguishing but bringing together both authors (*auctores*), of death and of resurrection, under the same name ‘human being’, this ‘determines that the resurrection is of the same substance as the death was (*eiusdem autem constitueret substantiae resurrectionem cuius et mortem*).

(*ibid.*)

Thus Paul ‘wishes the resurrection of the flesh to be believed with full assurance (*indubitate*)’ (48.13). He then reverts to the question posed by the Corinthian opponents of Paul himself at *I Corinthians* 15.35: ‘How will the dead rise again, and with what body will they come?’. Here, Tertullian says, Paul ‘discourses of the qualities of the bodies, whether they are the same bodies, or others, that are resumed’ (48.14). But the very question [by which he means the second] means that ‘the resurrection is defined as corporeal (*corporalem definiri*), since it is with the quality of bodies that the discussion is concerned (*cum de qualitate corporem quaeritur*)’ (*ibid.*).

In chapter 49 he continues the argument and poses the question: ‘What are the substances and of what nature are they which the apostle has disinherited from the kingdom of God?’ (49.1). He argues that ‘even if Christ were the only true “heavenly”, no indeed, super-celestial being, he is still human, one composed of body and soul’ (49.5). Tertullian takes the view that the distinction at *1 Corinthians* 15.49 between the person of faith having worn previously the image of the man of dust (Adam) and in the resurrection the image of the man of heaven (the second Adam, Christ) is a distinction of ‘life and manners (*in conversatione*)’ (49.9). And when the apostle speaks as he does at *1 Corinthians* 15.50a ‘he requires us to understand by “flesh and blood” no other thing than the previously mentioned “image of the man of dust”’ (ibid.). By ‘flesh and blood’ in verse 50 the apostle ‘means the flesh and blood to be understood in no other sense than the before-mentioned “image of the earthly”’ (49.9–10). Tertullian then appears to allude to *2 Corinthians* 10.3 – when the apostle says that ‘while we live (walk) in the flesh, we do not fight in the flesh’ – when he says that

if [Paul] has said that men who were still actually in the flesh were not in the flesh, meaning that they were not in the works of the flesh, you must not break down his rule when he makes alien from the kingdom of God, not a substance [= flesh and blood], but the works of the substance.

(49.11)

He confirms this from *Galatians* 5.19–21 – where the apostle lists the ‘works of the flesh’ and declares that those who do these things ‘will not inherit the kingdom of God’ – saying that such persons ‘are not wearing the image of the heavenly man’ (49.12). Tertullian then says that Paul, at *1 Corinthians* 15.32, where he says that if the dead are not raised – ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’, thereby linking the prospect and anticipation of resurrection and moral behaviour – is ‘by this interjection . . . [laying] an accusation against flesh and blood in respect of the fruits of them [sc. of flesh and blood], which are eating and drinking’ (49.13), and not thereby their substances.⁹

In chapter 50 Tertullian then proceeds to show in what sense ‘flesh and blood’ are excluded from the kingdom of God. At 50.1 he declares that

even if we leave out interpretations such as these [that is, those advanced by him in chapter 49], which censure the works of flesh and blood, it will be permissible to vindicate for resurrection the substances themselves, understood as they actually are.

(50.1)

For it is not resurrection which is in set terms (*directo*) denied to flesh and blood, but the kingdom of God, which is a concomitant (*obvenit*) of the resurrection, though there is also a resurrection unto judgement: rather, a general resurrection of the flesh is even confirmed by the very fact that a specific one is excepted (*cum specialis excipitur*).

(50.2)

‘For while it is announced into what state [sc. flesh and blood] do not rise again, one tacitly (*subauditur*) understands [thereby] into what state it does [sc. rise again]’ (ibid.). ‘Flesh and blood are excluded from the kingdom of God’, he says, ‘in respect of their sin, not of their substance; and although in respect of their natural condition they will arise again for the judgement, because they rise not for the kingdom’ (50.3). ‘And so all flesh and blood, without distinction (*ex aequo*), do rise again in their proper quality (*in qualitate sua*)’, he says,

but those to whom it appertains to approach to the kingdom of God will, before they can do so, have to clothe themselves with that principle of incorruptibility and immortality without which they cannot approach to the kingdom of God. . . . flesh and blood alone are too weak to be capable of the kingdom of God.

(50.5)

For the latter, they need the re-vivifying power of the Spirit in order (effectively) to fit them (as it were) for the kingdom. Therefore, he concludes, ‘flesh and blood can, when changed and swallowed up (*demutata ac devorata*), obtain by inheritance the kingdom of God: not however without being raised again (*non tamen non resuscitata*)’ (50.6). Thus, in chapters 48 to 50 Tertullian has demonstrated to his own satisfaction that the reference to flesh and blood at *1 Corinthians* 15.50 is essentially to their works and fruits in this life and not to their substances; the latter, he concludes, can enter the Kingdom – by the intervention of the Spirit in raising them to new life – even if their works in this present life are condemned.

In chapter 51 Tertullian argues that the fact the incarnate, risen and ascended Lord sits even now at the right hand of the Father in heaven as mediator between divine and human guarantees the resurrection of our flesh. ‘Jesus is still sitting there at the right hand of the Father, human being, yet God, the last Adam, yet the primary Word, flesh and blood, yet purer than ours’ (51.1). Christ ‘has carried [the flesh] with him into heaven as a pledge of that complete fullness which is one day to be restored to it’ (51.2). Both *1 Corinthians* 15.52 and 53 witness that ‘those things which are subject to corruption and mortality, even the flesh and blood, must needs also be susceptible of incorruption and immortality’ (51.10). But with what body, he now begins to explore at 52.1, will the dead come [the question put by the apostle’s opponents at *1 Corinthians* 15.35]? Tertullian then proposes, from Paul’s illustration of the seed, to demonstrate ‘that the flesh which will be made alive is none other than that which will have died (*non aliam vivificari carnem quam ipsam quae erit mortua*)’ (52.2). Indeed he urges that upon this assertion ‘there once be agreement, from the illustration of the seed . . . and then what follows will be crystal clear (*et ita sequentia relucebunt*)’ (ibid.). He suggests that those who maintain that when the apostle says at *1 Corinthians* 15.37 that as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, he is saying that the body which will rise is not that which has died, have missed the point (*ceterum excidisti ab exemplo*). For when, he says, wheat is sown and dissolved in the earth, barley does not emerge but the same species of grain, the same nature and quality and form (52.4). It may change in form but not in substance: ‘the very same flesh

which was once sown in death will bear fruit in resurrection-life – the same in essence only more full and perfect; not another [flesh] although reappearing in another form (*aliter*)’ (52.10).

At the beginning of chapter 53, Tertullian contends with those who ‘argue that soul-informed body means soul’ (53.1) and thereby the body which rises is not a fleshly one. He turns to what he regards as the pre-eminent example of Lazarus. ‘For in Lazarus’, he argues, ‘the pre-eminent instance of resurrection (*praecipuo resurrectionis exemplo*), it was flesh which lay down in weakness, the flesh which all but decayed into dishonour, the flesh which meanwhile stank to corruption: and yet as flesh Lazarus rose again’ (53.3). He argues that it is not the soul, which has not died, which is raised again but the body/flesh, which has died and therefore alone can be raised. Tertullian’s point is that the body which is soul-informed when it is sown is the same body but as spirit-informed when ‘it is wakened up’ (53.4). The body, when it rises, ‘receives back its soul [and] is again made a soul-informed body, so that it may become a spirit-informed one (*ut fiat spiritale*)’ (53.7). ‘Nothing rises again’, he declares, ‘but what has already been (*non enim resurgit nisi quod fuit*)’ (53.7). The apostle, says Tertullian, makes ‘this distinction of soul-informed body and spirit-informed body within the same flesh, seeing that he has previously built up this distinction in both Adams, that is, in both men (*id est in utroque homine*)’ (53.13). In the present life the flesh receives the Spirit but as a pledge (*arrabonem*). It receives the soul now not as a pledge but in its fullness (53.18). But ‘in due course’ it will receive the ‘fullness of the Spirit’, a spirit-informed body, and in that fullness (*per plenitudinem*) it is raised up again (53.19).

In chapter 54 Tertullian challenges those who argue that the verse from 2 *Corinthians* which declares that ‘mortality may be swallowed up by life’ (2 *Corinthians* 5.4) refers to the destruction of the flesh and thereby the impossibility of its resurrection (54.1). This phrase, Tertullian says, must be understood in the same sense as the other phrase (from 1 *Corinthians* 15.53) ‘this mortal must put on immortality’ (54.2). Thus the ‘swallowing up’ of the flesh is its being hidden and concealed and contained within life and not its being consumed or destroyed (*ibid.*). In chapter 55 he argues that the transformation or change in a thing’s condition is not tantamount to its destruction. For, he says, ‘no other flesh will partake of that resurrection than that which is in question’ (55.1). ‘Undergoing change is one thing,’ he declares, ‘but being destroyed is another’ (*aliud enim demutatio, aliud perditio*) (55.3). ‘To perish is altogether to cease . . . to be changed is to exist in another condition’ (55.6). ‘A thing may undergo a complete change and yet remain still the same thing’ (55.7). ‘Changes, conversions, and reformations will necessarily take place to bring about the resurrection, but the substance of the flesh will still be preserved safe’ (55.12). Chapter 56 is devoted to the simple argument that the proper and just judgement at the end is only possible if there is identity of the risen body with our present flesh with which argument Tertullian had dealt at great length from chapter 14. In chapter 57 Tertullian argues that our bodies, no matter how mutilated before or after death, will recover their perfect integrity in the resurrection. ‘To nature, not to injury are we restored; to our state

by birth, not to our condition by accident do we rise again' (57.5). In chapter 59 he argues that our flesh in the resurrection is capable, without losing its essential identity, of bearing with the changed conditions of eternal life (or of eternal death).

