

PAUL CONFRONTS PAGANISM IN THE CHURCH: A CASE STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS 15:45

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I. INTRODUCTION: A MOST UNUSUAL TEXT

I have chosen to examine 1 Cor 15:45 because this particular verse has deep implications for Christian apologetics in our modern world which, more and more, looks like the ancient world in which Paul first wrote it. In this regard it is interesting to note that one contemporary scholar provocatively states that verse 45 is “polemical.”¹ It is polemical—and this is the thesis of this paper—because Paul, with prophetic-apostolic authority, makes the biblical doctrine of creation one of the non-negotiables of the “metanarrative” of the gospel’s world view.² To borrow a phrase from another scholar, we encounter here, in what is going on at Corinth, “a massive clash of world views.”³

Though many have discussed verse 45, almost all deal exclusively with its last phrase—“the last Adam became a life-giving spirit”—inquiring into its implications for the whole subject of Pauline pneumatology.⁴ The verse as a whole, however, does not figure with any importance in the recent theologies of Paul,⁵ and to my knowledge, only rarely is the verse as a whole

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¹ Birger Albert Pearson, *The Pneumatikos-Psychikos Terminology* (SBLDS 12; Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973) 17.

² D. A. Carson, “Athens Revisited,” in *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) 390.

³ Ibid. This is a phrase from D. A. Carson, speaking of Paul’s debate with the Athenian Stoic and Epicurean philosophers (Acts 17:16–31), but there are many fascinating parallels with our text—see below.

⁴ See especially the brilliant article by James D. G. Dunn, “1 Corinthians 15:45—Last Adam, Life-giving Spirit,” in *Christ and the Spirit in the New Testament: Festschrift C. F. D. Moule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973) 127–41.

⁵ The text is referred to twice in Rudolf Bultmann’s *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1955). In H. J. Schoeps, *Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), it is mentioned one or two times with no discussion. More recently, and not surprisingly, since Paul is made out to be a Stoic, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), does not discuss this verse at all, nor this fundamental argument (1 Corinthians 15 is not referenced), which, for Paul, is the crucial issue of the Christian faith. Scott J. Hafemann, in his excellent work on the Spirit in Paul, *Paul, Moses and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), refers to 1 Cor 15:45 four times—p. 415,

given serious exegetical study.⁶ This is all the more deplorable because the verse is an essential part of Paul's theology and apologetics, as he takes on the thinking of the Greco-Roman pagan world as it finds a niche in the Corinthian church. Moreover, verse 45 contains the broadest, most far-reaching perspective on God's purposes for the cosmos than any other text in the Pauline corpus, and, indeed, in my judgment, in the whole NT. In addition, it touches on most of the major *topoi* of Pauline theology:

- theology = God, Creator and Redeemer, is the implied author of both creation and resurrection
- protology/doctrine of creation = "the First Man"
- providence = "a living being"
- anthropology = the two Adams
- soteriology = the giving of resurrection life
- Christology = "the Last Adam"
- the resurrection as historical event = ἐγένετο . . . εἰς
- ecclesiology = those who are implicitly represented by this new federal head
- eschatology = "the Last Adam"
- pneumatology = "a life-giving spirit"
- OT scriptural revelation = "as it is written" plus the OT citation
- NT scriptural revelation = the Pauline apodosis/Midrash
- redemptive history and the relation of the two testaments⁷
- essential anti-pagan apologetics

All this with just seventeen words!

Below is the Greek text and the translation I propose.

οὕτως καὶ γέγραπται·
ἐγένετο ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος Ἀδὰμ εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν,
ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδὰμ εἰς πνεῦμα ζῶσαν

n. 248: no discussion cf. 102–3, n. 32; p. 183: just reference, no discussion; p. 418: some discussion of "life-giving spirit"; p. 420: passing reference. In the impressive work of Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001) 152, 165, there are just two passing references. Generally, this is not just an absence of one text but of a major theme, namely Paul's doctrine of creation. For the general orientation of this paper, I am indebted to Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1930); and Hermann Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), both of whom have given a significant place to this text. See my *Capturing the Pagan Mind: Paul's Blueprint for Thinking and Living in the New Global Culture* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003).

⁶ Some exceptions would be Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987) 78–92, and Scott Brodeur, *The Holy Spirit's Agency in the Resurrection of the Dead: An Exegetico-Teological Study of 1 Corinthians 15:44b–49 and Romans 8:9–13* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1996), though Brodeur, too, is really only interested in verse 45b. See also R. Morissette, "L'antithèse entre le 'psychique' et le 'pneumatique' en 1 Corinthiens XV, 44 à 46," *RSR* 46 (1972) 97–143.

⁷ Dunn, "1 Corinthians 15:45" 128, speaks about "the central significance of v. 45 in Paul's argument . . . that has not been sufficiently realized."

Thus it stands written:

The first man, Adam, became a living being;

The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

The following exegetical details of verse 45 can be discerned.

1. *Parallelism.* The protasis and the apodosis of verse 45 form an almost perfect parallelism. The protasis has eight words, the apodosis six, but presupposes a seventh, the common verb ἐγένετο. The only difference in the two phrases is the noun ἄνθρωπος of the Genesis citation. All the elements correspond perfectly: “the first [man] Adam” with “the last Adam”; “living being” with “life-giving spirit.” In both phrases the same preposition, εἰς, occurs, whose only syntactical function is to recall the verb in the protasis of which it is a part. Both nouns, ψυχὴ and πνεῦμά, are modified by attributive participles, ζῶσα and ζωοποιούv, evoking creational and resurrectional life.

2. *The verb γίνομαι εἰς.* The little preposition εἰς has great theological significance. The verb γίνομαι εἰς which the Genesis text employs is a wooden Septuagintal translation of לְהִיָּתֵי, the verb “to be” plus the preposition “to,” which in Hebrew means “to become.”⁸ The repetition of εἰς in the apodosis has only one function. Taken alone it is gibberish. As an ellipsis, recalling the verb of the protasis, it is perfectly good Greek style.

This inceptive verb γίνομαι εἰς, as an ingressive aorist, clearly indicates entrance into a state.⁹ These syntactically balanced phrases are not simply a fine linguistic achievement. They also describe the momentous events of cosmic history. The changes of state represent the two essential acts of God in creation and resurrection. Paul is here affirming the goodness of the original creation and the surpassing glory of the final, transformed creation. So this text, dense as it is, proposes two book ends on the plan of God, declaring the organic relationship between protology and eschatology. In God’s plan there are two kinds of life, the protozoic and the eschatozoic, and they circumscribe the whole of human and cosmic history.¹⁰ In this sense, as Geerhardus Vos already saw, eschatology precedes soteriology.¹¹

3. *The meaning of ψυχὴ ζῶσα.* According to the logic [the οὕτως] of Paul’s argument, the Genesis citation explains the meaning ψυχικός in verses 44 and 46. In Genesis, ψυχὴ ζῶσα is applied both to Adam and to all living creatures

⁸ ἐγενήθη αὐτῆ εἰς υἱόν: Moses became her son: Exod 2:10. See also Exod 15:2: “The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation”; βοηθός καὶ σκεπαστής ἐγένετό μοι εἰς σωτηρίαν; cf. the same sentiment and vocabulary in Ps 93:22. See also, e.g., Deut 26:5; Jdg 11:39; 17:5, 12, 13; 1 Sam 30:25; 2 Sam 8:2, 6; 13:23; 19:3; 23:19; 1 Kgs 13:34.

⁹ Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 576, observes: “If a speaker wants to speak of the unchanging nature of a state, the aorist is not normally appropriate. Indeed, when the aorist of such a stative verb is used, the emphasis is most frequently on the entrance into a state.”

¹⁰ Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption* 83, rightly sees that these two categories “encompass the whole of human history . . . [they are] two comprehensive principles of history, two successive world-orders . . . [a] perspective . . . nothing less than cosmic.”

¹¹ Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961) 169.

in the original created order.¹² This is what Jesus means when he asks: “Is it lawful to save life or to destroy it?”¹³ Likewise, in Paul, ψυχή generally means physical life.¹⁴ Paul is not referring to “a living person” as such but is describing two orders of existence, determined by two principles, ψυχή and πνεῦμα. They presuppose two stages in God’s creative, redemptive plan. Ψυχή¹⁵ is the mode of creational life; πνεῦμα that of the future, new-creational life. Obviously Adam is a person, but Paul is here not so much interested in personhood as in the two epochs of cosmic, creational existence, as represented and embodied by the two “federal heads,” Adam and Christ.

