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RESURRECTION REVISITED

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

I Introduction

- 1.1 The four gospels are throughout, and not just in their final chapters, permeated with thoughts of resurrection. The whole stories that they tell attest powerfully the formative effect of the conviction that Jesus' horrific death had not been the end. *One (sic)* of the terms they used for his continuing life was 'resurrection', but it was not the only one. Thus, a poem about the one who was exalted by God's grace to a position of authority in his presence, suggests that 'exaltation' is an equivalent term.

⁶Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – *even death on a cross*.

⁹ Therefore God also *highly exalted him* and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, *in heaven and on earth and under the earth*, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, *to the glory of God the Father*. (Philippians 2.6-11: drawing on pre-Pauline tradition)

Nevertheless, the language of 'resurrection' was used at the very earliest stage:

Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures,⁴and he was buried, and *he was raised* on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ⁵and he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve, [and] ⁷then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. (1 Corinthians 15.3b-5, 7: again drawing on pre-Pauline tradition)

So, we ask, what did they mean when they used that term? The answer is not immediately clear, because in the Jewish context of their claim there was no one agreed view about its meaning. Different people could interpret in different ways that joyful claim, 'The Lord is risen indeed' (Luke 24.34).

'The evidence indicates that in the intertestamental period there was no single Jewish orthodoxy on the time, mode, and place of resurrection, immortality and eternal life.' (Nickelsburg 2006: 222)

- 1.2 The book of Daniel, in part the product of the C2 BCE trauma imposed by Antiochus Epiphanes, provides one of the few OT passages that deal with resurrection hope (cf. 12.1-3).

¹At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector/advocate of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. ²*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake*, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³*Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.*

In Jewish thinking, perhaps influenced by Zoroastrian thought, the stars represented God's angelic company, so for the wise teachers to become like the stars probably means their being inducted into the company of the angels.

'Shining like the stars should not be dismissed as a mere metaphor. ... The stars often represent the heavenly host and are used in that sense in Daniel 8.10. ... To "shine like the stars" is to join the angelic host. ... In Mark 12.25 Jesus tells the Sadducees that when men rise from the dead they are like the angels in heaven.' (Collins 2016: 140)

- 1.3 It was possible to develop this thought in the direction of either full-blooded physicality or alternatively an existence which is meta-physical. On the one side we have the expressions of resurrection hope by the seven brothers who, with their mother, gave themselves over to martyrdom under Antiochus Epiphanes. Each made sure he had the last word, either a statement of judgment on the oppressor or an affirmation of extremely physical resurrection, nothing less than a resuscitation of the original body. Thus:

¹⁰After [the second brother], the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, ¹¹and said nobly, '*I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again.*' (2 Maccabees 7.10-11)

On the other hand, and dating from around the same period (mid C2 BCE), there was the least physical option, which would not require any coming to life of the present body. Indeed, on this basis, the joyful existence of resurrection is seen as neither disturbing nor negating the buried condition of the bones:

And their bones will rest in the earth
and their spirits will have much joy. (Jubilees 23.31)

- 1.4 Depending on the choice made from among the options concerning the meaning of 'resurrection', the importance of the story of the discovery of the absence of Jesus' body from his tomb will vary. Put it another way, is the emptiness of the tomb a *sine qua non* of resurrection faith? The answer will be: 'Some say yes, and some say no!'

If one takes one's cue from 2 Maccabees 7, the firmly physical option, the resurrection of Jesus will be seen as the restoration of his physical life, probably in an emphatically earthly setting – but in that case there will be a serious question to answer: 'what happened to the body subsequently?'. If, on the other hand, one takes one's cue from Daniel 12 and Jubilees 23, the resurrection of Jesus will be seen as involving a transformed bodily existence defined by an *assumption/ascension* to the divine world, from which he may subsequently 'appear' and 'be seen'. (Note: This is not the same as Luke's final scheme, whereby Jesus ascends in all his unambiguous physicality – see later!)

