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Chapter Six

ABSENT FROM THE BODY

To be "absent from the body" is to be "present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). This is the clearest of truths in the mind of Paul, and one of the most comforting assurances for the child of God. Death for the Christian is not so much an exit out of life as it is an entry into the Lord's presence in a very personal sense.

Yet it presents a problem that has never really been resolved satisfactorily. The problem arises from the fact that Scripture seems to place the resurrection of the *body* not at the time of our departure from this life but much later: indeed, not until the Lord's return. There appears to be an interval between these two events. For those who, like Adam, Abel, Shem, Abraham, and other Old Testament saints, have already been in the Lord's presence for thousands of years, this period of waiting for the resurrection of the body would seem to be long indeed. In fact, it is apparent that for the great majority of those who have died in Christ throughout human history the interval between the two events must be very extended. What precisely is their "constitution" during this long intermediate period? Are they only "half-persons" meanwhile? What would be the nature of a half-person? Or doesn't the body *really* matter? Do we actually *need* it at all?

The problem stated

So the problem is, In what form does the disembodied spirit present itself when robbed of the vehicle by which it has expressed its character and established its personal identity throughout the whole of life? Does it exist as a mere ghost, a shadow of its former self? Is it in any sense a *real* entity, fully conscious and wholly representative of a human person while it thus awaits reunion with its body? If it is an entire and real entity, why does it still need reunion with its body?

Suppose we respond to this by saying, "No, we don't really need the body any more. We can be perfectly happy and content as a mere ghost of our former selves. As a disembodied spirit we can be fully conscious and well able to identify ourselves to others, and clearly recognizable to all who knew us as we were in this life." Then, this being so, why do we wait for some addendum that will make little if any difference to us when we finally acquire it? Why should we even now "groan within ourselves," awaiting the "redemption of our *body*" (Romans 8:23) if, when that redemption is accomplished, it really makes so little (if any) difference — innumerable departed saints having already managed without a body for thousands of years? As Martin Luther said, "It would take a foolish soul to desire its body when it is already in heaven."⁸⁹

In what way will the recovery of a body enhance our joy in the Lord and our sense of fulfillment as individuals if, for so long a time, a child of God can manage perfectly well without it? How will this final step in the plan of redemption of the whole man, enhance the wonder and delight we shall already be experiencing in the presence of the Lord Jesus? Why does Paul place so much emphasis upon, and go into such specific detail about, the resurrection of the body (and not just *any* body but our *own* body) as he does in 1 Corinthians 15:35-53? Why does he insist that if there is no resurrection of the body "we are of all men most miserable" (1 Corinthians 15:13, 19) — despite the fact that we apparently enter into the unalloyed joy of our Lord without it?

In contrast with this emphasis on the resurrection of the *body*, the Greek philosophers were so impressed with the vitality of the human *spirit* and the limitations imposed by the body which served only to imprison it, that they saw the death of the body as a great liberation.⁹⁰ The idea of being rejoined to it made no sense whatever. Indeed, the Gnostics at one point in the early development of Christian thought argued that the body was so great a hindrance to spiritual

⁸⁹ Luther, Martin: quoted by Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, translated by Robert C. Schultz, 1975, p.417

⁹⁰ By contrast the Taoists hold to the material immortality of the body: "The Taoists in their search for longevity, conceived it not as a spiritual but as a material immortality. . . . The Graeco-Roman world early adopted the habit of setting spirit and matter in opposition to one another. But the Chinese never separated spirit and matter. . . hence 'soul' never took up this antithetical character in relation to matter. . . . It was only by the perpetuation of the body, in some form or other, that one could conceive of a continuation of the living personality as a whole." (H. Maspero, "Le Taoism", quoted by Joseph Needham and Wang Ling, *Science and Civilization in China*, Cambridge University Press, 1956, vol. 2, p. 153, 154).