4. *The meaning of πνεῦμα ζωοποιῶν.* Because the phrase “became a life-giving spirit” is doubtless one of Paul’s most dense and enigmatic expressions, and of all the phrases of this verse, has received the most attention, it surely deserves a study, even a few Ph.D. theses, all to itself. In this context I can give it but two paragraphs. Essentially, there are two major possible interpretations. The first would see in the term πνεῦμα a specifically personal reference to the Holy Spirit, suggesting an “economic or functional” identity between the last Adam and the third person of the Trinity.¹⁶ Scholars who adopt this view will capitalize πνεῦμα. Certainly the participle ζωοποιῶν on its own would suggest this meaning, since the verb tends only to be used in the Bible in reference to the three persons of the Trinity,¹⁷ and the almost identical phrase, clearly referring to the Spirit, occurs in both John—τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ ζωοποιῶν (John 6:63) and also in Paul—τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ζωοποιεῖ (2 Cor 3:6).

The other interpretation, which I favor, sees a reference to the mode of resurrection life, created by the Spirit, which begins with the resurrection of Jesus.¹⁸ In support of this interpretation, it should be noted that both of the preceding examples clearly identify the *person* of the Spirit, the article is used. In 1 Cor 15:45, however, the article is absent. It is absent also from the preceding parallel phrase, ψυχή ζωῶσα. Adam did not become *the* living being, but *a* living being, the first of many, the prototype of a kind of existence. The anarthrous form suggests a specific example of a larger class. Thus the syntactical parallelism makes us render πνεῦμα ζωοποιῶν “a life-giving spirit.” Many translations support this rendering.

The strict parallel with verse 45a, and the first Adam, thus indicates that πνεῦμα ζωοποιῶν is a way (an unusual way, certainly) of speaking

¹² Gen 1:24 and 2:19. See also Gen 7:22.

¹³ Mark 3:4: ψυχὴν σῶσαι ἢ ἀποκτεῖναι.

¹⁴ Rom 2:9; 11:3; 2 Cor 1:23. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* 204, allows that ψυχή in Paul simply designates, as in Judaism generally, “human life,” but when contrasted with “spirit” in verse 45, then it takes on a deprecatory, Gnostic, sense. Here Bultmann fails to do justice to Paul’s eschatology, expressed so clearly in verse 46, showing that Paul is speaking not about a Gnostic rejection of the flesh, but about two divinely-willed stages for human existence.

¹⁵ While on one occasion (1 Cor 2:24; cf. Jude 1:19) Paul gives the term ψυχικός a more negative connotation, where the natural, like the flesh, has become the occasion of sinful opposition to the Spirit’s work, in this argument he is surely referring to the natural state of pre-Fall existence.

¹⁶ Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption* 86 and James Dunn, “1 Corinthians 15:45.” See also Hafemann, *Paul, Moses and the History of Israel* 183.

¹⁷ Rom 8:11; 2 Cor 3:6 cf. John 5:21; 1 Pet 3:18 cf. Neh 9:6; 2 Kgs 5:7; Job 36:6; Eccl 7:12; Ezra 9:8, 9.

¹⁸ It is surely not the incarnation where the Word became flesh (John 1:14): ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο, not πνεῦμα.

about the eschatological, heavenly, new-creational mode of being, just as $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta\ \zeta\omega\sigma\alpha$ describes the natural, creational mode of existence.¹⁹ Both unpack the adjectival nouns $\psi\upsilon\chi\iota\kappa\acute{o}\nu$ and $\pi\upsilon\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha\tau\iota\kappa\acute{o}\nu$ which describe these human modes of being. The subject of the pericope is “what kind of body” (v. 35), and Paul gives us two kinds. Adam became a living being and had the $\psi\upsilon\chi\iota\kappa\acute{o}\nu$ kind of body. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit and has a $\pi\upsilon\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha\tau\iota\kappa\acute{o}\nu$ body.²⁰ If this is so, then it is legitimate to translate $\pi\upsilon\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha\ \zeta\omega\sigma\iota\omicron\upsilon\delta\upsilon\nu$ as a heavenly, life-giving mode of existence. Paul does not change the subject. He does not, all of a sudden, introduce the mystery of the divine nature of Christ, nor evoke a special economic collusion of the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity in the work of redemption. The logic of his argument will not allow him to make such a major distinction between the Last Adam and his progeniture. Rather, by the term “the last Adam,” Paul is describing the nature of new eschatological *humanity*,²¹ of which Christ is the prototype and firstfruits (1 Cor 15:22). This is why it is appropriate to describe him as the *object* of the divine action implied in $\gamma\acute{\iota}\nu\omicron\mu\alpha\ \epsilon\iota\varsigma$. Ontologically, God never “becomes.” The Last Adam, as a human being, certainly does. For these reasons I take Paul’s language to refer to two modes of human existence that, in the plan of God, follow each other, as the immediately following verse affirms: “it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual.” This is doubtless why Paul can call Christians $\pi\upsilon\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha\tau\iota\kappa\acute{o}\iota$.²²

This “minor” exegetical point is nevertheless essential to the whole argument, which is, as we shall see, to demonstrate the organic connection between physical creation and bodily resurrection.

II. THE IMMEDIATE SURROUNDING CONTEXT OF VERSE 45: VERSES 42–49

The context of verse 45 indicates that this single verse is not a lone “diamond in the rough.” The setting, too, of carefully-posed gems, has also

¹⁹ Audet, “Avec quel corps les justes ressusciteront-ils? Analyse de 1 Corinthians 15:44,” *SR* 1/3 (1971) 174, argues that “the resurrection is a new creation which places the resurrected man (l’homme ressuscite) under the total influence of the Spirit and makes him as it were life giving spirit.” Audet refers to Murdoch E. Dahl, *The Resurrection of the Body* (Naperville, IL: A. R. Allenson, 1962) 81–82. See also Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.12, 2.

²⁰ In support of this, G. Vos sees the expression in Rom 1:4— $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\alpha}\ \pi\upsilon\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha\ \acute{\alpha}\gamma\iota\omega\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\nu\eta\varsigma$ —as a reference not to the agency of the Spirit but to the mode of being of the resurrected life of the eschaton.

²¹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.12, 2 sees the stages in the economy of salvation: the first where man is made a living being, the second where he becomes a life-giving spirit. The second Adam is not Christ as such but man who receives the vivifying Spirit. Though Irenaeus goes too far, he does see clearly that Paul is describing two types of humanity.

²² 1 Cor 2:13, 15; 3:1; Gal 6:1. An echo of this kind of thinking is found in the Gospel of John. John 20:22 also takes the eschatological work of the life-giving Spirit back to Gen 2:7 in the use of the unusual verb $\acute{\epsilon}\mu\phi\upsilon\sigma\sigma\omega$. Furthermore, Jesus says of believers: “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:38). The organic relationship of Jesus and the believer, so that what can be said of the one can be said of the other is also reflected in a further word of Jesus: “Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:19). $\zeta\acute{\alpha}\omega$ is present in both texts, where the communication of “life” is such a central idea. I am indebted to my student Chris Sandoval for pointing out this common theme.

been exquisitely constructed by a gifted jeweler/wordsmith. The setting is an extended series of strictly parallel couplets, with something of the appearance of a chiasm, though in no way formally so.²³ Verses 44 and 46 are deeply and organically connected to verse 45. Paul's antithetical, adjectival pairs in verse 44b—*ψυχικόν* and *πνευματικόν*²⁴—call forth the nouns *ψυχή* and *πνεῦμα* in OT citation and Paul's addition in verse 45. In verse 46, Paul then comments upon verse 45, reusing the adjectives *πνευματικόν* and *ψυχικόν* of verse 44.²⁵

The repetition of the key terms in verses 44b–46 is striking:

44b *ψυχικόν*—*πνευματικόν*
 45 *ψυχή*—*πνεῦμα*
 46 *ψυχικόν*—*πνευματικόν*

Clearly, these verses are united around a central and common theme,²⁶ but in so doing, they also appear to constitute the nub or apex of a larger whole, a tight argument that extends beyond verse 46 to verse 49 and reaches back from verse 44 to verse 42. In other words, we have good reason for identifying a discrete pericope that runs from verse 42b to verse 49.