Excursus on the women with seven husbands

And to go back earlier in the treatise (having treated of his reading of *I Corinthians* 15), what does Tertullian make of the question on the resurrection asked of Jesus by the Sadducees and particularly, of Jesus' answer whereby he says that the resurrected will be 'like angels' at *Matthew* 22.23–33, *Mark* 12.18–27 and *Luke* 20.27–40? And how does his reading of these accounts of Jesus' own teaching square with that by modern readings of the passages and the question of the nature and form of post-death survival posed at the beginning of this chapter: whether such survival is embodied – and if so, in what form? – or unembodied? Tertullian deals only three times with these passages, at length in chapter 36, in passing at 42.4 and at more depth in chapter 62. In chapter 36 he appears to assume rather than argue for Jesus' affirmation of the resurrection of the flesh in his confrontation with the Sadducees. Unlike the Sadducees, Tertullian says, who deny the resurrection, both of body and of soul, 'our Lord was affirming it' when he chastised them for their ignorance of the scriptures and their unbelief in the power of God to raise the dead (36.2). He declares that 'by affirming the existence of that which was denied [by the Sadducees] . . . he also affirmed that [the resurrection] is of a character such as was denied, is, in fact, of both human substances (*utriusque scilicet substantiae humanae*)' (36.3). 'For [the resurrected]', he says,

will be like angels, in that they are not to marry because they are not to die, and also in that they are to pass over into angelic quality (*transituri in statum angelicum*) by virtue of that garment of incorruptibility, by virtue of a transmutation of substance, substance however raised again (*per substantiae resuscitatae tamen demutationem*).

(36.5)

'Thus', he concludes, 'you have the Lord affirming (*confirmantem*) as against the heretics or Jews that which is now (*nunc*) being denied among the 'Sadducees of the Christians', a complete and entire [that is, of both flesh and soul] resurrection (*solidam resurrectionem*)' (36.7). Tertullian, at 42.4, merely repeats that 'the flesh will certainly rise again, and that, as a result of the change which will supervene, it will take upon it angelic attire (*habitum angelicum*)'. But the point is that the flesh, the same flesh, it will remain. In chapter 62, in the context of Tertullian's discussion of the resurrected having bodily parts without any need to exercise their natural functions, declares that the resurrected are 'like the angels' in that they do not marry because they do not die. The resurrected are not 'prevented', he says, 'from continuing in the flesh because they do not also continue in the usages of the flesh' (*ibid.*). Says Tertullian: Jesus 'did not say, "They will be like angels",

so as to deny their humanity, but *as* angels, so as to conserve that humanity: he did not deprive them of their substance when he added to it a similarity' (62.4).

In chapter 60 Tertullian then deals with bodily functions and their use or non-use in the next life. The assumption of his opponents is that what you have you must thereby use. 'When life itself', he says, 'has been delivered from necessities the members also will be delivered (*liberata*) from their functions (*officiis*): but they will not cease for that reason to be unnecessary . . . they are retained for judgements' (60.5). 'For God's judgement – seat demands a man in full being (*salvum hominem*): in full being, however, he cannot be without the members, for of their substances, though not their functions, he consists (*constat*)' (60.6).

And you [his opponents] will have no right, on the ground that the members will in future be inactive (*vacatione*), to deny the possibility of its existing anew: for it is feasible for a thing to exist anew and nonetheless be inactive.
(60.9)

In chapter 61 he continues this argument and declares that 'how much more, when [humankind's] salvation is secure, and especially in an eternal dispensation, shall we not cease to desire those things [like matters associated with our stomachs and our regenerative organs], for which, even here below, we are not unaccustomed to check our longings' (61.7). In chapter 62 he discusses our Lord's words at *Matthew* 22.30 about the dead being 'like angels' and argues that this dominical claim does not deprive the dead of corporeal substance (62.4).

In the final chapter of the treatise he concludes: 'So then the flesh will rise again, all of it indeed, itself, entire (*resurget igitur caro, et quidem omnis, et quidem ipsa, et quidem integra*)' (63.1). For Tertullian, then, the raising of the flesh entire and itself, the same body indeed, does not cancel out that it might, in the apostle's words, rise *transformed* and *different*. But in *substance* it is the *same*. He declares also that 'both natures has [Christ] already united (*foederavit*) in his own self' (*ibid.*). But his opponents, in repudiating the resurrection of the flesh, in fact repudiate her creator (63.6). Thus does he conclude the most comprehensive, if not necessarily the most impressive, defences of a primary article of classic Christian belief.

Summary of Tertullian's presentation

For Tertullian there are a number of things which, considered together, constitute the grounds for the Christian belief in the resurrection of the body. These include the dignity of the flesh, the power of God, the many analogies drawn from nature to show resurrection as a normal part of existence, and the requirements of divine providence. Tertullian, early on in the treatise, alongside his assertion of the dignity of the flesh, declares its worthiness to be raised after death and dissolution. He counters those passages in scripture which seem to disparage the flesh with those which 'ennoble' it. That God can raise the flesh is, for Tertullian, based on the fact that God can do all things. God, Tertullian says, is competent to re-create

what he has once created, and in any case, creation is a far greater [and thus more difficult] work than re-creation. Tertullian argues, too, that the demands of divine providence and justice require that body and soul, reunited at the resurrection, must together face judgement for those things which were done when they were previously in union one with the other. In this he shares the view of Athenagoras, but it is possible that he gives it more significance than did the Athenian. From 18.4 Tertullian considers in great detail the contribution of holy scripture – both Old and New Testament – to his thinking on the resurrection. He addresses those views which suggest that much scripture – and which would include those on the resurrection of the body – often speaks figuratively. He accepts that some scripture is so expressed but declares that figurative language can have no reference point if it be not based on actual happenings. He declares that while allegory is used in scripture, it cannot be understood as being employed of the phrase ‘the resurrection of the dead’ in a spiritual sense. He covers much of the New Testament in seeking out witnesses to the reality of the resurrection of the dead – from *Colossians*, *Galatians*, *Philippians*, *1 Thessalonians*, *Revelation*, *Acts* and *Romans* among the books mined – and the Old Testament too – the *Psalms*, *Isaiah* and *Genesis* among them. He devotes two chapters to *Ezekiel* 37 and the bones on the valley and a whole chapter (and indeed more) to Jesus’ challenge to the Sadducees over the woman allegedly married to seven brothers. He engages closely with key passages such as *2 Corinthians* 4 and 5, *1 Thessalonians* 4.15–17 and 5.21, and *Ephesians* 4.22–24 and the ‘putting off of the old man’. He properly explores *1 Corinthians* 15 at great length and devotes more than three chapters to the verse which proved such an obstacle to many early Christian apologists – *1 Corinthians* 15.50 – that ‘flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God’.¹⁰ He argues there that the reference to ‘flesh and blood’ is essentially to their fruits and not their substance. He recognises that they cannot, on their own, enter the Kingdom but can do so through the intervention of the Spirit even where their works in this life are roundly condemned. He argues that change and transformation are not destruction and declares that ‘our flesh in the resurrection is capable, without losing its essential identity, of bearing with the changed conditions of eternal life’. The same body, he says, may rise transformed and seemingly different, but its substance and therefore its essence is the same. His opponents, he concludes, in repudiating the resurrection of the flesh, repudiate its creator.

Notes

- 1 Translated in a rather pejorative sense by Evans (1960) 15, as ‘popular ideas’.
- 2 He also counters *Genesis* 6.3 with *Joel* 2.28, *Romans* 7.18 and 8.8 and *Galatians* 5.17 with *Galatians* 6.17, *1 Corinthians* 3.16–17, 6.15 and 6.20.
- 3 See Kearsley (1998) 99.
- 4 This is, however, certainly not true of Marcion and of the various Gnostic writers.
- 5 A claim made by a number of early Christian writers.
- 6 In his *Apologeticum* Tertullian also follows this theme of demonstrating resurrection from nature, light and darkness both coming and going in their turn, seasons ending and then ‘beginning anew’.
- 7 The *De Anima*.

- 8 See van Eijk (1971) 520f. See also *Adversus Marcionem* 5.9.4 where Tertullian declares that ‘nothing rises except that which has fallen (*resurgere autem non est nisi eius quod cecidit*)’ and in this present treatise at 53.7 where he says that ‘nothing rises again but what already has been (*non enim resurgit nisi fuit*)’.
- 9 At *Adversus Haereses* 5.10.4 Tertullian takes the same line, that it is the ‘fruits’ of flesh and blood and not their substance which is condemned and denied entry to the kingdom of God.
- 10 We are reminded here that Irenaeus of Lyons devoted fifteen chapters of the fifth book of his *Adversus Haereses* to this verse. Tertullian himself devotes a whole chapter – the tenth – of the fifth book of his *Adversus Haereses* to this verse from *1 Corinthians* 15.

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6 The nature of post-death existence in Origen and the *Letter to Rheginos*

In the previous two chapters of Part 2 of this book, where we introduced the question of the nature of post-death existence in the thought of our four writers, we posed a number of questions which might assist and guide us in delineating or sketching the outline or specifications of the topic before us, or at least give us a working framework in addressing it. We also then considered some key biblical passages on the matter, before we looked particularly at both Athenagoras' (in Chapter 4) and then Tertullian's (in Chapter 5) representations of such post-death nature. The questions posed included:

Might post-death existence be embodied or unembodied, and how might we understand these latter notions? Might such post-death existence be solely, even if only for a time, of the soul? Might such a soul give expression to itself, or even just be aware or conscious of itself, after its separation from that body which had been its companion in this present life? How are we to understand the matter of the ongoing identity of such an existent or person? Can an unembodied soul be regarded as a person at all? Can and does such an existent, which was *me* in this present life, remain *me* in a post-death existence? Is some form of continuity necessary in order for *me* to still be *me* post-death? Is such identity merely numerical or psychological or informed significantly, for example, by memory or particular relationships?