aspirations that it was a positive evil. They even denied that the Lord Himself could ever really have been "made flesh" because this would have been a defilement of his spirit. His flesh was therefore only a "seeming" flesh, and his sufferings and death on the cross could not possibly have been any more than apparent only. He did not really have a body at all! Towards the end of the first century A.D. John had to combat this heresy vigorously as is indicated by his remarks in 1 John 4:1-3.⁹¹ It was this misapprehension that almost destroyed the Church from within. Jesus did come "in the flesh," John assures his readers: his death on Calvary was terribly real. He really *was* born of Mary's body (Galatians 4:4).⁹²

The necessity of embodiment

Evidently a great deal hinges upon embodiment. We are not wholly human if we are merely disembodied spirits. We were designed for embodiment. It is no accident that we are born and grow and develop within a personal body that becomes an essential part of our conscious being. I may identify myself to someone else by my voice when I make a phone call. But I can only do so because I have the organs and the capacity for speech — both of which are functions of the body: the first of my tongue, and the latter of my brain. Part of my own self-awareness arises from my body, i.e., from hearing my own voice, and from seeing and feeling my own members.

It sounds as though we ought to be able to identify ourselves in the guise of a pure disembodied spirit but a little reflection soon reveals that if anyone should return from the dead and seek to identify himself to us with absolute certainty, that person could never succeed convincingly except by assuming at least a semblance of his own bodily form again — even if only momentarily. At the very least he or she must be heard by my ear or seen by my eye. The Lord acceded to Thomas' request for confirmation, even to confirmation by the sense of touch. A ghost could not "prove" his identity by some ethereal representation that floated in space. We would never be persuaded that we had not merely created the vision in our own mind, something that might well have been a hallucination.

⁹¹ "Beloved believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know we the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of Antichrist, whereof you have heard that it should come. . . ." 1 John 4:1-3.

⁹² "But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law." Galatians 4:4.

Clearly, to avoid this very possibility, the only One who has with absolute certainty returned to identify Himself as alive indeed, did so *bodily*. The Lord Jesus said, "Handle me and see, a ghost has not flesh and bone as ye see me have"! (Luke 24:39). He was *no ghost*, He was the One whom they had learned to love and to worship — in very Person. To establish his identity with certainty, He depended upon a resurrected body, not a mere ghostly intangible shapeless voiceless essence.

We have self-conscious identity and it is so real, so "undoubtable" — as Descartes said (and as Augustine had said, long anticipating Descartes)⁹³ — that we assume this inner consciousness of our own existence is independent of the body altogether. We imagine we can lay the body aside and carry on as usual. "John Brown's body lies amouldering in the grave but his soul goes marching on." It all seems so obvious. *But is it true?* Paul preached the resurrection of the body to the Greeks, and they were incredulous (Acts 17:32).⁹⁴ To them it seemed absurd. Who wants re-embodiment? Why not set the spirit free to roam without hindrance in the Elysian fields of a purely spiritual world? Although Paul risked losing his audience, he stuck faithfully to his thesis: an essential part of the Christian hope is that we shall recover our own body. We are to have a truly corporeal existence in heaven: not in the *old* body (praise the Lord!) but in a *real* body nevertheless — indeed, in a body that will be identifiably our own.

The soul is wedded to its body, and dissolution of this bond is abhorrent to any man or woman in normal health. And though we do not want to be imprisoned in this present body which is so defiled, we do not wish to go naked and bodiless either (2 Corinthians 5:1-5).⁹⁵

⁹³ Augustine's words were: "Without any delusive representation of images and phantasms, I am most certain that I am, and that I know and delight in this. In respect of these truths, I am not afraid of the arguments of the Academicians who say, 'What if you are deceived?' For if I am deceived, I am. For he who is not, cannot be deceived, and if I am deceived, by this same token, I *am*." [*City of God*, 11.26]. Descartes, some one thousand years later, reduced this to the axiom, *Cogito ergo sum*, ("I think, therefore I *am*").

⁹⁴ "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; and others said, We will hear you again on this matter." Acts 17:32.

⁹⁵ "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not that we would be unclothed but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that has wrought [made] us for the selfsame thing is God, who also has given unto us the earnest of the Spirit." 2 Corinthians 5:1-5.