These eight verses, constructed solely of ten strictly parallel, comparative couplets, form a clearly-defined literary unit. In this unusual pericope, Paul repeats the same theme ten times in a row. What is he trying to say? In terms of literary genre, I struggle to find the right terminology. I have found no discussion of the literary form of this entire pericope, which is, to say the least, a remarkable, rhetorical and literary *tour de force*, to my knowledge unique in the whole of Scripture.²⁷ It could be described as “synthetic”²⁸ or “complex” parallelism,²⁹ or an extended example of the rabbinic *qal wahomer*, that is, an *a fortiori* argument, from the lesser to the greater or *a minori ad maius*.³⁰ In Pauline terms, this would be an extended example of his εἰ . . . πολλῷ μᾶλλον (“if . . . how much more”) type of argument. But none of these

²³ That Paul knew this literary form seems to be evident from a somewhat similar structure in verses 20–28: see C. E. Hill, “Paul’s Understanding of Christ’s Kingdom in 1 Corinthians 15:20–28,” *NovT* 30 (1988) 300. See also John Gillman, “Transformation in 1 Cor 15, 50–53,” *ETL* 58 (1982) 309–33.

²⁴ Richard B. Gaffin, *Calvin and the Sabbath* (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1962), argues that Paul’s expression “if there is a psychical body, then there is also a spiritual body” actually affirms that the former body “anticipates the latter . . . the psychical body by its very nature implies the pneumatic.”

²⁵ Robert Guelich, “The Gospel Genre,” in *The Gospel and The Gospels* (ed. Peter Stuhlmacher; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 194–95, shows that *καθὼς γέγραπται* never begins a new thought, but always links to the preceding thought. Thus verse 45 is organically connected to verse 44.

²⁶ Morrisette, “L’antithèse,” calls verses 44–46 a “fragment.”

²⁷ Morrisette, “L’antithèse” 98, refers to various texts in the Babylonian Talmud, but these are merely examples of *qal wahomer* argumentation and bear no relation to the literary form of verses 42b–49.

²⁸ J. Jeremias, “Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God,” *NTS* 11 (1955–56) 158–59 uses this term for the couplets of 1 Cor 15:50–54.

²⁹ W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible: Explained and Illustrated* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968) 351.

³⁰ Bullinger, *ibid.* 297, speaks of *Symploce* or “intertwining.” Bullinger does cite vv. 42–44 and calls the passage a case of “double *anaphora* (repetition).”

attempts do real justice to the unique character of this literary achievement. The rhetorical and literary consistency, maintained throughout these eight verses, is best presented in indented poetic format, as is often done with Hebrew poetry, in order to measure the extent and powerful flow of Paul's expression. I would thus propose the following format, highlighting the central verse, 45, as the apex of the argument:

- A Natural Body of Corruption—σπείρεται ἐν φθορᾷ (v. 42b)
- B Spiritual Body of Incorruption—ἐγείρεται ἐν ἀφθαρσία (v. 42b)
- A Natural Body of Dishonor—σπείρεται ἐν ἀτιμίᾳ (v. 43a)
- B Spiritual Body of Glory—ἐγείρεται ἐν δόξῃ (v. 43a)
- A Natural Body of Weakness—σπείρεται ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ (v. 43b)
- B Spiritual Body of Power—ἐγείρεται ἐν δυνάμει (v. 43b)
- A Natural Body—σπείρεται σῶμα ψυχικόν (v. 44a)
- B Spiritual Body—ἐγείρεται σῶμα πνευματικόν (v. 44a)
- A Natural Body—Εἰ ἔστιν σῶμα ψυχικόν (v. 44b)
- B Spiritual Body—ἔστιν καὶ πνευματικόν (v. 44b)

Proof from Scripture = οὕτως γέγραπται

- A Natural Body [First Adam]—ἐγένετο ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος Ἀδὰμ εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν (v. 45a)

Proof from Apostolic "Scriptural" Midrash

- B Spiritual Body [Last Adam]—[ἐγένετο] ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδὰμ εἰς πνεῦμα ζῶσαν (v. 45b)

- A Natural—πρῶτον . . . τὸ ψυχικόν (v. 46a)
- B Spiritual—ἔπειτα τὸ πνευματικόν (v. 46b)
- A Earthly, of Dust—ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος ἐκ γῆς χοϊκός (v. 47a)
- B Heavenly—δεύτερος ἄνθρωπος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ (v. 47b)
- A [Earthly], of Dust—οἶος ὁ χοϊκός, τοιοῦτοι καὶ οἱ χοϊκοί (v. 48a)
- B Heavenly—οἶος ὁ ἐπουράνιος, τοιοῦτοι καὶ οἱ, ἐπουράνιοι (v. 48b)
- A Image of the Earthly, Dust—ἐφορέσαμεν τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ χοϊκοῦ (v. 49a)
- B Image of the Heavenly—φορέσομεν καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ ἐπουρανοῦ (v. 49b)

This literary form seems to follow somewhat the rules of chiasmus, but only in the sense that the center appears to constitute the main point,³¹ or the apex³² of the argument, by which everything else is defined. Clearly Paul reaches the first high point of the development that begins with verse 42, in verse 44a, where he speaks of "a natural body" and "a spiritual body."³³ This

³¹ John W. Welch, "Criteria for Identifying Chiasmus," *Chiasmus Bibliography* 157–74, provides fifteen criteria. He argues that in chiasmus attention is focused on the main point of a passage "by placing it at the central turning point" (p. 162).

³² The term is from Hill, "Paul's Understanding" 302.

³³ Morissette, "L'antithèse" 98, independently confirms my analysis. He describes verse 44b as "l'énoncé central" which is then developed in verses 45–48.

is then confirmed both by a restatement of the logic of the argument, using the same terms, ψυχικόν and πνευματικόν in verse 44b, and then using a proof from Scripture (old and new) in verse 45. These two elements—Paul’s summary statement, plus his scriptural proof—would then represent the middle point and thus the controlling center of his argument. The terms ψυχικόν and πνευματικόν are reprised in verse 46 to determine the rest of the argument up to verse 49.

In my opinion, the major interpretative error often made in regard to Paul’s argument here is to see an extended comparison of sinful humanity with glorified humanity.³⁴ In other words, the temptation is great to read verse 45 and its context in the light of verse 22. However, if Paul in verse 22 treats the issue of salvation from sin and death in the well-known phrase “as in Adam all died, so in Christ shall all be made alive,” it appears that in verse 45 Paul is making a different point, namely, to paraphrase, “as in the created Adam all are given the mode of terrestrial existence, so in the resurrected Adam, all are given the mode of heavenly, eternal existence.” The argument here is cosmological, not soteriological. Soteriology is absolutely central to Paul’s thinking about redemption, but this text reveals the equally decisive place and importance of the cosmological perspective.

If verse 45 is, as scriptural proof, the defining center of the pericope, I propose to look at both sides of the pericope, dealing first with verses 46–49 and then looking at the more ambiguous verses, 42–44, in order to discover an essential common logic which gives meaning to the entire pericope.

III. THE MEANING OF VERSES 46–49

It seems to me that Bultmann is right when he affirms that in the pairs from verse 45 to verse 49 there appears no hint of “sinful flesh.”³⁵ Indeed, the very citation of Gen 2:7 in verse 45, so obviously a prelapsarian reference, means that the capstone proof Paul advances for his argument to that point, showing how the body is raised, rests on the fact of the pre-Fall, sinless, created body of Adam. Moreover, if ψυχικός in verse 46 refers to sinful existence, then we have Paul stating programmatically that God condones the Fall as a necessary “first” event.³⁶ But in Paul’s thinking, sin is not the “first” event. The good creation is. So it is not Adam as the “first” sinner,³⁷ but Adam as the “first” created human being that Paul has in mind in verse 45.

³⁴ Leonard Audet, “Avec quel corps.” For him ψυχικόν means “la déchéance et . . . la corruption de la chair” (p. 169). See also Richard Hays, *1 Corinthians* 272, who believes that Paul evokes Adam in verse 45 “as the initiator of decay.”

³⁵ So Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* 249.

³⁶ Ronald Sider, “The Pauline Conception of the Resurrection Body in 1 Corinthians XV:35–54,” *NTS* 21 (1975) 435, argues that “in all four occurrences of ψυχικός in St. Paul, it contains a pejorative connotation.” He sees sin in “dust from the earth” when Paul says the earth is the Lord’s. It seems clear to me that Paul has both a negative and a positive use for this term. By it, as with “flesh,” he can mean what is thoroughly this-worldly, unspiritual, and thus sinful (1 Cor 2:14), but also simply physical/created, with no moral implications, as here.