We were reminded here, too, of the suggestion from many contemporary thinkers that visualisation, if not comprehension, requires [some form of] embodiment. And from scripture we considered particularly *1 Corinthians* 15, *2 Corinthians* 5, *Matthew* 22,23f./*Mark* 12.18f./*Luke* 20.27f. (the story of the woman with seven husbands), and *Luke* 16.19–31 (The Rich Man and Lazarus). In this chapter, we look particularly at the thinking about the nature of post-death existence of both Origen and the author of the *Letter to Rheginos*.

We are reliant, for the most part, on four passages in Origen's extant works for his explicit teaching on the resurrection of the body and particularly, its nature. One is from *De Principiis* 2.10, and the others are from *Contra Celsum*, 5.17–19, 7.32 and 8.49–50. In the second book of his now largely lost treatise *De Resurrectione*, however, Origen apparently combatted what he considered a crude understanding of the resurrection of the dead as the reconstitution of the fleshly body. This has led him, and wrongly so, we shall see, to be interpreted by some – and Methodius of Olympus from later in the third century (d. 311) is probably the

earliest example of such an interpretation – to have held and promoted a purely spiritual doctrine of the resurrection and particularly a spiritualisation of the resurrected body. This would seem to be also the case with reaction to his responses to the criticisms of Celsus on the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body. Origen's desire was clearly to make an intellectually robust case for the resurrection of the body against the suggestion of this most formidable pagan critic that the understanding of the 'simple' Christian was in fact the official view of the whole Christian body. This clearly led critics among his own co-religionists to sense, however wrongly, that he was himself compromising Christian doctrine. His translator Rufinus was, however, quite clear that Origen adhered clearly to the teaching of the church when he dealt with the resurrection of the body. In the *De Principiis* Origen, when preparing to speak about the judgement to come, declares that 'we must first, it seems to me, begin a discussion (*sermo*) on the resurrection, in order to learn what it is that shall come either to punishment or to rest and blessedness (*requiem ac beatitudinem*)' (2.10.1). He then makes clear that he needs here to repeat a few of his arguments from his previous works on the subject of the resurrection¹ 'because some make this objection to the faith of the church (*in ecclesiastica fide*), that our beliefs about the resurrection are altogether foolish and silly (*velut stulte et penitus insipienter*)' (*ibid.*). Recognising that his chief opponents at this point are '[Christian] heretics' – and not, presumably, pagans – he says, in the form of a series of questions, that if these agree with him that there is a resurrection of the dead, and that it is the body that dies, then 'there will be a resurrection of the body (*corporis ergo resurrection fiet*)' (*ibid.*). He then offers the apostle's statement at *1 Corinthians* 15.44 that 'the body is sown a natural (*animale*) body, it will rise again a spiritual (*spiritale*) body' to demonstrate that his opponents 'cannot deny that a body rises or that in the resurrection we are to possess bodies (*vel quia in resurrection corporibus utamur*)' (*ibid.*). If, Origen says, 'in the resurrection we are to possess bodies' and 'if those bodies which have fallen are declared to rise again' – and only that can rise which had already fallen, he declares –² 'then no person can doubt that these bodies rise again in order that at the resurrection we may once more be clothed with them (*ut his iterum ex resurrection induamur*)' (*ibid.*). And in order for us to live in bodies at the resurrection, it is necessary 'for us to live in no other bodies but our own (*non in aliis quam in nostris corporibus esse debemus*)' (2.10.1). And if it is true that these bodies, in which we are to be clothed and live, rise again as 'spiritual [things]', this means that 'they rise again from the dead with corruption banished and mortality laid aside' (*ibid.*). For otherwise, Origen declares, 'it would seem in vain (*alioquin vanum videbitur et superfluum*) for a person to rise from death only to die all over again (*ut iterum moriatur*)' (*ibid.*). For Origen the identity of the one body – sown *natural* and raised *spiritual* – is assured since 'it is from the natural body that the very power and grace of the resurrection evokes the spiritual body, when it transforms (*transmutat*) it from dishonour to glory' (*ibid.*).

Origen then affirms that each and every body – now or at the resurrection – has a shape (*habitus*) or form (*schema*); 'No-one', he says, 'except an utter stranger to all learning, will deny [that a body has a shape]' (2.10.2). Comments such as these may, of course, have caused Methodius to think that 'Origen taught that in

the resurrection men would have the same form as previously, but not a form of flesh [*De Resurrectione* 3.11–19]'. Origen then challenges his first opponents – his comments here remain primarily directed at the 'heretics' – to explain 'the differences (*differentias*) among those who rise again' (*ibid.*). He challenges them to show 'that the differences of glory among those who rise are comparable to these gradations among the heavenly bodies' (*ibid.*). He explains that for himself

when [the apostle] wished to describe how great were the differences among those who rise in glory, that is, the saints, [he] drew a comparison (*comparationem*) from the heavenly bodies.

but

when . . . he wished to teach us the differences among those who shall come to the resurrection without being purified in this life (*in hac vita non expurgati ad resurrectionem venient*), that is, the sinners, he draws an illustration from earthly creatures (*terrenis*). . . . For heavenly things are worthy of being compared with the saints, and earthly with sinners.

(*ibid.*)

Yet notwithstanding Origen's unusual but not untypical allegorising here, the bottom line for him at this point is that all this is offered 'in opposition to those who deny the resurrection of the dead, that is, the resurrection of bodies (*adversum eos qui resurrectionem mortuorum id est resurrectionem corporum negant*)' (*ibid.*). In Origen's mind, there may be gradations in the quality of the different resurrection bodies, but bodies all they will be. But what kind of bodies are they – we and he might ask along with the apostle – or are they not?

He then challenges people from within his own faith community (*ad nonnullos nostrorum*) – his previous comments having been directed against those he viewed as 'heretics' – people, he says, 'who either from poverty of intellect or from lack of instruction introduce an exceedingly low and mean idea of the resurrection of the body (*valde vilem et abiectum sensum de resurrectionis corporis*)' (2.10.3). Clearly these are people who believe in the resurrection of the body but believe that this involves a resuscitation or revival of the physical body which has died and been disposed of. It is precisely this rejection by Origen of such a crude and literal understanding of resurrection which has led him to be accused, wrongly in my view, of advocating a spiritual/unembodied view of it.³ He asks how one might read the apostle's teaching, in the Corinthian correspondence, of the natural body transformed into a spiritual one [at *1 Corinthians* 15.44], something sown in weakness and raised in power, from dishonour to glory, from corruption to incorruption [*1 Corinthians* 15.42–44]. Origen declares it absurd and contrary to the meaning of the apostle (*absurdum videtur et contra apostoli sensum*) to think that somehow [a body] risen 'in glory and in power and in corruptibility' might still be 'entangled in the passions of flesh and blood, given that the apostle says clearly that 'flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God' (*1 Corinthians* 15.50). He asks how those who this hold this 'low and mean' idea

of the resurrection of the body might understand the apostle's claim that 'we shall all be changed (*omnes autem immutabimur*)' [*I Corinthians* 15. 51], an act worthy of divine grace, a

change (*immutatio*) of like character to that in which, as the apostle describes it, "a bare grain of wheat or of some other kind [*I Corinthians* 15.37b]" is sown in the earth, but "God gives it a body as it pleased him (*prout voluit*) [*I Corinthians* 15.38a]", after the grain of wheat itself has first died.
(2.10.3)

He talks of there being implanted in our bodies, 'like a grain of corn', 'the life principle (*ratio ea*) which contains the essence of the body (*quae substantiam continent corporalem*)' (*ibid.*). And he declares that

although the bodies die and are corrupted and scattered, nevertheless by the word of God that same life principle which has all been preserved in the essence of the body (*verbo dei ratio illa ipsa quae semper in substantia corporis salva est*) raises them up from the earth and restores (*restituat ac reparat*) them, just as the power which exists in a grain of wheat, after its corruption and death, into a body with stalk and ear.

(*ibid.*)

He says something similar – or at least explains a possible misreading of such as this *De Principiis* passage – at *Contra Celsum* 5.23 when he declares that

we do not, therefore, maintain that the body which has undergone corruption returns [in the resurrection] to its original nature [εἰς τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς φύσιν], any more than the grain of wheat which has undergone corruption returns to the condition of wheat. What we say is that, just as over the grain of wheat there arises a stalk, so there is implanted in the body a certain life-principle (ἐγγχεῖται τοῦ σώματι λόγος τις), from which, not being corruptible, the body arises in incorruption.

This life-principle, the body being re-fashioned (*ratio illa reparandi corporis*), Origen continues in *De Principiis*, is for those counted worthy (*merebantur*) of an inheritance in the kingdom of the heavens. '[A]t the command of God refashions out of the earthly and natural body a spiritual body (*dei iussu ex terreno et animali corpore corpus reparat spiritale*) which can dwell in the heavens' (2.10.3). And, he continues, for those of inferior merit (*qui inferioris meriti*), even those of the lowest and meanest grade, there will be given

a body of glory and dignity corresponding to the dignity of each one's life and soul (*pro uniuscuiusque vitae atque animae dignitate etiam gloria corporis et dignitas dabitur*). This is so that even for those who are destined to the "eternal fire" or to "punishments (*supplicia*)", the body given is yet incorruptible, 'through the transformation (*permutationem*) wrought by the resurrection

so that this body itself ‘cannot be corrupted and dissolved even by punishments’ (ibid.). Origen then moves, in the remainder of chapter 10, to a reconsideration of its intended primary themes, judgement, the eternal fire, remedial punishments, the nature of the outer darkness and so on. We are reminded that here, for Origen, his discussion of the nature of the resurrection body – as in part for both Athenagoras and Tertullian – is set, in part at least, in the context of the coming judgement of God. We see, too, that Origen’s dealing with the topic of resurrection, as was Tertullian’s, is significantly informed by *1 Corinthians* 15. It is also clear that he believes that it is the same body in which we die in which we are raised, though a body transformed and not one of flesh and blood.