Spirit vs soul

Now, while angels make their presence known to us and communicate with us by an assumed bodily form of some sort, they can certainly exist as pure spirits without embodiment because that is what they are by design. They were so created; their nature is so constituted that they can be fully conscious in a purely ethereal state.⁹⁶ They are so made that they are not in need of organs of speech in order to be "heard," or eyes to see with and to be "seen" and thus identified by their fellows, or a bodily shape in order to establish their position in space and therefore their "reality." But man is not an angel and was never designed to exist as one. Man is an incarnated spirit, an embodied *soul*. Angels are never even spoken of as *souls*. It was by a deliberate act of God that we have a body through which to give expression to our spirits. "He that hath wrought us for this very thing is God" (2 Corinthians 5:5).

Our identity is therefore as much the result of the possession of a body as it is the possession of a spirit. We have never known any other kind of total identity. We cannot make ourselves known to one another except through the agency of touch or sight or sound — bodily things, all of them. Angels by their very nature are exempt from the circumscriptions of space and time such as we experience, but man seems to be designed for such circumscription. Even in the world to come the "new heaven" has also a "new *earth*."⁹⁷ Were this not the case, the emphasis upon, and the promise of, bodily resurrection would be unaccountable. Man knows deeply within his being that his body matters dearly to him even in his self-image as a human person. Although he groans in it as it begins to fail with age, no man in normal health ever yet *truly* "hated" his own body (Ephesians 5:29).⁹⁸ He may pretend that he does sometimes: but it is not embodiment per se that he hates, only embodiment in such a poor vehicle of self-expression. The aspirations of his spirit are so often defeated by the counter-demands of his body (Matthew 26:41).⁹⁹ Paul longed to be

⁹⁶ For more about the constitution of angels, see the author's *Two Men Called Adam*, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, Doorway Publications, 1983, chap. 2, p.22 f.

⁹⁷ Over a century ago, James Gall observed: "Christianity is the only religion that indicates the dignity of the material universe, by connecting it with man's future existence in the resurrection from the dead. All heathen religions deal not only in worlds of ghosts but in ghosts of worlds." [*Primeval Man Unveiled*, London, Adams, 1871, p. 99.]

⁹⁸ "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the church. . . ." Ephesians 5:29.

⁹⁹ "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Matthew 26:41.

freed from his body because it opposed his spiritual yearnings (Romans 7:18-24);¹⁰⁰ not because embodiment was a "mistake" as it were, but because the effects of the Fall had ruined it. Unlike the Greeks, Paul did not want to be unclothed — disembodied: he longed to exchange it for a new one.

The classical Greek and the later Gnostic attitude towards embodiment as a curse was the result of a "vain philosophy" (Colossians 2 :8)¹⁰¹ that did not reflect the promise of bodily resurrection so clearly intimated in the Old Testament, and so unequivocally spelled out in the New. Such a divine promise is sufficient evidence that a body is necessary for our proper identity as individuals even in the world to come.

Can one really imagine how a disembodied human ghostly presence would communicate with other disembodied human ghostly presences? What would such a community of human ghosts be like? Is this the prospect of our new "citizenship" (Philippians 3:20,¹⁰² margin) in heaven? Is this what we desire more earnestly than the fellowship of the saints that we now experience in the flesh, despite all its disappointments? Yet Paul assures us that we *should* desire it rather: and indeed we do desire this future prospect more than the present painful reality.

No doubt demons and angels do communicate with each other by some other means than those we have learned to use, some unearthly form of telepathy. We don't really know. Demons certainly seek embodiment in order to give expression to their evil nature and they appear to be largely impotent without it. They speak only through man's tongue, and possibly make use of man's brain in order to exercise their will upon the physical world through man's hands. But they were not and are not creatures of God's design but of Satan, and their unnatural desires seem to result

¹⁰⁰ "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwells no good thing; for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:18-24).

¹⁰¹ "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." Colossians 2:8.