³⁷ The sinning, death-sentenced Adam in Pauline terminology is σάρκινός/σαρκικός.

Further proof is at hand. This term, ψυχικός, from verse 46 on is in parallel not with σάρκινος or σαρκικός (“fleshly”) but with ἐκ γῆς and χοϊκός. These expressions actually constitute a second citation of Gen 2:7, this time reproducing the first part of the verse, which reads in the OT text as follows: καὶ ἔπλασεν θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον χοῦν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς. Paul’s reprise of Gen 2:7a is virtually verbatim, while repeating his “inspired” addition, πρῶτος, from verse 45. His text reads: πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος ἐκ γῆς χοϊκός.³⁸ It thus appears that in verses 46–49 Paul is proposing an extended development of the eschatological implications of creation that he finds implicit in Gen 2:7. Out of this OT pre-Fall text and what it implies about the nature of God the Creator, he finds “proof” of (a) the inevitability of a consummated mode of existence (the πνευματικόν of v. 46); (b) the necessity of a second (human) Adam who will deal with the reality of the Fall (v. 47); and (c) the birth of a new eschatological humanity (vv. 48–49).

Paul’s two-stage eschatology, expressed in verse 46, contrasts significantly with the three-stage “eschatology” of Gnosticism, and in particular, with that of the “Gnostic” Paul. In the Nag Hammadi text, *The Prayer of the Apostle Paul*, “Paul” calls the biblical God “the *psychic* God,”³⁹ whose creation is a terrible mistake. The Gnostic believer prays to the God behind God, the Great Spirit, the Father of the Totalities, from whom all things have emanated. Redemption for the Gnostic is thus a return to what he originally knew and was, the πνευματικόν, which for the Gnostic means consubstantiality with the divine. Having fallen into evil matter, the ψυχικόν, the Gnostic must banish false notions of himself from his mind, separate himself “from the *somatic* darkness . . . from *psychic* chaos in mind and the femininity of [physical] desire.”⁴⁰ Then he knows “a stillness of silence within me” and “hear[s] the blessedness whereby I kn[o]w myself as <I am>,”⁴¹ thus anticipating his restoration into the πνευματικόν.

Can Paul be more different? Can his argument be any clearer? He goes out of his way to insist on a different chronology from the pagan and Gnostic one. For him the biblical order is: first the *physical*, then the *spiritual* (1 Cor 15:46). He is affirming the goodness and the necessity of the first creation—the *physical*—before the second re-creative act of God, transforming and infusing the original physical with the *spiritual*, the future life of the new creation.⁴² It is therefore *this earthly man* of dust, ἐκ γῆς, created good, *ex nihilo*, not yet a sinner, who is compared to the second man from heaven—ἐξ οὐρανοῦ—“from heaven,” not in the sense of being parachuted in from the

³⁸ Inexplicably, Sider, “Pauline Conception” 434, sees a reference to sin in Paul’s term “from the earth, dust”—ἐκ γῆς χοϊκός, even though this is a quotation from Gen 2:7, before the Fall, and Paul declares to the Corinthians that “the earth is the Lord’s”—τοῦ κυρίου γὰρ ἡ γῆ (1 Cor 10:26).

³⁹ *The Prayer of the Apostle Paul* I A:25–29, I B:5–9.

⁴⁰ *Zostrianos* VIII 1, 1:10–20.

⁴¹ *Allogenes* 60:15–19.

⁴² N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection* 355, makes the same point: “The *pneumatikos* state [the spiritual] is not simply an original idea in the mind of the creator, from which the human race fell sadly away; this model of humanity is the future reality, the reality which will swallow up and replace mere *psychikos* [natural, earthly] life.”

blue yonder, but in the sense of having a physical body now imbued with the life of the future transformed heaven and earth by his resurrection from the dead.⁴³ Paul's argument consistently seeks to show that the heavenly resurrection body is an eschatological fulfillment, not of the survival of the soul or spirit, nor of the body of sin,⁴⁴ but of this earthly, earthy body of dust.

IV. THE MEANING OF VERSES 42B–44B

That Paul refers to pre-Fall reality seems to be incontestable so far as the second part of the pericope, verses 46–49, is concerned. What of the first part, the series of pairs in 42a–44b on the other side of pericope's pivotal verse 45? Most scholars believe that in the preceding side of the argument, Paul is certainly comparing the sinful body with the resurrected body.⁴⁵ Paul's introductory statement—οὕτως καὶ ἡ ἀνάστασις τῶν νεκρῶν in verse 42—would seem to suggest this without further discussion. Jervel declares: "It is only a question of death in this context."⁴⁶ Paul is speaking here of the sinful body.⁴⁷

However, some early Church fathers (see below) and the contemporary French scholar François Altermath are of the opposing opinion. Altermath believes that in these verses it is actually only a question of resurrection, noting that in verses 42–44 the term ἀμαρτία is never used in the antitheses.⁴⁸ If these eight verses 42–49 do constitute a defined, discrete literary unit, as I have tried to show, there are good reasons for thinking that verses 42b–44a also describe the pre-Fall situation of Adam.

The phrase ἡ ἀνάστασις τῶν νεκρῶν, though at first blush suggesting sin and death, may well be simply a technical term for the general theme of the entire chapter (1 Cor 15:12, 21). Paul is perhaps recalling the original subject, after what is seemingly a digression into a discussion of plants and heavenly bodies in verses 36–41.

One constant in the pairs of verses 42b–44a is the term "sow," σπείρω, which we must now seek to define. Most exegetes understand the verb "sow" to mean "bury," implicitly suggesting the death of *sinful* flesh.⁴⁹ However, neither in the OT nor in the NT is the verb "sow" used for burial.⁵⁰ Indeed,

⁴³ This is suggested by Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption* 92, though I find no specific reference to verse 46. Against all expectations, given his dislike of "heaven" as a disembodied kind of place, N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection* 355, gives to the expression more the notion of Christ's parousia.

⁴⁴ In Col 3:2, 5, Paul can speak of earthly passions, though he never uses χοϊκός that way.

⁴⁵ Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption* 79, believes that from verse 42a, "the corpse of the believer is in view."

⁴⁶ Jervel, *Imago Dei* 264

⁴⁷ Pearson, *The Pneumatikos-Psychikos* 26, who claims the terms describe "the aeon of sin and death." Audet, "Avec quel corps" 166, argues that Paul shows "[m]an from his situation as sinner to his glorification in God." He further argues that "ψυχὴν is a quite pejorative concept" (p. 174).

⁴⁸ Altermath, *Du corps psychique* 49.

⁴⁹ Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption* 79.

⁵⁰ In spite of this, this text is often cited at funerals.

“sow” meaning “create” is a perfectly acceptable sense.⁵¹ In its most obvious sense, “sow” evokes not death but the very beginning of vibrant, burgeoning life. In the LXX “sow” is used in Jeremiah of the renewal of Israel, presented as a repetition of the first creation.⁵² In Hosea the Lord says: “I will plant [literally ‘sow’—σπερῶ] her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called ‘Not my loved one.’ I will say to those called ‘Not my people,’ ‘You are my people’; and they will say, ‘You are my God’” (Hos 2:23). This is the promise of a people coming to life. “Sow” here clearly means birth or creation.⁵³ Even the expression in 1 Cor 15:36: “You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies,” which might be taken to mean “bury” cannot bear that sense. All Paul is saying here is that what is sown, or comes to life in a fallen world will eventually die.

The passive, in the verbs σπείρεται and ἐγείρεται, presupposes divine action.⁵⁴ It is obvious and right to see God as the author of resurrection, but if “sow” means burial, this would make God the author of death as the consequence of sin, which Paul could never say. There are thus good reasons for thinking that “sowing” in these couplets refers to creation, and “raising,” obviously, to resurrection.⁵⁵

Moving out from the literary center, which as we have established is clearly speaking of created and resurrected bodies, we exegete, so to speak, backwards from the logical apex, verses 44b–45 to verse 42b, moving from the clear and known to the less clear and the less known. In terms of our purely Western linear logic, this might seem like an odd way of doing exegesis, but if there is in biblical literature the phenomenon of chiasmic logic, then such an approach is well justified.