At *De Principiis* 2.11.2 he speaks of ‘some men, who reject the labour of thinking and seek after the outward and literal meaning of the law’ and who ‘desire after the resurrection to have flesh of such a sort that they will never lack the power to eat and drink and to do all things that pertain to flesh and blood’. At 2.11.3 he speaks, on the other hand, of those ‘who accept a view of the scriptures which accords with the meaning of the apostle [at *1 Corinthians* 15.44], who do indeed hope that the saints will eat; but they will eat the “bread of life”’. This does not entail that Origen rejects a bodily resurrection – although one could see how some might interpret it so – but that he will not countenance a fleshly one in which we are raised with the self-same body and the self-same desires as before.

At *De Principiis* 3.6.1 Origen acknowledges that biblical passages such as *John* 17.21 make it difficult to believe other than that ‘the end of all things will be incorporeal’ by our Lord’s statement there (*that they may be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you*). Yet, he argues from other passages at 3.6.4 that

we must not doubt that the nature of this present body of ours may, through the will of God who made it what it is, be developed by its Creator into the quality of that exceedingly refined and pure and splendid body, according as the condition of things shall require and the merits of the rational being shall demand.

At 3.6.5 he continues,

Our flesh indeed is considered by the uneducated and by unbelievers to perish so completely after death that nothing whatever of its substance is left. We, however, who believe in its resurrection, know that death only causes a *change* in it and that its substance certainly persists and is restored to life again at a definite time by the will of its Creator and once more undergoes a *transformation*.

‘When therefore all rational souls have been restored to a condition like this, then also the nature of this body of ours will develop into the glory of a “spiritual body”’ (3.6.6) and ‘that this *same* body, having cast off the weaknesses of its present existence, will be *transformed* into a thing of glory and made spiritual’ (ibid.). Origen’s faithfulness to the apostle and to the Corinthian correspondence could not be made more obvious. And in the end, he says that ‘it follows of necessity

that then even their *bodily* nature will assume that supreme condition to which nothing can ever be added' (3.6.9).

At *Contra Celsum* 4.57 Origen declares that Christians, as 'we believe in the resurrection of the dead, we affirm that changes occur in the qualities of bodies' – from corruption to incorruption, from dishonour to glory, from weakness to power, from natural to spiritual – as Paul at *1 Corinthians* 15.40–44 declares. And thus is the *underlying matter* able to receive whatever qualities the Creator wills to give it. At 5.17–19 Origen makes significant use, as he did in *De Principiis* and as Tertullian did in his *De Resurrectione*, of the 15th chapter of *1 Corinthians*. Chapter 17 of Book 5 deals primarily, in response to Celsus's apparent claim that Christians of his day believed that only Christians are raised from death, with the *who* and not the *what* or *how* of the resurrection body and thereby sits outside of our immediate concern here, this being the *nature* of the resurrection body. In chapter 18 Origen declares that this work is 'a defence (ἀπολογία) addressed to one foreign to the faith' but is also written to immature Christians: 'babes who are tossed to and fro and carried about "by every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and in craftiness after the wiles of error"' (5.18). Thus Origen writes both to defend Christian doctrine before a most able pagan opponent and to challenge the particular views of some rather simpler Christians. Origen declares that 'neither we nor the divine scriptures maintain that those long dead will rise up from the earth and live in the same bodies without undergoing any change (μεταβολή) for the better' (5.18). He wishes to both defend the bodily resurrection but also to disassociate himself from the more immature and unacceptable views espoused by some of his co-religionists. His commitment to a form of bodily resurrection is, however, undeniable. He quotes *1 Corinthians* 15.35–38 in which the apostle poses the primary question about the nature of the resurrection body – he takes as a given that it is a body – and declares that the nature of the resurrection body is such as God pleases to provide [*1 Corinthians* 15.38] (ibid.). But Origen makes clear from this passage, the body 'that is to be', the resurrection body, is not that which was 'sown' [buried] but like the seed of grain, such a body as 'God is pleased to give' (ibid.). He says, too, that 'we also hear the Bible teaching by many passages that there is a difference (τὴν διαφορὰν) between the body that is, as it were, sown, and that which is, as it were, raised from it' (5.19).

He then quotes from a number of Pauline passages on the subject: *1 Corinthians* 15, 42–44, 48–49 and 50–51. His use of 15.42–44 is to demonstrate that there is a 'difference' between the body that has been sown and that which has been raised from it. Difference, however, does *not* mean *not the same* body. His use of 15.48–49 is meant to elucidate 42–44 with the contrast between bearing the image of the earthy [man] (τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ χυκοῦ) and that of the heavenly (τοῦ ἐπουρανίου). Origen contends that the apostle here wished to

hide the secret truths on this point which are not appropriate for the simple-minded (τοῖς ἀπλουστέροις) and for the ears of the common crowd (τῇ πανδήμῳ). While these latter are led on to live better lives by their belief, nevertheless, to prevent misunderstanding of his words

presumably that it is the same body entirely as enfleshed that is raised – ‘he was later forced after the words “let us bear the image of the heavenly” to say as follows’. He then quotes 15.50 on ‘flesh and blood’ not being able to inherit the kingdom of God, or corruption incorruption (ibid.). The apostle, says Origen, then made clear that there was something ‘secret and mysterious about this teaching’ in declaring at 15.51a that he wishes to tell his readers a ‘mystery’. Origen here makes clear that such things sometimes can be classified as mysteries: ‘the deeper and more mystical doctrines which are rightly concealed from the multitude (ἀπὸ τῶν πολλῶν)’ (ibid.). On a rather more basic level, he comments that the Christian ‘hope is not one of worms, nor does our soul desire a body that has rotted’ (ibid.). This is merely a rejoinder to Celsus, whom he had quoted at 5.14, of declaring the Judaeo-Christian belief in the resurrection of the body as ‘simply the hope of worms . . . [and a] desire for a body that has rotted’.

Origen again takes up the subject of the resurrection at 7.32 of *Contra Celsum*. He there describes the doctrine (λόγον) of the resurrection as ‘deep and hard to explain’, which doctrine ‘needs a wise man of advanced skill more than any other doctrine (τι ἄλλο τῶν δογμάτων) in order to show that it is worthy of God and that the doctrine is a noble conception’. This doctrine, he continues, ‘teaches that the tabernacle [cf. 2 *Corinthians* 5.4] of the soul . . . possesses a seminal principle (λόγον σπέρματος)’. This latter term reminds one, as Henry Chadwick says, of the Stoic *logos spermatikos*.⁴ Origen then, against Celsus, declares that Christians

do not talk about the resurrection . . . because we have misunderstood the doctrine of reincarnation (τῆς μετενσωματώσεως), but because we know that when the soul, which is in its own nature incorporeal and invisible, happens to be in any material place, it requires a body suited to the nature of that environment (ὅτι ἡ τῆ ἐαυτῆς φύσει ἀσώματος καὶ ἀόρατος ψυχὴ ἐν παντὶ σωματικῷ τόπῳ τυγχάνουσα δέεται σώματος οἰκείου ἢ φύσει τῷ φύσει τῷ τόπῳ ἐκείνῳ) . . . it bears this body after it has put off the former body which was necessary at first but which is now superfluous in its second state [my italics] . . . it puts a body on top of that which it possessed formerly, because it needs a better garment for the purer, ethereal, and heavenly regions.

Origen is also recorded as having said, according to Methodius, that

it is necessary for the soul that is existing in corporeal places to use bodies appropriate to those places . . . if we are to inherit the kingdom of heaven and to exist in superior places, it is essential for us to use *spiritual* [my italics] bodies. This does not mean that the form of the earlier body disappears, though it may change to a more glorious condition.

(Methodius, *De Resurrectione* 1.12.4–5)

Thus Origen maintains his view that in the resurrection state there is yet a body but not one as previously worn. He then, in the latter part of 7.32, declares that

incorruptibility is not the same as incorruptible, just as immortality is not the same as immortal. This he intends, it would seem, to allow that a resurrected person puts on incorruptibility and immortality so that ‘the person who wears them does not suffer corruption or death but does not thereby become, by nature, incorruptible or immortal’. And then, at 7.33, he declares that

anyone interested should realise that we need a body for various purposes because we are in a material place, and so it needs to be of the same character as that of the nature of the material place (δεώμεθα σώματος τῷ Ἐν τόπῳ σωματικῷ τυγχάνειν καὶ τοιούτου ὁποῖα ἐστὶν ἡ φύσις τοῦ σωματικοῦ τόπου), whatever that may be; and as we require a body, we put the qualities previously mentioned on top of the tabernacle.

(cf. 2 Corinthians 5.1f.)

This idea, expressed here by Origen and repeated throughout the history of Christian reflection on the resurrection of the body – that God will give the person a body suitable and appropriate to his or her context or environment, so that the body which suits this present world may not be so in the next – is critical. The dilemma, of course, for theologians, is that when does the same body cease to be the same? There is the old joke of the curator at the Smithsonian who proudly recalls that the institution holds the original axe with which the young George Washington had cut down the cherry tree; they had needed, over time of course because of wear and tear caused by handling, to change the handle three times and the actual blade twice!

But again, against Celsus, Origen makes clear that

in order to know God we need no body at all. The knowledge is derived . . . from the mind which sees that which is in the image of the Creator and by divine providence has received the power to know God.