¹⁰² "For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." Philippians 3:20.

from their unnatural origin.¹⁰³ Angels were never intended to be embodied as a way of life, but some of them sought embodiment in a way that was a departure from the design of God (Jude 6)¹⁰⁴ and in due time they were punished for presuming to desert their proper estate. By a kind of poetic justice, the "imprisonment" they sought by embodiment was rewarded by a spiritual imprisonment they had *not* sought, in a place called *Tartarus* (2 Peter 2:4).¹⁰⁵

So we cannot appeal to the hosts of angels as examples of the reality of a purely spiritual existence that is personal yet without need for embodiment. They do seem to have personal "identity," since even "opinion" among them is divided (Daniel 10:21)¹⁰⁶ and they are distinguished individually by personal *names* (Daniel 10:13¹⁰⁷ and Luke 1:19¹⁰⁸). Yet they are clearly pure spirit, each one a separate creation. They were created this way, not generated by multiplication of a single seed, as man is.¹⁰⁹ They do not propagate and evidently were never designed

¹⁰³ *The Book of Jubilees* (4:15, 22 and 5:1) speaks of sexual intercourse between the angels and the daughters of men, and ascribes the origin of evil to the demons who were descendants of these sinful unions. *The Book of Baruch* (66:11-15) reflects the same view. In *The Testament of Reuben* (5:6) the off-spring of this union were giants. When the Flood wiped them out, they were disembodied and their evil spirits went about in search of re-embodiment. The fallen angels themselves, who had sired these unnatural spirits were put in chains, but their offspring are apparently still free to roam the earth.

¹⁰⁴ "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." (Jude 6).

¹⁰⁵ "For if God spared not the angels that sinned but cast them down to hell [Gk: *tartarus*], and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment. . . ." (2 Peter 2:4).

¹⁰⁶ "I [Daniel] will show you that which is noted in the scripture of truth: and there is none that holds with me in these things but Michael your prince." Daniel 10:21.

¹⁰⁷ "The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days; but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me." Daniel 10:13.

¹⁰⁸ "The angel said to [Zacharias], I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God. . . ." Luke 1:19.

¹⁰⁹ As Thomas Aquinas was acute enough to perceive, each angel, being an individual creation, is a species in itself. [See H. O. Taylor, *The Medieval Mind*, London, Macmillan, 1911, vol. 2, p.458].

for dependence upon a body. They only assume some kind of body in order to communicate with man upon occasion (cf. Genesis 19:15, 16).¹¹⁰

The reality of his resurrected body

For this reason and in demonstration of the fact that a human being is an embodied spirit, the Lord Jesus, even in his resurrection appearances, still presented Himself to his disciples for identification *as an embodied spirit* not a disembodied ghost.

In the resurrection scenes, the disciples met with and conversed with the Lord in the most natural way imaginable walking with Him, sharing meals with Him, talking with Him, doing many of the things that we do with one another as real people, and above all "renewing acquaintance" by clearly establishing physical reality. To doubting Thomas He had done so, and Thomas joyfully identified Him with the words, "my Lord and my God"! (John 20:28). The important point is that this intercommunication was always done through a very real embodiment although the Lord's body was a transformed one as to its potential. Jesus deliberately set out to demonstrate unequivocally that He was *not* a ghost but an embodied human being.

For Mary, the Lord's identity was established by the sound of his voice (John 20:16)¹¹¹ — the inflection, the timbre, by the very way He spoke her name. She heard *HIS* voice, not merely a voice. Thomas was assured of the Lord's identity because he was invited (and able) to *handle* Him and *see* for himself. It was identifiably *HIS* body that he was able to touch, a body so manifestly real that it is doubtful if he even needed to verify it by actual contact. It was visibly a three dimensional body. The eye quickly distinguishes the real thing in three dimensions from a mere two dimensional visual image such as is projected on a screen. The free-standing quality of his real presence must have been undeniable. The disciples as a group were absolutely convinced when He asked for food and ate it before their very eyes assuring them thereby that even though He could appear and disappear at

¹¹⁰ "When the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him, and they brought him forth, and set him without the city." Genesis 19:15,16.