V. 44b: Εἰ ἔστιν σῶμα ψυχικόν; ἔστιν καὶ πνευματικόν

⁵¹ Altermath, *Du corps psychique* 27. Altermath notes that “in Antiquity, σπεῖρω has the meaning of ‘engender’ or ‘procreate.’”

⁵² Jer 31:27 (LXX 38:27); cf. Ezek 36:9ff; 4 Macc 10:2. See Altermath, *Du corps psychique* 26. Jer 38:27 says: “The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I plant [σπερῶ] the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the offspring of men and of animals.” In the LXX, this text not only uses σπερῶ but other terms found in 1 Cor 15:38–39, namely, σπέρμα, ἀνθρώπος and κτήνος. Other texts that are often translated as “plant” but actually use the verb “sow” include Lev 25:20, 22; 26:16; Deut 11:10; Mic 6:15; Eccl 11:4.

⁵³ Hays, *1 Corinthians* 271, states that “our present bodies are sown (in this life) perishable, etc,” giving the sense of “born,” though maintaining the notion of sin.

⁵⁴ Altermath, *Du corps psychique* 27, notes that the past tense, σπείρεται, expresses divine action, which cannot designate the placing of a corpse in the ground. This relates rather to a creative act of God.

⁵⁵ Altermath, *Du corps psychique* 25–26, argues that the image of grain placed in the ground to die (v. 36) is a different image than the one in verse 42b. He argues that in the analogy of the seed, placing the seed in the ground precedes its death, whereas, for the body, death precedes burial. One could also ask if, in the case of a seed, there is really death in the moral and even physical sense of the term. What Paul is describing here is physical transformation from seed to plant. Also, here “sow” is used in the active, not the passive. A. T. Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1911) 371, maintain that there is no direct relationship between the “image” of verse 36 with the use of the verb in verses 42–44.

Moving upwards or backwards from verse 45, the key nouns ψυχή and πνεῦμα in verse 45 have clearly emerged from the adjectives ψυχικόν and πνευματικόν of verse 44b. In neither ψυχὴν ζῶσαν of Gen 2:7, nor πνεῦμα ζωοποιούν, modifying the last Adam, is there any obvious notion of sin (ἁμαρτία).⁵⁶ There is thus little reason to think that this would be the case here for the adjectives ψυχικόν and πνευματικόν, which, so clearly are dependent upon verse 45. Certainly Paul's use of ψυχικόν in 1 Cor 2:14 evokes those who live in a purely natural, "unspiritual," and therefore sinful manner. He says: "The natural person [ψυχικὸς δὲ ἄνθρωπος] does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually [πνευματικῶς] discerned." Here you have natural and spiritual juxtaposed as moral categories. The natural has raised itself to an autonomous, immoral principle of living.

However, if our comments on verse 46 above are correct (where it seems impossible to understand Paul as saying that "sin" was the original, ordained reality of God's creative plan), then we must reckon with the fact that Paul can use the term "natural" in both a moral and an ontological sense. Readers will remember that Paul does the very same thing with "flesh." Σὰρξ serves both as a reference to mere creatureliness and its inherent weakness (see comments on verse 43b below), but also as a short-hand term for sin, as in the term "living according to the flesh."⁵⁷

V. 44a: σπείρεται σῶμα ψυχικόν ἐγείρεται σῶμα πνευματικόν

Here we have the repetition of the terms in verse 44b, ψυχικόν and πνευματικόν, in the phrases σπείρεται σῶμα ψυχικόν, ἐγείρεται σῶμα πνευματικόν. It is safe to presuppose that Paul maintains the same meaning for identical terms in the very same verse.⁵⁸ Now Paul associates them with the verb "sow," which we argued above means "create." Thus, since ψυχικός in verse 44b designates man as he was created by God, prior to sin, it suggests that the preceding uses of "sow" and the adjectives there employed in the verses 42b–43, equally evoke humanity prior to the Fall. We must therefore ask if the four antitheses of verses 42b–44a, which are "rigorously parallel," oppose man, not as fallen but as created, with man as he will be resurrected.⁵⁹ I would propose that in the light of the meaning of the parallel terms we have examined in verses 44b–49, the terminology of "weakness," "dishonor," and "corruption," as we generally translate them, may not be intended to invoke the sinful body but the created, limited body of the First Adam prior to the Fall.

⁵⁶ Clearly, in the actual reality of cosmic history and in the coming of the second Adam, sin is the immediate cause, so it can never be entirely eliminated.

⁵⁷ Rom 8:4, 12. For neutral references to "flesh," see Rom 1:3; 2:28; 3:20; 4:1; 6:19; and many others. See also below.

⁵⁸ To have the couplets of verses 42b–44a speak of corpses, Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption* 79, argues that "the pointed antithesis of 42–44a is suddenly softened" by a change in form. Instead of a "series of contraposed main clauses," we have the joining of a protasis with an apodosis. This is ingenious, but hardly convincing. It has Paul meaning two different things with identical terms, in the same verse, in parallel form.

⁵⁹ Altermath, *Du corps psychique* 37.

V. 43b: σπείρεται ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ, ἐγείρεται ἐν δυνάμει

Though we automatically think of “moral weakness,” the eleven times when Paul uses ἀσθενεία it has to do with human helplessness and frailty rather than moral failing. In 1 Corinthians, Paul can speak three chapters earlier of “parts of the body that seem to be weaker” [ἀσθενέστερα] but “are indispensable,” without the slightest hint of moral failing.⁶⁰ If Paul can already declare this body as “dust,” without implying sin, then it is certainly appropriate to see weakness in a non-ethical sense. In the OT ἀσθενεία is a frequent designation for man in his natural, finite state; that is, man in his creatureliness and vulnerability⁶¹ as compared to God who is associated with δυνάμις, by which power God raises Jesus from the dead (Rom 1:4).⁶² If power as such is not a moral category but an expression of divine superiority, then the comparative term “weakness” is ontological, not moral. It is the idea of humanity in need of God, especially where resurrection is concerned, such as Paul states in 1 Cor 15:50: “I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood [σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα] cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” As in other places, “flesh and blood” evokes human weakness and dependency⁶³ as opposed to God’s great life-giving, victory-giving power (1 Cor 15:57).

V. 43a: σπείρεται ἐν ἀτιμίᾳ ἐγείρεται ἐν δόξῃ

It is usual to take the first term—σπείρεται ἐν ἀτιμίᾳ—in its ethical sense of moral unworthiness. But if the corresponding ἐγείρεται ἐν δόξῃ is not an ethical category, but an expression denoting “blazing, dazzling beauty,”⁶⁴ as verse 41 shows, then ἀτιμία may well designate, as it sometimes does, the “common” or the “plain.”⁶⁵ Thus Paul argues in Romans: “Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes [τιμὴν σεβῶς] and some for common use [εἰς ἀτιμίαν]?”⁶⁶ We are then in the presence of a typical Pauline πολλῶ μᾶλλον—“how much more”—type of argument. In comparison with the glory that is to come, says Paul

⁶⁰ 1 Cor 12:22. This would be true of “flesh and blood” in verse 50, referring not to the moral failings of humanity but to the ontological impossibility of humanity to bring in the kingdom of God by its own limited power. The only power the pre-Fall Adam had was moral obedience, but he did not create the world nor would he have been able to recreate it. See Jeremias, “Flesh and Blood” 152–53. Altermath, *Du corps psychique* 31, indicates that this was the position of Clement of Alexandria and Philo.

⁶¹ Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 1266, speaking generally about Paul’s understanding of “flesh.”

⁶² Altermath, *Du corps psychique* 31–32. See also Walter Grundmann, “δυνάμις,” *TDNT* 2.290–94. Bavinck, *In the Beginning* 198–99, in commenting on 1 Cor 15:45–49, describes the pre-Fall Adam as “dependent on the earth . . . [for] food and drink, light and air, day and night . . . his condition was provisional and temporary.”

⁶³ See Gal 1:16 which compares divine revelation with human information. See also Matt 16:17.

⁶⁴ Glory is the believer’s hope: see Ps 7:19; 57:6, 12; cf. Isa 40:3–5.

⁶⁵ When Paul describes the condescension of the eternal Son in Phil 2:7, though the comparison is between the divine and the human, something of the nature of human existence as weakness is surely implied. The same is implied in 2 Cor 8:9, which speaks of the poverty of human nature in comparison with the riches of heavenly existence.