So a fundamental datum of all discussion of Jesus' *post mortem* existence is the divergence of the gospels over the nature of Jesus' bodily existence: extremely physical in some stories (Luke 24.36-43; John 20.20-28) but non-physical in others where Jesus walks through doors, is not immediately recognizable, and simply disappears (Luke 24.13-35; John 20.19).

The first of these options, the extremely physical interpretation of Jesus' risen-ness, which is often assumed in our own day to be the one and only way of taking 'resurrection' seriously, can only have come from adopting the 2 Maccabees-type option available in a Jewish intellectual context. Greco-Roman writers, like those Jewish writers who adopted the Daniel 12/Jubilees 23 option, are rather careful not to involve the mortal body in immortal life (hence the problem Paul had to address in respect of scepticism in Corinth).

1.5 Against this background, we are interested to enquire where Mark, our earliest gospel stands.

1.5.1 He gives us a very carefully structured story of the crucifixion of Jesus (Mark 15.22-39) which is consciously and deliberately formed in dependence on the story of the persecuted and executed servant of God in Wisdom 2, 4-5. The claims of the righteous servant and of Jesus are subjected to critical scrutiny by opponents, and found wanting because they are not confirmed while that person is still alive. For Wisdom those claims are however vindicated when, to their horror, the opponents see him elevated into the company of the angels. In acute distress they acknowledge that he was right and they were wrong.

For Mark's Jesus, the reluctant acknowledgement of authenticity by the opponents takes place when the centurion, representing the opponents, declares, in the light of cosmic signs of divine attestation, that Jesus is 'son of God'. And the visionary factor comes into play in the threat voiced by Jesus to the high priest: 'You will see ...' (14.62). Meanwhile there is an angelic appearance at the tomb, into which Mark has inserted an instruction about an appearance of Jesus himself to those who have been close to him.

¹When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome *bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.* ² And very early on the first day of the week, *when the sun had risen,* they went to the tomb. ³*They were saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?'* ^{4a} When they looked up, they saw that the stone had already been rolled back, ^{4b} *for it was very large.*

⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, *who was crucified. He has been raised;* he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷ *But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.'* ^{8a} So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; ^{8b} *and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*

The underlying story, received by Mark, is an affirmation of absence! But affirmations of absence in parallel stories are part of a sequence which has to do with assumption, ascension, direct entry to the divine world. The pre-Markan story envisages *immediate, not later, ascension/assumption*. By injecting into the story what Jesus is reported by Mark to have said in 14.28, '*But after I have been raised up, I will go before you to Galilee*', the language of resurrection is imposed on the underlying assumption scheme.

1.5.2 In what sense 'go before'? In the three-day long journey from Jerusalem to Galilee it can hardly be a 'going before' of the sort mentioned in 10.32: 'They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was *walking ahead* of them', but invisibly. Much more likely would be his having been assumed into the heavenly world and then in Galilee becoming seen, i.e. being sighted there in heavenly epiphany mode.

2 Appearances and how they may be defined

- 2.1 We have moved in the direction of the sightings (cf. I Corinthians 15.3b-5, 7), the appearance stories and their preservation in either stories or credal statements. And at this point we may usefully turn to Luke.
- 2.2 Perhaps the most compelling of all appearance stories in the Gospels is that concerning the walk to Emmaus (Luke 24.13-35). This is not mentioned in the pre-Pauline formula, but it is notable because it presumes that Jesus has previously entered the divine world (cf. 'Today ... in Paradise') and now emerges from it, becoming visible in the process.

Inserted by Luke into a narrative sequence from the tomb tradition (Luke 24.1-12/Mark 16.1-8) to the group appearance tradition (Luke 24.36-43/Mark 16.7), this story is a self-contained unit, quite capable of surviving meaningfully by itself, and doubtless treasured and used by a Christian community whose members identified with its message. That would mean that when those Christians assembled to 'break bread' they did so in a resurrection-inspired context.

¹³Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, 'What are you discussing together while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad.

¹⁸Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' ¹⁹He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. *Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place.* ²²*Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.'*

²⁵Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?'

³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. *³⁴They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!'* ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

- 2.2.1 The story has had injected into it two interrupting additions, signalled in blue print and italics, so we work with the pre-Lucan version of the story, which lacked those extra elements.