¹¹¹ "Jesus said to her [Mary], Woman, why do you weep? Whom do you seek? She, supposing him to be the gardener, said to him, Sir, if you have borne him hence, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned herself, and said to him, Rabboni." John 20:15, 16.

will and could pass easily through walls or bolted doors, He was by no means a ghost as they must at first have supposed Him to be (Luke 24:39).¹¹²

It is true that his body was a glorified body, but it was a body nevertheless: and it had (and has) all the capabilities that our bodies have *and far more*. Moreover, it was his body that guaranteed unequivocally the reality of his continuing *manhood* on the other side of the grave! "The Lord is risen indeed! Allelujah!" They had not seen a pure Spirit. They had seen the Man Christ Jesus.

Some of the details of the resurrection scenes contain little bits of information that reinforce this fact in extraordinary ways. Evidently the Lord had a body that was in a real sense physically congruous *even with this world*. John 21:3-11 contains the beautiful story of a second all night fishing excursion by Peter and his immediate companions which had netted them absolutely nothing!¹¹³ The first occasion had been remarkably similar. We have this previous record in Luke 5:4-9.¹¹⁴

¹¹² "[Jesus said] Behold, my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me and see; for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see me have". Luke 24:39.

¹¹³ "Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana of Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. 'I'm going out to fish', Simon Peter told them, and they said, 'We'll go with you.' So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called to them, 'Friends, haven't you any fish?' 'No', they answered. He said, 'Throw your *net* on the right side of the boat and you will find some'. When they did this, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, 'It is the Lord', he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught.' Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three, but even with so many *the net was not torn*." John 21:2-11.

¹¹⁴ "Now when [Jesus] had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water and let down the nets [the Greek is plural] for a catch.' Simon answered, 'Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the net' [the Greek is singular]. When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their net began to break. So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to

They had, in this first instance, lent their boat to the Lord as a pulpit, and He in turn seemed desirous to repay them. When He told them to cast off and to let down the nets (plural) Peter responded by saying, "Master, we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net" (singular).¹¹⁵ The result was such a draught of fishes that the net broke (verse 6) and they almost lost their ship by reason of the overload! Perhaps if Peter had let down his nets (plural) as instructed, the load could have been hauled ashore safely, and neither would the net have been broken nor the ship been in danger of sinking.

And now once again, they had toiled all night but still they had caught nothing (John 21:5). It seems that as they approached the shore empty-handed, they were hailed by a "stranger" asking if they had caught anything: they could only answer very simply, No.

Then the stranger called back, "Cast the net (singular) on the right side of the ship and ye shall find." And they obeyed, literally, casting one net overboard exactly as instructed. Did this somehow ring a bell in Peter's mind as he obeyed the command without question?

At any rate, they now found their net so filled with fish that they simply could not draw it in! And John was the first to realize who the stranger was. He whispered to Peter, "It is the Lord"! And when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he at once "girt his fisherman's coat about him and cast himself into the sea." That was impetuous Peter!

When they drew the net into shore they found that although it was filled with great fishes (a mighty catch indeed — one hundred and fifty-three of them) "for all there were so many, yet was not the net (singular) broken."

sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!' For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken." Luke 4-9.

¹¹⁵ The textual justification for the use of the singular here is extensive. It is to be found in very many MSS from the fifth to the ninth centuries. This was enough to satisfy the scholars who gave us the King James Version. It is a pity that so many modern translations have opted for the plural. The effect is to make Peter's response appear as one of strict obedience, which makes the breaking of the net a strange situation. The parallel in John's Gospel ceases to show how important obedience is when it tells us that, despite the huge catch, "yet was not the net broken"! John 21:11.