⁶⁶ Rom 9:21. Cf. Prov 12:9; Isa 3:5; Wis 3:17; 7:9; 15:10; Matt 13:57 [?]; 1 Cor 4:10 [?]; 12:23; 2 Cor 6:8; 2 Tim 2:20 [?].

of the New Covenant, the Old “which came in glory has come to have no glory.”⁶⁷ On the πολλῶ μᾶλλον principle, the glorious first creation is nonetheless common and plain compared to the surpassing glory to be revealed in the new creation (Rom 8:18).

V. 42b: σπείρεται ἐν φθορά ἐγείρεται ἐν ἀφθαρσία

In verse 42b one finds the only term in the whole series with a genuinely moral content—σπείρεται ἐν φθορά, “sown in corruption.” Paul argues in Gal 6:8 that “the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption” (Gal 6:8). But there is the possibility that even this expression can rightly be said of the pre-Fall body, especially if “sown” means “created.” Athenagoras [late 2d cent.] notes that it was not inappropriate for God from the beginning to create man corruptible.⁶⁸ Thus the phrase σπείρεται ἐν φθορα, in the light of this whole argument, could well mean “created corruptible,” that is, created with the genuine possibility of being corrupted.⁶⁹ This is the nature of created flesh, its glory but also its weakness. Indeed, for the original probation to be real, it must have included the possibility of the Fall. Paul may indeed be offering a sober, realistic, redemptive-historical interpretation of the original Adam, over against Philonic divinizing speculations about the original “incorruptible” man.⁷⁰ At creation, before the actual Fall, the Fall is surely a real possibility.⁷¹ In the resurrection that possibility is gone

⁶⁷ 2 Cor 3:10. See 2 Cor 3:9, 11 and Rom 5:9, 10, 15, 17; 1 Cor 12:22; Phil 1:23; cf. Rom 11:12, 24.

⁶⁸ Cited in Altermath, *Du corps psychique* 72.

⁶⁹ In Col 2:22 Paul speaks of “corruption” as a future, inevitable reality because of the human character of things—“These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings” (NIV)—ἅ ἐστιν πάντα εἰς φθορὰν τῇ ἀποχρήσει, κατὰ τὰ ἐντάλματα καὶ διδασκαλίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων. If this is true in the fallen state, it is doubtless so in the pre-Fall state. Certainly, in Philo, at the creation of the “earthly man” (ὁ γηϊνός), the “earthlike mind . . . is corruptible (φθαρτός) were not God to breathe into it a power of real life” (*Leg. All.* 1:31). Bavinck, *In the Beginning* 198, states that the pre-Fall Adam lived under the “threat of punishment in the case of transgression . . . [thus] he did not yet possess the highest humanity.” In explicating Adam’s pre-Fall situation, Bavinck points to Augustine’s important distinctions. Adam possessed the ability not to sin and die—*posse non peccari and posse non mori*—but the state of impossibility to sin and to die—*non posse peccari and non posse mori*—awaited his successful passing of the probationary arrangement and subsequent glorification (p. 201). In his definition of God and human beings, Norman Geisler defines the difference in the following way: “God is pure actuality with no potentiality whatsoever. Everything else has potentiality not to exist.” This is true of beings before as well as after the Fall. See Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Salleh, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in the Light of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 139.

⁷⁰ This is not just an ancient formulation. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible Third Edition* on Phil 2:5–7 states that the phrase “equality with God” “may refer to divine status, or simply pre-existence as a heavenly being, or to Adam’s original immortality [italics added] which Christ renounced by becoming subject to death.”

⁷¹ See 1QS 11:20ff for a non-idealistic view of man, similar to Paul’s, alluding to Ps 2:7:

And what is the son of Man himself
Amidst all thy marvelous works?
And that he is born of woman,
What is his worth before thee?
Truly, this man was shaped from dust
And his life is to become the prey of worms.

The rabbis believed in the restoration of humanity to the supralapsarian Adamic state—see *T. Levi* 18:9–12; *Apoc. Mos.* 13:2–4; 28:3; 39:2—see Robin Scroggs, *Last Adam* 29–30; Scott M. Lewis S.J.,

forever. Says Paul of the case of Christ, because of the resurrection, the life Christ now “lives, he lives [entirely] to God, because he is raised incorruptible”—ἐγείρεται ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ. In the πνευματικόν, corruption is impossible.

Our first exegetical look at verse 45 is now complete. This jewel of Pauline theological depth, expressed with amazing poetic concision, also stands at the center of a unique literary structure, verses 42–49. The first section, verses 42b–44a, draws out the great distinctions between created and resurrected bodies. The second section, verses 46–49, does the same, with an emphasis on their God-intended temporal sequence, as implied in the Genesis account. Verse 45 functions as a summary statement and clear definition of terms. Thus we conclude that Paul wishes here to found the miracle of the resurrection, not on God’s soteric dealing with sin—though he will do this elsewhere⁷²—but on the ontological and eschatological possibilities inherent in God’s original creative act. Such a notion beckons us to look further.

V. THE IMMEDIATE PRECEDING CONTEXT OF VERSES 35–42A

Though this is not the place to comment on verse 45 in light of the entire chapter 15 (though this doubtless should be done), it is important to get some idea of the larger context in which this verse is situated. In his magisterial commentary on 1 Corinthians, Anthony Thiselton demonstrates that chapter 15 is a literary unity, or, in the words of Conzelmann, “a self-contained treatise.”⁷³ Thiselton identifies three “main blocks,”⁷⁴ made up of (a) the reality of the resurrection of Christ (vv. 1–11); (b) the dire consequences of denying the resurrection (vv. 12–34); and (c) the logical possibility or conceivability of the resurrection of the dead (vv. 35–58).⁷⁵ These three sections could be called the historical, the theological/soteric, and the cosmological. Verse 45 belongs to this third, cosmological section, which begins in verse 35 with πῶς and answers the question: “How [in the cosmos!] is bodily resurrection conceivable?”⁷⁶ We must therefore ask how the rhetorical flourish of verses 42–49 fits with Paul’s “how” argument that begins in verse 35. The short answer is: like a hand in a glove.

“*So That God May Be All in All*”: *The Apocalyptic Message of 1 Corinthians 15:12–34* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1998) 48. This position idealizes the prelapsarian state considerably beyond where Paul seems to stand.

⁷² See Rom 4:25 and the excellent treatment by Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption* 122–24.

⁷³ Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 1177; see Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* 249. Karl Barth believed that the entire letter is held together by an eschatological theme, with chapter 15 as its goal: Karl Barth, *Resurrection of the Dead* 7–8. See also J. C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle* 173, 176.

⁷⁴ Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 1177–78.

⁷⁵ Ibid. See also Lewis, “*So That God May Be All in All*” 27, who structures the chapter in two parts: (a) the fact of the resurrection (vv. 1–34); (b) the how of the resurrection (vv. 35–58). Lewis (ibid. 44–46) rightly established that in the work of redemption (1 Cor 15:20–28), God soteriologically repossesses or reconquers the cosmos. However, the cosmological “how” of the repossession is worked out in verses 35–49.

⁷⁶ Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 1262, referring to Robertson and Plummer, *First Epistle* 368. Morissette, “L’antithèse” 97, speaks of the literary unit of verses 35–49.

Paul begins his “how” argument by accusing his interlocutors of “foolishness.” It is the foolishness of misunderstanding the character of God as revealed in the natural world. In other words, it is a failure to understand God as Creator. Thiselton is right when he says: “two themes . . . run throughout vv. 35–49 . . . (a) the differences between ‘bodies’ and (b) the infinite resourcefulness of the sovereign God already observable in creation.”⁷⁷ N. T. Wright goes even further: “there can be no doubt,” he says, “that Paul intends this entire chapter to be an exposition of the renewal of creation.”⁷⁸ Paul appeals to the natural process of seeds turning into plants as a perfectly justifiable explanation of the resurrection body (vv. 36–39).⁷⁹

The references to plants, animals, fish, birds, the heavens, and humanity are unmistakable references to the Genesis creation account. Here is the God of order and structure.⁸⁰ Arguing from creation, Paul’s language is full of terminology found in Genesis 1–2:⁸¹ σπέρμα (Gen 1:11, 12, 29; 7:3); σπείρω (Gen 1:11, 12, 29); σάραξ (Gen 2:23, 24; 6:19; 7:11); ἄνθρωπος;⁸² κτηνῶν;⁸³ πτηνῶν;⁸⁴ and ἰχθύων (Gen 1:26, 28). Furthermore, the phrase ἐκάστω τῶν σπερμάτων ἴδιον σῶμα recalls the Genesis refrain κατὰ γένος which occurs ten times in Genesis 1, and σώματα ἐπουράνια recalls the “great lights” of the sun and the moon plus the stars—ἀστέρας (Gen 1:16).⁸⁵ Six times Paul speaks of the glory of these created things, the way they are declared six times “good” and once “exceedingly good” in Genesis 1. Paul’s διαφέρω—that these created glorious things “differ” one from another—recalls the creative process where God “separates” the light from the darkness, and the waters below from the waters above (Gen 1:3, 6), and makes things “according to their various [different] kinds” (Gen 1:11, 12, 21, 24, 25; 6:20; 7:14). Later with his phrase “bearing the image” of the earthly, Paul reflects back on what he has said with an allusion to Genesis,⁸⁶ with not the slightest suggestion of moral shame.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 1259.