- 2.2.2 There is a particularly close parallel for this tradition in the book of Tobit (late C2 BCE?). This is predominantly the story of a journey undertaken by Tobias with a companion whose identity is unknown – to Tobias and his father Tobit, that is, though the narrator tells us in advance that the companion is Raphael, one of the top angels! Their journey involves the solution of some family problems and it comes to a conclusion with a recognition scene in which Raphael discloses his identity ... and promptly disappears! The story as a whole (Tobit 5-12) is extremely instructive, but its conclusion (Tobit 12.6, 15-22) suffices for the present.

⁶ Then Raphael called the two of them privately and said to them ... ¹⁵ I am Raphael, one of the seven angels who stand ready and enter before the glory of the Lord.' ... ¹⁶ The two of them were shaken; they fell face down, for they were afraid. ¹⁷ But he said to them, 'Do not be afraid; peace be with you. Bless God for evermore. ¹⁸ As for me, when I was with you, I was not acting on my own will, but by the will of God. Bless him each and every day; sing his praises. ¹⁹ *Although you were watching me, I really did not eat or drink anything—but what you saw was a vision.* ²⁰ So now get up from the ground, and acknowledge God. See, *I am ascending to him who sent me.* Write down all these things that have happened to you.' And he ascended. ²¹ Then they stood up, and could see him no more. ²² They kept blessing God and singing his praises, and they acknowledged God for these marvellous deeds of his, when *an angel of God had appeared to them.*

The match between this recognition scene and that in Luke 24.28-31 will be immediately obvious. But the match is not just between stories, or even concluding episodes in stories, but also in respect of the category to which the central figure belongs: *the Jesus of the Emmaus road is comparable to Raphael – in a word, is angelic/heavenly.* That is his new existence. He is a heavenly person who has now appeared from heaven, shared a journey *incognito*, disclosed his identity, been recognized, ... and has promptly disappeared! He is not subject to flesh and blood constraints. He has not been eating and drinking, for that would be incompatible with his angelic existence. He is 'other'. And at the end of the episode he simply disappears!

- 2.3 The angel's insistence in Tobit 12.19 that he did not eat or drink, even though it was thought that he had ('although you were watching me'), alerts us to a quite fundamental discrepancy between the Emmaus walk tradition and the following story in which Jesus sets out to prove by eating and drinking that his existence had not changed, and had not become heavenly/angelic!

³⁶ While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' ³⁷ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, 'Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.' ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence. (Luke 24.36-43)

The logic of this story is the same as the underlying logic of the rewriting by Josephus and Philo of the story of the visit by the mysterious trio to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre in Genesis 18. That ancient story leaves no doubt that Abraham's hospitality, including the food, was accepted by the visitors: 'He took the curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them *while they ate.*' (Genesis 18.8).

Centuries later, Philo revised the account. According to him, the three angels 'did not shrink from stopping and receiving hospitality from men', and they would not have given the impression of feasting except as a sign of their sharing with their host the service of God. Yet, for Philo, the giving of an impression was precisely what it was: 'though they neither ate nor drank *they gave the appearance* of both eating and drinking' (Philo, *On Abraham* 115-118).

A few years later still, Josephus responded to the unequivocal statement of the Genesis text by producing the so-called 'docetic paraphrase': the visitors are again 'three angels', and as for their accepting hospitality, 'they *gave him to believe* that they did eat'. (*Antiquities* 1.196-197)

So there is a major clash, a quite fundamental inconsistency, between two adjacent Lucan stories. The one sees *post mortem* existence as different, the other sees it as the same. The one stays with the implication of the Daniel 12 text and presumes transformation; the other stays with the outlook typified by the 2 Maccabees text and invests in resuscitation. The one would, as we will see, make sense for some Jewish thinkers and for those whose world was Greco-Roman; the other would be seriously problematic for such people.