They came up out of the water and what did they find? They found the Lord tending a fire of coals with fish already being prepared for their anticipated coming! As Abraham, the Lord's "friend" (James 2:23),¹¹⁶ had once entertained *Him*, now the risen Lord reversed the situation and entertained his "friends" (John 15:15).¹¹⁷

Surely no ghost from the other world ever entered so completely into the life of *this* world as did the risen Lord during those forty wonderful days. How did He obtain these fishes, and how did He collect the wood and build a fire which He then somehow "lighted," placing the fish into position that they might be properly cooked? The *simplest* answer is that He had a body of some sort, sufficiently real to the task of handling things which is miracle enough.¹¹⁸ And must we not assume He had even prepared the fish by cleaning them first? What questions must have been in the disciples' minds as they picnicked there around the campfire. Here was no ghost of his former self, but identifiably the same wholly caring and foreseeing

¹¹⁶ "Abraham believed God. . . and he was called the Friend of God." James 2:23. See also Chapter 18 of Genesis.

¹¹⁷ Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant doesn't know what his lord does; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." John 15:15.

¹¹⁸ Perhaps it would therefore be quite proper to suppose that the same Lord in a pre-incarnate incarnation had similarly assumed bodily form when He stooped down and fashioned Adam's body before breathing life into it. Was this, therefore, how He fashioned it *in his own image*, in a body like that which He had assumed in order to manipulate the materials of the earth and to breathe into Adam's nostrils the breath of life by a process akin to artificial respiration?

and Sufficient Person who was indeed their Lord and their God.¹¹⁹ How they must have studied his actions!

When, at the end of the forty days of unparalleled fellowship, He ascended up into heaven, He ascended up *bodily*. And as they watched Him go, the angel who stood by assured them that He would return in exactly the same real and recognizable form and, indeed, at the very same spot (Zechariah 14:4).¹²⁰ It was as though to reinforce the fact that, in leaving them, He was in no sense about to be transformed into some other kind of being. "This *same* Jesus" (and *Jesus* was his name as to his humanity) "shall so come *in like manner* as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:10,11). He had not gradually faded away like a ghost: He had departed as a person, and as the same Person He would return. No wonder they went back to Jerusalem "with great joy" (Luke 24:-50-52)!¹²¹

¹¹⁹ This was no mere anthropomorphism as in the Old Testament. Such anthropomorphisms were necessary because, as embodied creatures, we cannot imagine how expression can be given without it. James Muilenburg put it this way: "The parts of the body are associated with psychical states: psychical states have a physical basis. This explains in part the numerous anthropomorphisms of the Old Testament. To be a person is to possess a body, but a body is more than a physical organism. The functioning of its organs often expresses not only the divine activity but also the intention which motivates the activity. . . Thus the ways of the living God are understood realistically in relation to man's psychophysical life." (*The Way of Israel*, New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1961, p.17).

In contrast to anthropomorphisms which were temporary, God has now objectified Himself permanently to humankind (who were made in his image) by becoming Man. As Karl Barth observed, there is *humanity* in God [*The Humanity of God*, Richmond, Virginia, Knox Press, 1972, p.49-52]. God is like light. Light can be broken up into its colours. *One* of the colours is part and parcel of that light — just as the humanity of God is part and parcel of his image. The 'filter' which made that humanity apparent without destroying it or demeaning it in any way was the *body* — that is, the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ!

¹²⁰ "On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem. . . ." Zechariah 14:4.

¹²¹ [Forty days after his resurrection, Jesus] "led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy." Luke 24:50-52.

Jesus: man on earth and in heaven

There is, then, a real world on the other side of Jordan, to which He has now gone for a season and from which He will yet return again. He went as our forerunner — a real human person, spirit and body reunited. His humanness is clearly bound to his incarnation, and that humanness was designed to last not for a mere thirty-three years, but *forever*. He has become what He had not been, yet without ceasing to be what He was before. He has become Man without ceasing to be God: and so will He always remain — two natures in one Person, deity embodied as Man, without confusion and without separation.