(7.33)

We need, one might say, a material body to navigate a material space. Thus again we see the ambivalence of Origen with respect to the body – and here he is so different from Athenagoras and Tertullian, for example – and it is this occasional ambivalence which has led him so often to be misunderstood.

At *Contra Celsum* 8.49 Origen also challenges Celsus – who had apparently accused Christians of longing for the body and hoping that it will rise again in the same form as if they possessed nothing better or more precious than that and who are ‘bound to their bodies . . . boorish and unclean . . . destitute of reason and suffer from the disease of sedition’ – declaring that he [Celsus] thereby misrepresents them – for

we have shown as far as possible what seemed to us the reasonable view of the matter when he asserts that we hold that in our constitution there is nothing better or more precious than the body. We maintain that the soul, and especially the rational soul (τὴν λογικὴν ψυχὴν), is more precious than any body,

since the soul contains that which is “after the image of the Creator” whereas this is in no sense true of the body . . . [for] God is not a material substance (οὐδὲ γὰρ . . . σῶμα ὁ θεός).

And yet again Origen reflects that ambivalence about the body which, again, has led to much misunderstanding of his thinking on the matter. And yet, he clearly maintains the resurrection of the whole person, body and soul.

Though Origen argues against Celsus that there will be a resurrection of the body at the end, he also argues against the Christian *simpliciores*, and does so thereby in some sympathy probably with Celsus here, when they argue for the resurrection of the actual flesh itself on the basis that ‘all things are possible to God’. He and Celsus would agree, according to Henry Chadwick, that ‘it is quite mistaken to appeal to divine omnipotence in order to justify belief in what seems fantastic’.⁵ There are at least four elements, Chadwick declares, to Origen’s argument here. The *first* is that ‘the nature of σῶμα is impermanent’; it is in a continual state of change and transformation. . . . Matter, [Origen] says, is continually in a state of flux’ (Methodius 1.9). *Second*, says Chadwick, Origen contends that ‘at death the body returns to its constituent elements, and although the composing elements do not in any sense cease to exist, yet they cannot be put together again in their original form’ (Methodius 1.14–15).⁶ ‘[T]he actual matter composing human flesh and blood does not stop existing at death, but it cannot again be restored to its former state’.⁷ *Third*, Origen points to the fact that when a person is devoured by wild beasts their body becomes part of the beast’s body (Methodius 1.20.4).⁸ This matter was the subject of some debate – see Tertullian – in the second century, although it is interesting, as Chadwick points out, that Celsus himself never makes use of this argument against the Christian belief in resurrection. Origen’s *fourth* line of argument is that ‘if the flesh is to rise again in the same form [as it enjoyed before death], then what use is going to be found for its organs?’ (ap. Methodius 1.24).⁹ In summary, for Origen ‘the resurrection does not mean that the physical and earthly body [itself] will be reconstituted’.¹⁰ The only point at which I need to take issue with Chadwick is what appears to be his claim that Origen’s challenge to the rather literalist views of the ‘simple-minded’ is in fact a challenge to the prevailing church doctrine. Chadwick says, for example, that Origen is challenging the *simpliciores*. He speaks then of Origen’s ‘criticism of the popular conception [on the resurrection of the body] as held in the church’.¹¹ But later he speaks of ‘the ecclesiastical doctrine of the resurrection of the body’ and of ‘Origen’s criticism of the church doctrine’.¹² Nowhere does Origen, to my mind, suggest that he is speaking of anything other than of the views of a particular group within the church, what Tertullian once called the *simpliciores*. To set him apart, in his own time, from church doctrine (however understood) on this matter is unnecessary and, I suspect, untrue.

Summary of Origen’s presentation

In both the *De Principiis* and the *Contra Celsum*, Origen struggles to deal with both what he sees as the misrepresentations of his mainly pagan opponents – who

accuse Christians of being credulous, foolish and simple-minded – and many ordinary Christians – who accept a literalist, materialist view of the resurrection of the body. This leads him often to a degree of ambivalence in the way in which he speaks of the resurrection body as he tries to balance these two concerns and we can see perhaps why his later Christian opponents (like Methodius) believed that he taught a spiritualised, incorporeal resurrection. Much of his purpose in writing about the resurrection of the body is driven by his understanding of the demands of divine providence and judgement, but he does not (though he may have done so in the largely lost *De Resurrectione* but we cannot know) give as much attention to the human person as body-and-soul, as do Athenagoras and Tertullian. He affirms that in the resurrection we are to possess bodies – and these bodies ‘will be our very own’ with corruption and mortality laid aside – but bodies transformed as the apostle maintains. Origen is Pauline through and through. He rejects any crude and literal understanding of the resurrection of the body and refutes any simplistic understanding of the physical body, as we know it now, being resuscitated or revived. He declares that it is absurd and contrary to the apostle’s meaning to suggest the body raised in power and glory and incorruptibility might be ‘entangled’ in flesh and blood, and this shapes his understanding of *I Corinthians* 15.50. God will give the resurrected such a body ‘as pleases God’. The resurrected body does not return ‘in its original state’. The transformed body is not one of flesh and blood. Origen does not reject a bodily resurrection; he cannot, however, countenance a fleshly one. The body is changed by death but persists and is restored but not as flesh. Different, he maintains, does not mean that it is not the same body. The doctrine of the resurrection of the body is ‘deep and hard to explain’, he says. In the resurrection state, there is a body but not the one previously worn, he tells Celsus. The tightrope of a careful ambivalence he walks on this matter makes for difficult reading and leaves Origen open to much misunderstanding. God, he declares, will give the resurrected such a body – the same but transformed – as is suitable and appropriate to its context and environment; a body which suits this world may not the next one. The nature of the *soma* is impermanent. It is in ‘a continual state of change and transformation’. At death the body returns to its original elements. They persist beyond death but ‘cannot be put back together again in their original form’ at the resurrection. The resurrection does not mean that the physical and earthly body [itself] will be reconstituted. But it is the same body and the same person. About that, at least, Origen is clear.

The precise meanings of seemingly significant parts of the *Letter to Rheginos* are notoriously unclear. Those who regard the work as a relatively straightforward Gnostic work from the second or third century simply read it as the docetic, anti-materialist, spiritualising piece that they assume it to be. Those who regard Valentinus as near-orthodox, on the other hand, and who see this piece as reflective of that school and as seeking to understand, interpret and apply the teaching of Paul, especially in *I Corinthians* 15, are inclined to see it close to orthodoxy if not straightforwardly orthodox for its day. Indeed, Mark Edwards declares, in a thoughtful 1995 essay, that ‘the language of the *Epistle* is in most respects consistent with the teaching of Paul about the resurrection’.¹³

At 44.13–15 the writer speaks of Christ ‘existing in the flesh (σάρξ)’. This is not the statement of a classic docetist. Likewise, at 44.25–26, he speaks of Christ ‘possessing both humanity and divinity’ and, at 46.15–17, that ‘we have believed that [Christ] arose from among the dead’. This Christology will inform, in part at least, his understanding of the resurrection. And yet, at 45.39–46.2, he speaks of the ‘spiritual resurrection’ ‘[swallowing] up the psychic alike (ὁμοίως) with the fleshly (σαρκινή)’. Edwards points to the fact that editors of the text ‘explain that “swallows up” [here] means “annihilates” or “destroys”’.¹⁴ ‘Nothing in this passage, then’, Edwards declares, ‘excludes the possibility that the final resurrection will be experienced “in the flesh”’.¹⁵ This, he argues, on the grounds that it may mean that resurrection ‘in the aeon swallows up the insipid foretastes which are marred by the interference of our bodily and worldly appetites’ and that our author has affirmed ‘that the resurrection follows immediately on our departure from the world’.¹⁶ I fear that I cannot see this as easily as Edwards seems to do. Our author says at 46.7–8 that ‘he who is dead shall arise’. Given that he seems to suggest later that the mind and the thought of the saved do not perish (46.21f.), this might tend towards the suggestion that that which dies – the flesh – might yet arise.

At 47.4–13 he says,

For if you did exist in flesh, you received flesh when you entered this world. Why, then, will you not receive flesh when you ascend into the Aeon? What is better than the flesh is for it [the] cause of life. Is not that which comes in to being on your account yours? Does not that which is yours exist with you?