- 2.4 Luke's version of the group appearance tradition is probably the source of John's emphatically physicalizing presentation in John 20.19-29. The Thomas incident (20.24-29) has no parallel elsewhere in the gospel tradition, and is quite clearly a spin off of the inserted, dislocation-causing, interruption in John 20.19-23 (cf. similar dislocation in 19.33-34, 36-37). The first edition of the gospel (4G¹) came to a climax and conclusion in a story that lacked the blue italicized insertions, themselves arguably added at the 4G² stage.

³³But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴*Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. ...* ³⁶These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'None of his bones shall be broken.' ³⁷*And again another passage of scripture says, 'They will look on the one whom they have pierced.'* (John 19.33-34, 36-37)

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them *and said, 'Peace be with you.'* ²⁰*After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side.* Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them *again*, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' (John 20.19-23)

In both Luke's and John's versions there is an irreconcilable clash – the physical versus the meta-physical. Both cannot be simultaneously true. If so, there is either a development from the physical to the meta-physical (rather unlikely) or from the meta-physical to the physical (more likely). Luke writes for a multi-ethnic Christian community, and therefore for the 'benefit' of some Jewish Christians within that community he draws on 2 Maccabees 7-type thinking. John, who shows no sign of writing for a Christian community including gentiles, and who probably depends on Luke, inherits and invests in the Lucan double-think.

- 2.5 The Lucan double-think is the cause of needless complication, the most notable being his unique ascension story, where incidentally he again exhibits his lack of concern for consistency (Luke 24.50-53; Acts 1.1-11). His Jesus (1) dies physically in an entirely normal way; (2) is transformed and becomes angelic, being transported to the heavenly world of Paradise, from which he subsequently appears; (3) is transformed back from being angelic into normal 'human', i.e. non-angelic, physical mode; and therefore (4) has to be removed from the human scene somehow, the 'somehow' being as in the Elijah myth of an assumption in bodily form.

This back-and-forth transformation sequence is needless and misleading. The underlying scheme was straightforward and uncomplicated: Jesus died. He did indeed, as he said to the repentant thief, go straight to Paradise. From there he appeared – several times, i.e. he appeared and then disappeared, sometimes to individuals (Luke 24.13-35) and sometimes to groups of believers (Luke 24.36-43). Full stop!

3 Jesus and Romulus

- 3.1 The followers of Jesus belonged to a Jewish world which was itself part of the Greco-Roman world and by no means insulated from its culture and ways of thinking. Our exploration of the story of Jesus may therefore usefully be informed and sensitized by an awareness of other stories which at points bear a striking resemblance to his own.
- 3.2 A text from classical literature provides a really rather striking parallel for what the gospel writers wanted to convey. This is the account of what happened at the end of the human life of Romulus, an account which had had ample time to embed itself in popular awareness.

The historian Livy (59 BCE – 17 CE) writes about Romulus in his *Early History of Rome* 1.3-16. His account is manifestly coloured by his own contemporary situation in which ‘the divine Julius’ had undermined the republic, had acquired divine honours, had been assassinated by the senators, and had then ultimately been succeeded by Octavian/Augustus. The latter had moved the governance of Rome beyond the triumvirs (Antony, Lepidus and himself) to single rule by himself (cf. Beard 2015: 73-74). Livy treats *en passant* the question of a divine birth, which he recognizes as a natural, even if unconvincing, inference from the greatness that distinguished a person’s career. Such a ‘virgin birth’ would not involve a physical sexual encounter between a god and a human woman, which would be quite unfitting, but would be achieved by means of the spirit’ or ‘power’ of the god making the woman pregnant (cf. Litwa 2014: 37-54). That pattern indicates something about an understanding of divine existence: it is ‘spirit’.