In his famous letter to Flavia, dated June 13, 449 A.D., we find Leo the Great (Bishop of Rome from 440 to 461) speaking of the two natures of the Lord Jesus:

Each nature performs its proper functions in communion with the other; the divine Word performs what pertains to the Word, the human flesh what pertains to the flesh. The one resplendent with miracles, the other submits to insults. The Word withdraws not from his equality with the Father's glory; the flesh does not desert the nature of our kind. And so it does not belong to the same nature to say 'I and the Father are one' (John 10:30), and 'The Father is greater than I.' (John 14:28).

And thus Leo reconciled a seeming contradiction. How wonderful! Man and God, human and divine: for ever to remain what He was divine: but for ever to remain what He has now become — human. A human being in heaven, an embodied spirit: truly a Mediator between man and God the bridge between spirit and matter.

How can we be sure that He will henceforth remain a human Person? In the Prayer Book of the Church of England formulated by Bishop Cranmer under instructions from Edward VI are the following words to which the common people subscribed at Evensong by reciting as a kind of credal "response." Part of this response is reproduced here in the old English spelling of the original:

Perfecte God and perfecte man: of a resonable
soule, and humayne fleshe subsisting.
Equall to the father as touchyng his Godhead:
and inferior to the father as touchyng his manhoode.

Here, then, is the secret of his two apparently contradictory relationships to the Father: equal in terms of his deity, inferior in terms of his manhood — equal as to his spiritual being, inferior as to his embodiment. In the final act of biblical

drama He, as to his manhood, will become subject to the Father in order that God may ultimately be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).¹²² *He will retain his manhood by retaining his embodiment. It can hardly be doubted that we too shall remain human by recovering ours.*

He promised his disciples that if He lived, they should live also — not as some ghostly shadows of their former selves in a world of ghosts, but as real people in a real world. And in due time He said He would return and would then receive them unto Himself to share his glory (John 14:3), to be like Him as to his body (Philippians 3:21) and to partake of his divine spiritual nature (2 Peter 1:4).¹²³ Our spirits will be made perfect and rejoined to our own bodies made glorious like His!

What an amazing prospect. This will be heaven indeed!

No body = nobody

It is apparent, therefore, that we shall identify ourselves and be recognized for whom we are by the same means by which He deliberately established *His* identity . . . not merely by displaying his own unique personality, but by the possession of a palpable body that allowed Him to speak in a familiar voice, to do characteristic things (cf. Luke 24:30, 31¹²⁴), and to demonstrate unmistakably that his body was verifiably his *own*. Surely this is to be the pattern of our future also.

It thus seems clear *from Scripture* that we have a positive answer to the basic question: Is the possession of a body really essential for achievement of human identity in heaven? The answer is, Yes, indeed it is! It mattered for Him, and it must therefore matter for us - since we are to be conformed to his image and become like Him. For three days and three nights He ceased to be man, but with the resurrection of his human body He re-assumed his human identity, an identity which He will henceforth retain for ever because He will remain for ever embodied. No person is

¹²² "Then the end will come when he [Christ Jesus] hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until God has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put everything under his feet. Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all." 1 Corinthians 15:24-28, NIV.

¹²³ "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature. . . ." 2 Peter 1:4.

¹²⁴ "As he sat at meat with them [the two from Emmaus], he took bread, and blessed it, and broke it, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened and they knew him. . . ." Luke 24:30, 31.

a *whole* person as a disembodied spirit: for man, the union of spirit and body is fundamental to the establishment of personal identity.

The evidence to be examined

Let us now turn to an examination of the *experimental* evidence bearing on the constitution of man. Much new data has in recent years begun to emerge from the researches of the neurophysiologists into the *relationship* between soul and body — or as they would put it more precisely, between *MIND* and *BRAIN*. How do spirit and body interact? How does our mind command our body so effectively and with such immediacy? In what way are they really interdependent? Is man truly constituted of two elements, one spiritual and one physical, each with an independent origin? Or is he, as we have been told in recent years by the strict behaviourists, merely an electrochemical machine which, upon the dissolution of the body in death, simply disintegrates as though it had never been? Can a soul exist without a body? We assume it can, of course. But what do we really *know*? Does the experimental evidence suggest anything — one way or the other?

➡ PROCEED