⁷⁸ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection* 313.

⁷⁹ “Sowing,” “dying,” and “coming to life” are images not of sin and death but of a natural process. Literally, the seed does not die. It changes form. That is, there are no moral connotations here.

⁸⁰ Wright, *The Resurrection* 313, says, “Genesis 1–3 is thus not only a frequent point of allusion, but provides some of the key structural markers in the argument.”

⁸¹ I include references to the reestablishment of creation after the Flood. Altermath, *Du corps psychique* 22, though he does not develop it, sees the continuity between the enumeration in Genesis 1–2 and 1 Corinthians 15, which employs the same terms: “cet exemple n’est pas une construction abstraite: Paul illustre la puissance créatrice de Dieu à l’oeuvre dans la nouvelle création à la fin des temps précisément à partir de son oeuvre créatrice dans le passé.”

⁸² Genesis 1:26, 27; 2:7:5, 6, 8, 15, 18, 24; 6:7; 7:21, 23.

⁸³ Genesis 1:25, 26, 28; 3:14; 6:7, 19, 20; 7:2, 8, 21; 7:2, 8, 21, 23; 8:1.

⁸⁴ Genesis uses the alternate form πετεινόν—see LS 1397 (Gen 1:20, 21, 22, 30; 2:19, 20; 6:7, 20; 7:3, 8, 14, 21, 23; 8:1, 17).

⁸⁵ Altermath, *Du corps psychique* 24, notes that patristic exegesis sometimes saw in the reference to heavenly and earthly bodies a reference to saints over against sinners, but the reference is purely physical (see Robertson and Plummer, *First Epistle* 371): “the differences between the various *sōmata* are physical not ethical.”

⁸⁶ 1 Cor 15:49: ἐφορέσαμεν τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ χοϊκοῦ; cf. Gen 1:27: ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ’ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν.

In his capacity as a New Covenant prophet like Moses, we can observe the apostle Paul engaged in drawing out the implications of Moses' account of creation for understanding the end-time event of re-creation. God, as Creator, makes bodies appropriate to their circumstances as he determines, according to his creative and redemptive plan. What you now see is not that which will be, as even the natural realm reveals. Grain bears little resemblance to the full-grown plant; the caterpillar bears little resemblance to the butterfly. The created body is like a grain or seed, or a caterpillar, not very remarkable. God will one day give the created, earthly body a body similar to that of a full-grown plant or glorious butterfly. This is the same argument of "organic" continuity we have noted in verse 45 and explained in verse 46. The Creator, who creates various bodies with differing levels of splendor, does the same in resurrection for human bodies. The Creator has made the world with great variety, including the human earthly body, so resurrection bodies are not unexpected products from such a skillful designer, but flow with a deep inevitability from God's original creative work.

This whole argument, verses 35–49, in various ways repeating the same theme, thus constitutes both a rhetorical and a theological *tour de force*. Paul, in his teaching on the resurrection, observes N. T. Wright, "based his thinking firmly on the power of the creator God."⁸⁷ The immediate goal is to establish the "how" of bodily transformation by showing its relationship to the miracle of creation. But it does more. Paul is eager to establish this teaching, because what he says about the resurrection body lays the groundwork for a thoroughgoing development of final, consummated cosmology, which he will develop elsewhere.⁸⁸ Specifically, the transformed, resurrected body of Jesus implies the πνευματικόν, that is, future transformed human existence and final anthropology; it establishes the basis for the eternal rule of the last Adam; and it functions as proof of the eventual transformation of the physical cosmos.⁸⁹

But here is the point. This glorious cosmic destiny emerges ineluctably and sequentially both from God's original creative intention and from his saving work of redemption. There is a harmonious functioning of the mind of God as both Creator, Redeemer, and Consummator. But such teaching effects the way the Corinthians should think not just about the future but also about the present.

⁸⁷ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection* 273.

⁸⁸ Specifically, Ephesians and Colossians, but already in 1 Cor 15:24–28.

⁸⁹ Rom 8:21—αὐτὴ ἡ κτίσις ἐλευθερωθήσεται ἀπὸ τῆς δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς: like the body, according to 1 Cor 15:42b [ἐγείρεται ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ. σπείρεται ἐν φθορᾷ], the cosmos will be freed τῆς φθορᾶς. In Rom 8:22, the entire cosmos—πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις—yearns for the freedom it will one day be given. See also Rom 8:39, which teaches that the whole of creation will not separate us from the love of God, because then Christ will rule over it with his people as the glorified new humanity, for then it will be submitted to its rightful place (1 Cor 15:27), intended from the beginning, hence the citation of Ps 8:6. On Paul's use of Psalm 8 in 1 Cor 15:20–28, see Scott M. Lewis, "So That God May Be All in All" 58–61.

VI. THE CORINTHIAN SITUATION

Paul engages in such a long discourse on creation because there are false notions about creation—whether Philonic,⁹⁰ proto-Gnostic,⁹¹ or purely Hellenistic pagan⁹²—held by an influential group at Corinth, which affects their understanding of anthropology, soteriology, eschatology, sanctification, and resurrection.⁹³

A somewhat parallel situation occurred at Ephesus under the pastorate of Timothy. Hymenaeus and Philetus teach that τὴν ἀνάστασιν ἤδη γεγονέναι, because they affirm that the glorious future of believers has already occurred (2 Tim 2:18–19), just as in Corinth (1 Cor 15:12; cf. 1 Cor 4:8).⁹⁴ They are, in essence, affirming some kind of “spiritual resurrection.”⁹⁵ Of this Paul will have nothing. In 2 Timothy he calls this wickedness ἀδικία,⁹⁶ and in

⁹⁰ Pearson, *The Pneumatikos-Psychikos* 16–21, believes Paul’s exegesis of Gen 2:7 is polemical against “widespread Hellenistic Jewish exegesis of Genesis 2:7.” He argues that there was a Hellenistic Jewish synagogue in Corinth and that Apollo was a Hellenistic Jew. He further notes that Philo and Wisdom of Solomon both interpret Gen 2:7 to teach the doctrine of immortality. “His opponents in Corinth, under the influence of teachers who had grown up in Diaspora Judaism, were espousing a doctrine of a-somatic immortality, and denying the bodily resurrection” (p. 24).

Specifically, Philo believed that the heavenly man was immaterial but earthly man of Gen 2:7 was joined to a body as the result of the Fall. See *Opif.* 13, 28, 36, where the heavenly man of Gen 1:26, in the image of God, is intelligent, incorporeal, neither male nor female, and by nature incorruptible. Altermath, *Du corps psychique* 42, sees in the term οὐ πρῶτον of verse 46 a polemic against Philonic speculation, according to which the non-corporeal world was created on the first day, and there then follows the creation of the physical world—see *Opif.* 67, par. 36. Schmithals, *Gnosis* 159, sees the same phrase directed against Gnostics. In a sense, both are right.

⁹¹ For the Gnostic backgrounds, whether proto or otherwise, see Schmithals, *Gnosis* 159, who believes Paul is polemicalizing against Gnostic opponents. W. Kümmel, in P. Feine, J. Behm, W. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (trans. A. Mattill, Jr.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1966) 209. Bultmann, *Theology of New Testament* 174, sees Paul employing ψυχικός as a Gnostic term against his opponents.