Such, then, were the deeds of Romulus, and they will never grow old. One day while he was reviewing his troops on the Campus Martius near the marsh of Capra, a storm burst, with violent thunder. *A cloud enveloped him, so thick that it hid him from the eyes of everyone present; and from that moment he was never seen again on earth.*

The troops, who had been alarmed by the sudden storm, soon recovered when it passed over and the sun came out again. Then they saw that the throne was empty, and, ready though they were to believe the senators, who had been standing at the king’s side and now declared that *he had been carried up on high by a whirlwind*, they none the less felt like children bereft of a father and for a long time stood in sorrowful silence. Then *a few voices began to proclaim Romulus’s divinity; the cry was taken up, and at last every man present hailed him as a god and son of a god, and prayed to him to be for ever gracious and to protect his children.* However, even on this great occasion there were, I believe, *a few dissentients* who secretly maintained that the king had been torn to pieces by the senators. At all events the story got about, though *in veiled terms*; but it was not important, as *awe, and admiration for Romulus’s greatness, set the seal on the other version of his end*, which was, moreover, given further credit by the timely action of a certain Julius Proculus, a man, we are told, honoured for his wise counsel on weighty matters.

The loss of the king had left the people in an uneasy mood and suspicious of the senators, and Proculus, aware of the prevalent temper, conceived the shrewd idea of addressing the Assembly. *‘Romulus,’ he declared, ‘the father of our City, descended from heaven at dawn this morning and appeared to me. In awe and reverence I stood before him, praying for permission to look upon his face without sin.* “Go,” he said, “and tell the Romans that by heaven’s will my Rome shall be the capital of the world. Let them learn to be soldiers. Let them know, and teach their children, that no power on earth can stand against Roman arms.” Having spoken these words, *he was taken up again into the sky.’*

Proculus’s story had a most remarkable effect; the army and commons, cruelly distressed at the loss of their king, were *much comforted once they were assured of his immortality.*

Of course, most interest attaches to the story of an absent body, a heavenly disappearance in a cloud and ascent, the acclamation of divinity and divine sonship, and a choice of two explanations – (i) the natural one, that he has been subject to foul play, hence the absence of the body, and (ii) the unnatural one, that he has been caught up to heaven, which cannot explain but treats as a matter of some indifference the absence of the body – and finally the descent, an appearance to a person of repute, a ‘last word’, and a concluding ascent.

Explanation (i) is, I am advised by my former colleague, Peter Wiseman, Professor of Classics at the University of Exeter, a later addition to what originally involved just (ii): the case of Julius Caesar was being imported so that the Romulus pattern was, as it were, reborn in favour of ‘the divine Julius’ and (even more to the point) in favour of his great nephew, Octavian/Augustus. But in any case, at both earlier and later stages in the history of the myth, what swings opinion in favour of (ii) is ‘awe and admiration for Romulus’s greatness’. Thus comes ‘the assurance of his immortality’ as well as acceptance of the birth legend. The life’s content clinches it, *reinforced by an appearance experience*.

- 3.3 Much thought was given by Roman writers to the question of bodily existence for someone who had been ‘translated’ into the divine world. Of any direct movement into that world of a physical body there can be no question. It is a matter of a transformation into a mode of existence that is fitting for that world. And such a meta-physical existence enables the person concerned to appear and disappear, uninhibited by the constraints of present human life.

We can hardly fail to see the correspondence between this train of thought and that which Paul, who had witnessed an appearance of ‘the Son of God’ from heaven, affirmed when confronting the doubts of some Corinthian Christians in resurrection *if resurrection is defined in terms as resuscitation of the present physical body*.

³⁵ But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?’ ³⁶ Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. ³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. ³⁹ Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. ⁴⁰ There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. ⁴¹ There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; indeed, star differs from star in glory.

⁴² 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. (1 Corinthians 15.35-44)

4 Back to the gospels

- 4.1 When we return to the traditions in the gospels, the coverage of what happened to, and/or can be claimed for, Jesus fits neatly into an already existing world of thought. (i) The primary scheme involves an ‘assumption’. (ii) The new and different mode of existence is what is deemed appropriate to the divine world. (iii) The fate of the earlier human body becomes a matter of lesser significance once the person concerned has been seen. (iv) Everything hinges on the sighting. And (v) the appearing person says words of guidance about the continuing life and wellbeing of the community he has left behind.