This Peel calls ‘a new transformed flesh’ or ‘spiritual flesh’.¹⁷ He suggests further that our author may have had *1 Corinthians* 15.44 in mind here. Layton suggests here that traditional notions of God’s providence and omnipotence might counter-act any idea that the flesh – created by God – could actually cease to exist forever; the flesh in this scenario might disappear for a while but not forever.¹⁸ Edwards, looking particularly at the apostle’s words at *2 Corinthians* 5 and 7, *Philippians* 1.23 and *Colossians* 3.3, suggests that ‘that which is better than the flesh’ – since its role is to give life to a subject – will also require that subject and therefore ‘its permanence will thus imply the survival of the flesh’.¹⁹ His argument has merit. At 47.38–48.1, after he has acknowledged the question as to whether the one who is saved, if he leaves behind his body [at death], will be saved immediately (see Chapter 2 on the matter of the possible stages between death and resurrection), the author of the *Letter* answers that ‘indeed, the visible members (μέλος) which are dead shall not be saved;²⁰ and that only the living [members] which exist within will arise’. Edwards, who supports Peel’s translation here (and elsewhere), reads these lines in the light of *Ephesians* 2.1 and *Colossians* 2.13, suggesting that these are a Pauline commonplace that ‘those without Christ are dead in the present world’, and *2 Corinthians* 4.16 on the ‘outer man’ perishing while ‘our inner man is renewed day by day’.²¹ This, with the exhortation at *Colossians* 3.10 to ‘put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him’, ‘at least in metaphor, equates our future life with the inner man

and the spiritual body'. 'The exaggeration of the spatial metaphor in the *Epistle to Rheginus*', Edwards says, 'does not suffice to prove that the author took the phrase more literally than Paul'.²²

At 48.34–49.1 our author declares that the resurrection 'is the revelation of that which exists, and the transformation of things, and a transition (μεταβολή) into newness. For imperishability descends upon the perishable'. This, of course, reflects *1 Corinthians* 15.53–54 and does not seek to move from Paul's presentation of the resurrection; for with the apostle, it is the perishable and mortal body which must put on imperishability and immortality. Our author's injunction at 49.10–16 that Rheginos should not live 'in conformity with this flesh for the sake of unanimity, but flee from the divisions (μερισμός) and the fetters, and already you have the resurrection' may reflect more the language of Plato than of Paul perhaps, but it does not move from the latter's sentiments. This in no way requires a reading denying the resurrection to the flesh but merely argues that Rheginos should not live in accord with the fallen, imperfect, sinful ways of the flesh in this life (as the apostle declares at *Romans* 8.4b and 5a). At 49.30–36 our author declares, in noting Rheginos' 'lack of exercise [in practising the resurrection life],' that

it is right for each one to practise (ἀσκεῖν) in a number of ways and he shall [then] be released from this element (στοιχεῖον), so that he might not be misled but shall himself receive again what at first was.

This notion of being 'released' from what is clearly a reference to the earthly body is one to its present, fallen state and cannot necessarily be one which repudiates the possibility of the resurrection of such a body transformed into imperishability and glory. These sentences do not necessarily rule out a resurrection of the body.

Summary of the presentation of the *Letter to Rheginos*

There is little perhaps in this work, apart from the use of language clearly at home in a Gnostic universe, which challenges or repudiates Paul's witness to the resurrection which includes that of the earthly body transformed into immortality and imperishability at the resurrection. While much of the Valentinian/Gnostic language at first glance suggests a spiritual, soul-only resurrection, there is much in the work, if one puts aside a prejudiced determination to read it only through the lens of second-century and later orthodox critics of Gnostic thought, to see it rather as an attempt to understand the resurrection from the perspective of the apostle, particularly from the 15th chapter – as with Tertullian and Origen and others – of his *First Letter to the Corinthians* and from other writings of his. For the author of the *Letter* the resurrection almost certainly involves a body along with that mind and thought which, however, constitute the essence of the person.

The presentations of Athenagoras, Tertullian, Origen and the *Letter to Rheginos* compared on the nature of the resurrection body

All four writers in some way deal with the thought of Paul, and the 15th chapter of the *First Letter to the Corinthians* in particular, in their addressing of the matter of the nature of post-death existence. Athenagoras makes very little explicit use of Holy Scripture in his argument about the resurrection but the language of the apostle is clearly in his mind. Tertullian deals with the witness of scripture in over half of his treatise on the resurrection, much of it with reference to *I Corinthians* 15 and three chapters to verse 50 of that chapter alone. Much of the extant reflections on the matter of resurrection on the part of Origen concern *I Corinthians* 15 and 15.50 is a crucial part of this. The *Letter to Rheginos* is in great part a reflection on this same chapter. Tertullian seeks a way of explaining away 15.50 – that the reference there to ‘flesh and blood’ is to the fruits of sinful flesh and not to its essential substance – while Origen sees it as vital evidence that the resurrected, transformed body will not come back in its original, fleshly form.

Athenagoras deals with the nature and purpose of human existence – that purpose being the unending contemplation of the divine – the requirements of divine justice – specifically the requirement that the whole person, soul-and-body, might face the judgement of God for things done in this life – the power of God to affect the resurrection of a dissolved body, and the worthiness (or not) of God in doing so. For Athenagoras the body must be raised exactly as it was ‘in all its constituent parts’ in order for it to both meet the end purposed for it and the demands of divine justice.

Tertullian deals with similar matters to Athenagoras – the dignity of the flesh, the power of God to raise the dead and the worthiness of this, the requirements of divine justice and the need for the whole person, soul-and-body, to face this – and gives particular attention to analogies from scripture for resurrection as normal part of created existence. He accepts, as the apostle argues, that our flesh, without losing its essential identity and substance, may rise transformed as bearing with the changed conditions of its new existence. Yet while it may be different, it will be essentially the same. In this he differs from the Athenian.

Origen writes, in his known thought on the resurrection, about the demands of divine providence and judgement, that the bodies in which we rise are ‘ours’, ‘our very own’, but transformed with corruption and mortality laid aside. The risen body no longer is flesh and blood, but it is the same person and the same body, but one suitable and appropriate to its new context and environment.

The *Letter to Rheginos* seems to accept that the body enjoys the resurrected life and constitutes with the mind the essential person, yet one transformed.

At the beginning of Chapters 4 (Athenagoras), 5 (Tertullian) and 6 (Origen and the *Letter to Rheginos*), we recognised how our consideration of the thought of our four early Christian writers might be informed or shaped even by a number of questions on the nature of post-death existence. Now while some if not all of these questions may properly be regarded as contemporary to them – and thus perhaps

ones which our writers, in their own time, may not have asked quite so explicitly – it might be useful to see how they would possibly respond if some of these questions were put to them. Some of the questions not addressed here, such as

How are we to understand the matter of the ongoing identity of such an existent or person?

Can an unembodied soul be regarded as a person at all?

Can and does such an existent, which was me in this present life, remain me in a post-death existence?

Is some form of continuity necessary in order for me to still be me post-death?

have been addressed already in Chapter 3 on continuity and personal identity.

Might post-death existence be embodied or unembodied and how might we understand these latter notions? While Athenagoras, Tertullian and Origen might represent a transitional, intermediate state – between death and resurrection – as essentially unembodied, they would have all understood post-death resurrection as embodied even if, in the case of Tertullian and Origen, that existence were in a transformed-but-the-same body. In the case of the writer of the *Letter*, the jury is out on this question; yet unembodied existence, even in resurrection, cannot be ruled out.

Might such post-death existence be solely, even if only for a time, of the soul? For Athenagoras, Tertullian and Origen the answer would almost certainly be in the positive, while the *Letter* it is not at all clear on this. What is clear, however, is that the *Letter* envisages no intermediate state between death and resurrection.

Might such a soul give expression to itself, or even just be aware or conscious of itself, after its separation from that body which had been its companion in this present life? For Athenagoras the unembodied soul appears to have no self-consciousness or self-awareness while for Tertullian and Origen the unembodied is both self-aware and active.

Irenaeus deals with many of the same issues as one or other of the writers addressed here, particularly Tertullian. He gives constant and consistent attention to the capacity – the power – of God to affect the resurrection, to do the seemingly impossible (*Adversus Haereses* 5.3.1; 5.3.2; 5.3.3; 5.4.1; 5.5.2; 5.6.2 and 5.72).²³ At AH 5.3.2 he remarks, employing a commonplace sentiment found in a number of the Fathers, that it is easier to re-create than to create in the first place:

And surely it is more difficult and incredible, from non-existent bones, and nerves and veins, and the rest of man's organisation, to bring it about that all this should be, and to make man an animated and rational creature, than to re-integrate again that which had been created and then afterwards decomposed into earth . . . having thus passed into those [elements] from which man, who had no previous existence, was formed.

At *Adversus Haereses* 5.3.3 Irenaeus covers another concern addressed by a number of our writers when he affirms the dignity of the flesh and the worthiness of

God's part in raising it from death. At 5.5.2 he confirms the strength of the will of God against the nature of any created thing and particularly in this matter of resurrection, the weakness of the flesh. At 5.6.1 he repeatedly draws attention to the fact that whole, perfect human being is both body and soul (and for him, spirit):

Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a *part* of the man, but certainly not *the* man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God.

At 5.7.1 Irenaeus makes clear that Christ's resurrection in the flesh is the primary model for ours. At 5.7.1 and 2 he makes extensive use of various verses from *1 Corinthians* 15 to make his case for the resurrection of the flesh. And then, for six chapters from 9 to 14, he exegetes the key and [to many of the Fathers, most troubling] verse, *1 Corinthians* 15.50: '*Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*'. His dealing with this verse is not dissimilar to that of Tertullian in *De Resurrectione* 48–50. Irenaeus says at 5.9.3 that 'the flesh, therefore, when destitute of the Spirit of God, is dead, not having life, cannot possess the kingdom of God'. Yet, he says, the flesh does not so much inherit the kingdom but is *inherited* (5.9.4). It cannot by itself inherit the kingdom but can be taken for an inheritance into the kingdom. He makes clear, too, that it is the fruits of the sinful flesh and not its substance which is at issue here (5.10.1). Flesh is, Irenaeus says, 'capable of corruption, so also of incorruption' (5.10.1). Irenaeus declares that his opponents – the heretics – wrongly allege that this verse refers to the flesh 'strictly so called' and not to fleshly works (5.13.3) but the Lord shall 'transfigure the body of humiliation conformable to the body of his glory' (*ibid.*). And thus, 'if in the present time, fleshly hearts are made partakers of the Spirit, what is there astonishing if, in the resurrection, they receive that life which is granted by the Spirit?' (5.13.4). And thus the apostle 'has not pronounced against the very substance of flesh and blood, that it cannot inherit the kingdom of God' (5.14.1). Nowhere can I see, however, Irenaeus particularly associating resurrection and judgement with respect either to the whole nature of human being as body and soul (and spirit) or to the inheritance of flesh and blood with respect to the kingdom.