- 4.2 *Matthew*, following Mark reasonably closely, edits rather more drastically the story of the women at the tomb and strongly suggests that Jesus emerges from the tomb there and then. The women, previously instructed to pass on the message that he will appear to 'the brothers' in Galilee, then have an encounter with him themselves. They grasp his feet (28.9), which suggests that a transformation of his existence has not yet occurred, but when eventually he appears in Galilee (28.16-20) he has become a transformed and heavenly person, no longer subject to the inhibitions of physicality. This time he is not on his way up to heaven, but rather appears as one who has come down from heaven!

¹⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

The heavenly/angelic form of life characterizing the Jesus of this story can be inferred from (i) the doubt factor, which implies uncertainty about what is being seen. i.e. a sense of its 'otherness'; (ii) the prior gift of cosmic authority; (iii) the absorption of Jesus as the Son into the very existence of God, represented by a single 'name'; and (iv) the promise of a universal presence unlimited by time or space.

This time the group appearance is understood quite differently from the way Luke, and indeed John, presents it. *It does not have to be defined by physicality.* In this respect Matthew agrees with what is implicit in Mark and differs from what is explicit in Luke and John.

- 4.3 *John* gives a special position to the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene. The appearance by the lake (21.1-14) is said to be 'the third time that Jesus appeared', and that covers the appearances to the group without Thomas (20.19-23) and then with Thomas (20.24-29). What then of that sighting by Mary, which seems not to be included in the 'first ... second ... third' counting? The key features are the non-recognition (20.14-16) and the change from touching (Matthew 28.9) to the prohibition of touching, with an explanation (20.17) attached:

Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."'

This is extraordinarily like the concluding words of the angel Raphael to Tobit and Tobias before his return to heaven (Tobit 12.20).

'So now get up from the ground, and acknowledge God. See, I am ascending to him who sent me. Write down all these things that have happened to you.' And he ascended.

So the Jesus whom Mary Magdalene sees is on his way from earth to heaven and has been transformed bodily from a tangible to an intangible existence. This transformation is already signalled by the interest shown in the grave clothes. A heavy hint had been dropped but not followed up in Luke 24.12. This became an object of some concentrated attention in John 20.3-9: is not the 'belief' of the beloved disciple achieved by his understanding the message of the linen wrappings, a message that has not penetrated the rather duller mind of Peter? The state of the linen wrappings not only disproves Mary's inference that someone human has removed the body but also proves that resurrection means transformation into a different sort of bodily existence.

¹²But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened. (Luke 24.12)

³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw *the linen wrappings* lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw *the linen wrappings* lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with *the linen wrappings* but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. (John 20.3-9)

- 4.4 All in all, therefore, we have to get used to thinking of 'resurrection' as 'assumption' or 'ascension' into the divine world. Since no one saw the actual movement from one place to another, the description of the bodily existence as new and different is an inference concerning what is thought to be fitting.

5 Resurrection as prologue

- 5.1 Reports of *post mortem* 'sightings' of Jesus are many and varied. The understanding of those experiences as appearances of someone who has become 'other' – enjoying a bodily existence but not this-bodily – is widely attested. Only occasionally, and exceptionally, is a physicalizing interpretation imposed on a tradition. The shared conviction of the majority of the traditions is that Jesus has entered the divine world, has been vindicated by God, and is now making himself known. In the becoming known there will be the communication of how the life of the members of the Jesus movement may unfold. They will live as the community of the risen one, resurrection people. And they will spell out *variously* their interpretation of what it all means.
- 5.2 The question of the tomb remains problematic. The secondary physicalizing interpretation of Jesus' resurrection makes the emptiness of the tomb virtually a *sine qua non*. But how does the inherently ambiguous phenomenon of an empty tomb relate to the primary understanding of the resurrection as the beginning of an existence that is 'other' and confirms to 'spirit'? That has to be a matter for further reflection.
- 5.3 The best attested of all the appearance experiences is that to a group. It was suggested once that these were all a spin-off of defining experience to one individual, Peter, but this seems highly improbable. And while experiences of 'sightings' or other ways in which there is a sense of the presence of someone who has recently died are very well attested in human experience, and these could be drawn into the discussions of the individual appearances of Jesus after his death, this seems less relevant to group experiences. We are left with the deeply rooted claim that these things happened.

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