Ps-Justin deals much less with the matters addressed by our authors than does Irenaeus. In chapters 4 and 5 of his *De Resurrectione*, he speaks of the power of God to raise the dead and suggests in chapter 6 that this belief in the resurrection is consistent with those philosophers like Plato, Epicurus and the Stoics whose belief in the indestructibility of the primary elements makes it not impossible that such elements are capable of being re-made. In chapter 7 he speaks of the value of the flesh in God's sight, as his creation, and thereby of the worthiness of its being raised from death. He also, in chapter 8, makes clear that given that human being is a union of body and soul – for each by itself is only a *part* and not the *whole* person – and the promise of salvation made to the human person is made thereby to the body. And as in Irenaeus, for ps-Justin, as he makes clear in chapter 9, the resurrection of Christ in the flesh is the primary model for ours.

Notes

- 1 This is presumed to be a reference at least to his largely lost *De Resurrectione*, now known only in a few unreliable fragments.
- 2 See the similar language employed by Tertullian in Chapter 5.
- 3 See, for example, Photius, Ep. I.8.15,
- 4 Chadwick (1953) 420, note 4.
- 5 Chadwick (1948) 48.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 86.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 88.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 89.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 90.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 97.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 86.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 94f.
- 13 Edwards (1995b) 79.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 80.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 Peel (1969) 42 and 83.
- 18 Layton (1987) 322.
- 19 Edwards (1995b) 85.
- 20 Layton (1987) 323, interestingly, translates this as ‘Surely, then, [Layton adds, ‘so might run the argument’) the dead, visible members will be preserved’.
- 21 Edwards (1995b) 81.
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 *I Clement* 27, Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 1.18; and 1.19, and Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum* 1.13, also make reference – within their limited dealings with the matter of resurrection, the second mentioned the much-quoted *Matthew* 19.26 on God doing the impossible – to the power of God to raise the dead.

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7 Conclusion

The second and third centuries of the Common Era saw a surge in interest among Christian writers on the matter of the resurrection of the body. It is perhaps the single subject most written about in the period – Tertullian himself calls the doctrine of the resurrection the ‘first article of our faith’ – and is sometimes the only subject still extant from the body of work of many such writers.¹ Apart from the writers with whom we have primarily dealt in this book – Athenagoras, Tertullian (in at least four of his writings²), Origen and the author of the *Letter to Rheginos*, and those like Irenaeus of Lyons (15 chapters as we have seen in the fifth book of his great work the *Adversus Haereses*) and ps-Justin (possibly Hippolytus of Rome?) (and a whole treatise devoted to the subject)³ to a lesser extent – others like Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, the author of the *Didache*, Justin Martyr, Tatian the Syrian, Theophilus of Antioch and Methodius (with his own *De Resurrectione*) all either wrote whole treatises on the topic or gave significant attention to it in other more general works. The context in which these treatises were written was normally either their dealing with the criticisms of pagan opponents like Celsus or with those of their heterodox ones within their own broader faith community. The former, the responses to pagan attacks, were written therefore for the most part as apologetic or protreptic works – both to defend and to commend the faith and its central teachings to explain and to convert – while the latter were intended not only to defend this central doctrine of the faith against the seemingly heterodox (always more dangerous than mere pagans) but to defend and to support the potentially wavering faith of others which attacks on the resurrection of the body either jeopardised or at least compromised. Denial or refutation of the resurrection of the body (but what else, as some of our writers ask, could be raised?) challenged and threatened some foundational tenets of the Christian faith: the Incarnation, the unity of the Godhead,⁴ the critical relationship of the Old and the New Covenants, the identity and relationship of the Creator God and of his Son, the critical connection between Creation and Redemption, and so on. The attack on the resurrection of the body on the part of Christian heretics was almost always linked with an attack on some other feature of orthodox belief. The defence of the resurrection – and writers like Tertullian knew this very well – was, for such writers, a defence of the very fundamental tenets of Christian teaching. If the bastion of the resurrection went down, what would follow in its train? What else, if anything, might survive the wreckage, the resultant carnage?

To deny the resurrection of the body was, for some early Christian writers, to deny the incarnation of the Son of God; for why would the Father send the Son in incarnate form if the flesh were not part of God's salvific plan? To deny that Son could have been sent in incarnate form was, for some such writers, to embrace the positions of both Marcion and many of the Gnostic writers which held that the Father of the Son is not the Creator God – who is indeed some inferior, somewhat deluded deity who thinks that he deserves top billing – and that the act of creation (by this inferior divinity) had no connection whatsoever with the renewal and reconciliation brought into action by that Son at his Father's behest. For these writers – and Athenagoras, Tertullian and Origen (and possibly even the author of the *Letter*) at least are among them – to deny the resurrection of the body was to deny God himself and his Son. Later such denials were thought even to imperil central Christian practices such as Baptism and Eucharist.

Athenagoras is clearly a philosopher-theologian but a Christian one. He alludes to the Christian scriptures but does so for the most part only indirectly, without explicit acknowledgement, and without any sense that these scriptures are the starting point or even the primary basis for his argument for the resurrection of the body. His epistemological approach would have been recognised by philosophers of his day, be they Middle Platonist, Stoic or even Aristotelian. He argues from *first principles* and from the notion of *natural concepts*. He makes no reference, makes no allusion, even, to the resurrection of Christ as the basis or even as corroborating argument for the bodily resurrection of the human person. He makes occasional references to God but mainly to the Creator; this is not surprising given that in the creation of the human person is grounded his whole argument for the resurrection, but it is noteworthy. He is a Christian – there is no doubt about that – but it is not the Christians, it would seem, unless it is to a very philosophically minded Christian audience, to whom he addresses his arguments. It is to the philosophers who inhabit his intellectual world. It is, of course, possible that Athenagoras, when he speaks of 'falsehood which grows up alongside of every doctrine and teaching which abides by the truth that it contains' at 1.1 of the *De Resurrectione*, and of 'those who honour the sowing of spurious seed to the destruction of the truth' (ibid.), and of the 'reflections on these matters and the discord which arose between them and their predecessors and contemporaries' (1.2), and of 'the confusion which characterises the discussion of matters currently debated' (ibid.), and of the persons who 'have left no truth free from misrepresentation' (ibid.), is alluding to the purveyors of what he deems to be Christian heresies concerning the resurrection of the body. We can, of course, never know this, and if he is doing this then it would only be – if we accept the thesis that this treatise is intended as a contribution to a philosophical conversation wider than the Christian one – out of concern for non-Christian misunderstandings of this central teaching of Christian belief drawn from such heterodox misrepresentations. And yet nothing else in the treatise would positively and incontrovertibly support such a reading. We turn now to Tertullian, whom, we shall see, approaches the matter from a whole other direction, on a whole other basis, and where the heretics are explicitly recognised, named and in Tertullian's view, shamed.

Tertullian is a Christian theologian who seeks to base his arguments, including those for the resurrection of the body, on scripture. He is not uninfluenced by the philosophical schools of his day, both the Middle Platonist and especially the Stoic, but even these are for him ultimately subject to the direction of scripture and the evolving Christian tradition. His thought, however passionately and at times violently expressed (and Tertullian is violent of language and passionate), is clear and sophisticated, and this is no less true of his writing on the resurrection than it is for that on other topics. His primary audience is Christian and Christians of all sorts. He writes both to and against both heretics and the *simpliciores* – the unlettered Christians – (although he has some sympathy for the latter but none for the former). He wrote against both Marcion – who distinguished the Gods of the Old and New Testaments and denied the incarnation of the true God’s Son – and the Valentinians among the Gnostics. In the *De Resurrectione* he challenges a Christian ‘sect more akin to the Epicureans than to the Prophets’ (2.1) with the response of Jesus to the Sadducees (see Matthew 22.23–33) in affirming the resurrection. This group – one found ‘even among God’s people’ – would seem to have discounted the resurrection altogether. Yet Tertullian’s primary concern here is with the ‘other Sadducees’, those who ‘acknowledge [only] half a resurrection (*dimidiam agnoscunt resurrectionem*)’, that of the soul alone, ‘spurning [as they do] the flesh as they spurn also even the Lord of the flesh’ (2.2). These are, he says, the ‘heretical upholders of a second deity’ who separate Christ and his work from the Creator [God]. And here he names those whom he challenges specifically as Marcion, Basilides, Valentinus and Apelles. These, he says, ‘shut the door against the salvation of that substance of which they deny that Christ is partaker (*consortem*)’ (2.4). The breadth of his writings – there are thirty extant treatises on a wide array of topics from different periods of his lengthy career – only underlines his commitment to his faith and to its exposition and defence. His writings are didactic, apologetic and protreptic.

It is a pity, as we have noted before, that we do not have the largely missing *De Resurrectione* of *Origen*. If we did have it, for example, then we would probably have a much clearer idea of just whom he saw as his most significant opponents when writing on the resurrection. As it is, however, we do know this reasonably well from his work that is extant. Clearly one such opponent was the pagan Celsus and others presumably like him. Though the matter of resurrection takes up only a relatively small portion of the *Contra Celsum*, it is not without significance either for knowing what types of opposition to the doctrine of the resurrection Christians faced from pagan writers or for what Origen himself thought on the topic. In the *De Principiis* too, while the portions of that work on the resurrection and the afterlife are, again, relatively few, they do provide us with some clear ideas of just whom Origen saw as the main opposition – mainly here from within the broad Christian community – as well as with insights into his own thinking on the matter. At 2.10.1 of this work – where he begins his brief treatment of the resurrection – he declares that the ‘chief objectors [to the doctrine of the resurrection] are the heretics’. He doesn’t name them explicitly or what their particular objections to or arguments against the teaching were; we are simply to understand

that they oppose it. In this section he simply invokes the teaching and authority of the apostle in *1 Corinthians* 15. And then, at 2.10.3, he turns the discussion to ‘some of our own people, who either from poverty of intellect or from lack of instruction introduce an exceedingly low and mean idea of the resurrection of the body’. Again, while he does not make explicit what these people think, it is clear that their take on the resurrection of the body is an unsophisticated, literal and materialist one. The body that is raised, for them, is the body that died with no change in its physicality. This is, of course, the view of the resurrection that Celsus so mocked in his work against the Christians. Again, Origen points to the teaching authority of the apostle in his Corinthian correspondence to make clear what that teaching really is. Thus Origen, in his dealing with the subject, seeks to carefully balance his defence of the teaching of the church between the mockery of the educated pagan and the credulity of ordinary, uneducated Christians, Tertullian’s *simpliciores*.

Origen was perhaps, indeed almost certainly, the greatest mind produced by the church in the period before Nicaea. He was both a theologian and an exegete, and his thought is solidly based on scripture, although as much on an allegorised reading of many texts as on a more literal one. His work is, like that of Tertullian, didactic, apologetic and protreptic. His desire to combat those among the pagans, like Celsus, who had begun to attack the teachings of the church, but also to challenge the simplistic readings of the faith by many of his less-educated co-religionists, led him into a certain ambivalence – as he sought to engage in a series of balancing acts – which made him the object of much suspicion among other believers, both contemporary and later, and saw him as much condemned as celebrated within the church in the centuries which followed. This is as true with his work on resurrection as on any other topic.

The author of the *Letter to Rheginos*, known only to us from this work, clearly identifies with the Valentinian-Gnostic movement of the second century (and employs both their language and basic frameworks), but was, as we now recognise the great Valentinus himself to have been, much closer to orthodoxy, as then and later understood, than is often allowed. It was perhaps this near-orthodoxy which made both Valentinus, and this author, most dangerous in the eyes of ‘orthodox’ opponents. We often feel more need to make clear how different we are from those to whom those differences are not so apparent than we do with those whose differences from us are glaringly obvious. This near-orthodoxy and its challenges to the ‘orthodoxy’ are clear in this epistle on the matter of the resurrection. It is possible to see the opponents against whom the author of the *Letter* might have contended as both those so-called ordinary Christians, Tertullian’s *simpliciores*, who maintained a literalist and materialist view of the resurrection of the body – the same group as those against whom Origen wrote – but also his fellow-Gnostics, if we may so call them, who discounted a bodily form of resurrection altogether and who also took a docetic/non-incarnational view of the coming of Christ into the world of human beings.

While there is much argument among biblical scholars and theologians on the matter of whether scripture allows or suggests an intermediate period between

this life and death and the resurrection, it is clear to me at least that there is more evidence in the scriptures to support such notion – in which the body remains dead and non-existent and the soul very much alive, conscious or otherwise, in what someone has called an ‘in-between state’ – than for the contrary argument that the resurrection follows immediately upon death. This assertion leaves aside the argument over whether time in this world and that in the next are not to be compared so that what seems like an interval, an *in-between* from the perspective of this present existence, may not seem so from that of the next. For me *Luke* 23.43 (the request from the thief on the cross alongside Jesus and the latter’s response), *John* 14.2 (the ‘way-stations’ to be prepared by Jesus for his followers), *Luke* 16.19–32 (The Rich Man and Lazarus), and *2 Corinthians* 5.6–7 (‘no-one is at home with the Lord immediately on going into exile from the body’) (*1 Corinthians* 15, interestingly, has no view on the matter) – but not perhaps *Philippians* 1.23 (Paul’s desire ‘to be with Christ’) – clearly evidence a belief in such an intermediate state. But notwithstanding the partial ambivalence of the scriptures on the matter, the Christian writers with whom we have dealt – Athenagoras, Tertullian, Origen (and Irenaeus) but not the author of the *Letter* – are quite clear on the matter; there is such a state. All of them, except Athenagoras, base their understanding of this primarily on the scriptural witness. For most, the name of this place, for the righteous – the unrighteous wait elsewhere in a location far less salubrious – is ‘paradise’. For no-one, apart from Origen, does this transitional state have a particular purpose which they might name; it simply is. For Origen, on the other hand, it is a place and a time of instruction, a lecture-room or ‘school for souls’ where the righteous are helped to understand the things which they have seen and experienced in the present life and to receive some indication of what is to come in the next. It may also be that Irenaeus, too, saw some instructional purpose in the stop-over spot on the way to the consummation of all things and immortality. The way-stations of *John* 14 can be merely stops on a journey or for Origen, instructional centres themselves. But for all, that is, for those for whom there is an intermediate state, it is only temporary. Only the author of the *Letter*, not surprisingly, understands the translation from this life to the next as immediate and seamless. Indeed, for him, the next life can be begun even in this one; the resurrection can be already.

The matters of the spatio-temporal and the more critical personal continuity and identity from this present life-and-death to the resurrection life is not unconnected to that of the question of the intermediate or immediate transition or translation. Both Athenagoras and Tertullian, as we have seen, recognise the potential gap between this present life and the resurrection as one in terms of personal continuity. Neither regard this problem, such as it is, as insurmountable. Athenagoras sees the apparent discontinuity between death and resurrection – with the body absent and the soul dormant – as not really different from a phase of sleep. He says further that the demands of divine judgement – for which the body and soul must be reunited and about which the united person must retain a memory of the deeds for which he or she is praised or blamed – make this apparent discontinuity of person only that – apparent, that is – and constitutes its own form of continuity.

Tertullian, addressing questions of both judgement and of God's creation and re-creation out of nothing, declares that any change in the body, which changes are part and parcel of its existence even in this life, do not mean destruction but only transformation (as the apostle witnesses to in *1 Corinthians* 15). Origen, like Tertullian, sees the soul in the interim as active. He sees no problem with the transitional and the absence of a body but, as we saw above, understands this time as a useful one of instruction. (This would also be so for Irenaeus, it would seem.) For the author of the *Letter* there is no issue as an interim, intermediate state does not exist. Personal continuity and identity is guaranteed by both the seamless transition from this life to the next and by the fact that the immortal soul or mind of the Elect constitutes the essence of the person.

The matter of the nature of the resurrected person – in particular but not solely the form of embodiment – is perhaps the most critical and debated one of all in discussions about the resurrection. All of our four writers (and Irenaeus too) – and this includes Athenagoras who, while he rarely if ever quotes or explicitly acknowledges scripture in his treatise, clearly has the words of the apostle in the back (or even at the front) of his mind throughout his reflections – look principally, if not quite exclusively, to the thought of Paul; in particular to the 15th chapter of his *First Letter to the Corinthians*, and most particularly to *1 Corinthians* 15.50: *Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*. Tertullian (and Irenaeus) make clear that the apostle's concern here is with the fruit of the flesh in this sinful and fallen world and not with its substance. They also confirm, however, that flesh and blood cannot of themselves inherit the kingdom but only do so with the help of the Spirit. Origen also sees this verse as presenting no particular problem but takes a slightly different approach to Tertullian (and Irenaeus) in seeing it as confirmation that the flesh, while resurrected, will not come back in its original, fleshly form but as transformed into a spiritual body in the Pauline sense. If Athenagoras himself had dealt explicitly with the verse, I am convinced that he would have struggled to exegete it out of the way – apart from adopting a form of Tertullian's (and Irenaeus') response – so committed was he to the original form of the resurrected body needing to be raised exactly 'in all its constituent parts'. For Tertullian, the resurrected body will be 'different but the same essentially, in substance'. The *Letter* is in some ways itself a significant exegesis on the 15th chapter of *1 Corinthians*. The employment of phrases from the epistle occur throughout as evidence of this.

Athenagoras, as we have seen above, identifies the matter of the nature and purpose of human existence as his primary explanation for the need for the resurrection of the flesh. He and Tertullian both consider as significant, *first*, the matter of the power of God to raise the dead (to do the otherwise seemingly impossible), given that they say that it is, in any case, far easier to re-create something than to create it in the first place from nothing (as do both Irenaeus and ps-Justin); *second*, the inherent dignity of the flesh as created by God; *third*, the utter worthiness of God in raising it and the assumed unworthiness of not raising and saving that which he has created; and *fourth*, the need for the human person to be raised whole and complete from death, body and soul reunited for the purpose of a fair and

reasonable divine judgement on those deeds, good and not-so-good, done in this present life. Both Irenaeus and ps-Justin mirror the need for the reunion of body and soul at the resurrection but do not mention this particularly in relation to divine providence and judgement. This may, however, reasonably be assumed to be part of their thought on the matter. Origen, too, writes of the demands of providence and judgement and claims that this must happen with a body ‘which is ours’, ‘our very own’, but one transformed with corruption and mortality laid aside.

There is a progression of sorts from the literalism and seeming materialism of Athenagoras on the matter⁵ – requiring the body raised to be that entirely which had died – to the more nuanced view of Tertullian with less emphasis on the fleshly and more on the transformed nature of the body – and then to the even more sophisticated and necessarily ambivalent presentation of Origen, who tries to steer a path between the ridicule of Celsus and the unformed thinking of the ‘simple’ Christian.

Notes

- 1 There is, of course, a certain irony in the fact that the treatise *De Resurrectione* from the pen of Origen – perhaps the most prolific writer of the pre-Nicene period – is not extant and is found only in the occasional excerpt from other writers’ works.
- 2 The *De Resurrectione*, the *Apologeticum*, the *De Anima* and the *Adversus Marcionem*.
- 3 See Whealey (2006).
- 4 See, for example, at Tertullian’s *De Resurrectione*, 2. 5f., where he explicitly connects the heretics’ dealing with both the resurrection of the flesh and the unity of the Godhead. He makes particular mention here, too, of his ‘preparatory volume’ the *De Carne Christi*.
- 5 This may not apply so easily, of course, if one accepts a post-second-century dating and another writer for this treatise.

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