⁹² Hays, *First Corinthians* 269 speaks of the Corinthian “aversion to the idea that the body could be reanimated after death” as an idea “positively undesirable to ancient Hellenistic thinkers devoted to an ideal of spirituality that sought to transcend corporeality.” For the views of Plato and Aeschylus, see Robertson and Plummer, *First Epistle* 347. Neither could envisage a glorified body.

⁹³ Audet, “Avec quel corps” 169, proposes three possibilities for the false notions of the Corinthians: (1) Greek belief in the immortal soul; (2) Christian Gnostics; (3) Christian spiritualists who believe the resurrection has already occurred spiritually (cf. 2 Tim 2:17–18). Surely these categories are too water-tight. Could there not be a mixture? We know most of the Corinthians were Greeks, having been involved in mystery religions (1 Corinthians 12), holding to a realized spirituality (1 Cor 4:8), and thus on the way to serious Gnosticism. All of these positions are related by the fact that they refuse the biblical notion of creation. See the opinion of G. E. Sterling, *DNTB* 792, who argues that “the apostle’s polemic on order [in v. 46] suggests that the Corinthians had a different order” similar to Philo’s reconstruction of the creation accounts, leading them “to devalue the corruptible body and deny the resurrection.”

⁹⁴ See Anthony Thiselton, “Realized Eschatology in Corinth” 510–26. Audet, “Avec quel corps” 4–5, argues that in the light of Paul’s argument for a future, corporal resurrection, one must believe that his opponents held to a spiritual resurrection that had already taken place.

⁹⁵ One of the powerful arguments of N. T. Wright’s work on resurrection is to show the impossibility of “spiritual” resurrection as a concept in early Christianity—see *Resurrection* 342 et passim.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

1 Corinthians “sin”—ἁμαρτάνετε (1 Cor 15:34). At Ephesus, this false “spiritual” view of the resurrection doubtless flows out of the prior denial of the goodness of the physical creation, and of God, maker of heaven and earth. This is why Paul describes such “Christian” thinking in the strongest of terms as “deceiving spirits and things taught by demons”—πνεύμασιν πλάνους καὶ διδασκαλίας δαιμονίων (1 Tim 4:1). Denial of creation comes in many forms. At Ephesus “they forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created [ἃ θεὸς ἔκτισεν] to be received with thanksgiving” (1 Tim 4:3).⁹⁷ Paul’s riposte is both a resounding affirmation of creation—πᾶν κτίσμα θεοῦ καλόν (1 Tim 4:4)—and a warning: “Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge” (βεβήλους κενοφωνίας καὶ ἀντιθέσεις τῆς ψευδωνύμου γνώσεως; 1 Tim 6:20). This also seems to be the case at Corinth, *mutatis mutandis*, where Paul is also dealing with “spiritual people” (1 Cor 12:3; 14:37) who reject the biblical doctrines of creation and resurrection. Clearly the Pauline community had within its ranks pagan thinking about the nature of the cosmos which was “antithetical” to biblical theism,⁹⁸ plus spiritual gnosis to go along with it.

The rejection by some in the Corinthian church of the continuing value of creation distorts their understanding of new creation. The resultant problems are not mere “difficulties,” or a “failure to grasp . . . connections,” as some scholars maintain.⁹⁹ As we noted above, they are “fools”—ἄφρων (v. 36). N. T. Wright is correct in seeing this “foolishness” not as a genuine lack of knowledge but as “a dismissive put-down” of the notion of physical resurrection by people scandalized by such simplistic teaching.¹⁰⁰ One thinks of the “fool” in the Psalter, “the fool [ἄφρων] [who] says in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Ps 14:1). Jesus brings the same judgment on the Sadducees who, with similar attitudes of pretended Hellenistic sophistication, likewise reject physical resurrection. They neither “know the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Mark 12:24). In essence, they reject the God of Scripture.

The refusal of the physical resurrection for some kind of “spiritual” equivalent is not a possible “Christian” option. It is a woeful rejection of the essence of biblical religion, as verse 45 teaches with such clarity. There is an unbreakable integrity between the two great acts of God, Creator and Redeemer, who both produces the physical creation and, by that same power, resurrects it. Without this there is no Christian faith. For Paul, those who reject this Gospel will perish, “still in [their] sins” and are thus “to be pitied more than all men” (1 Cor 15:19). If, says Paul, the physical resurrection did

⁹⁷ The refusal of creation with a lack of thanksgiving is typically pagan—see Rom 1:21.

⁹⁸ According to E. Pagels, “‘The Mystery of the Resurrection’: A Gnostic Reading of 1 Corinthians 15,” *JBL* 93 (1974) 278, the Gnostics believed in the resurrection but not the way the church understood it. The Gnostic way is not simply another way. It is the very “antithesis” of the truth.

⁹⁹ But Audet, “Avec quel corps” 170; Lewis, “*So That God May Be All in All*” 42, who says: “[there is] no need to resort to gnosticism or Hellenistic mystery religions—they simply failed to grasp the connection between them and Christ, and how a dead person could be with God.”

¹⁰⁰ Wright, *The Resurrection* 342.

not happen in the way the original apostles say it did, then instead of being preachers of good news, they become “purveyors of lies”—ψευδομάρτυρες τοῦ θεοῦ (1 Cor 15:15)¹⁰¹—really ψευδαπόστολοι, as he will say elsewhere, “servants of Satan” (1 Cor 11:14–15).

Is Paul overreacting? Some would say yes, but the stakes are enormous. That is why he uses terms such as “ignorance” and “vanity,” which evoke the specter of pagan religion. Ignorance, ἀγνοσία, as it relates to God the Creator is inexcusable.¹⁰² Paul’s thinking is anticipated in the Wisdom of Solomon, which states:

What born fools [μάταιοι] all men were who lived in ignorance of God [θεοῦ ἀγνοσία], who from the good things before their eyes could not learn to know him who really is and failed to recognize the Artificer though they observed his works (Wis 13:1).

In this text, θεοῦ ἀγνοσία and μάταιοι are juxtaposed, for vanity is a classic OT and Jewish way to describe pagan religion. Pagan religion is vain—μάταιος,¹⁰³ the term μάταιος is used for vain idols¹⁰⁴—and the pagan nations are “nations of vanity.”¹⁰⁵ Paul himself describes the pagans as “without God and without hope in the world” (Eph 2:12). Thus he exhorts his once pagan converts: “So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking” (ἐν ματαιότητι τοῦ νοῦς αὐτῶν; Eph 4:17). It is in this light that one should understand Paul’s warning to the Corinthians that their rejection of the resurrection, though pretending to be wise, is futile—μάταιοι (1 Cor 3:20)—and makes their faith futile—ματαία πίστις (1 Cor 15:17). It is also significant that the synonym, κενός, used four times in the body of chapter fifteen,¹⁰⁶ frames the entire chapter with an *inclusio*.¹⁰⁷ Paul constantly warns the believer not to fall into vanity by denying the very physicality of the Gospel by which one is saved.

The full implications of this “ignorance” and “vanity” are consistently worked out in later Gnosticism, which builds on the common pagan notion of the divinity of humanity. Plato taught that the soul “was immortal by its very nature”¹⁰⁸ and thus consubstantial with the divine. This notion is integrated into Jewish thinking by Philo,¹⁰⁹ and developed by later Gnosticism

¹⁰¹ For Paul, “false witness” is a serious charge—see 2 Cor 11:15: “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, ψευδαπόστολοι, ἐργάται δόλιοι, . . . Their end will be what their actions deserve.” Cf. 2 Pet 2:1; Jer 26:11.

¹⁰² Rom 1:18–20; cf. 1 Pet 2:15, τὴν τῶν ἀφρόνων ἀνθρώπων ἀγνοσίαν, which in verse 12 is associated with the pagans, cf. Acts 17:23.

¹⁰³ The term μάταιος is often associated with pagan idol-making: see Isa 44:9–10; Jer 10:3.

¹⁰⁴ μάταιοι—לָמָּה: Amos 2:4; Jonah 2:8; 2 Kgs 17:15.

¹⁰⁵ 1QM 4:12: “Extermination of God for all the nations of vanity”; cf. 6:6; 9:9 (“the seven nations of vanity”).

¹⁰⁶ 1 Cor 15:10, 14 (*bis*), 58. For evidence as a synonym for μάταιος, see Job 20:18 LXX: εἰς κενὰ καὶ μάταια; Hos 12:2: κενὰ καὶ μάταια; Isa 49:4 LXX: καὶ ἐγὼ εἶπα κενὸς ἐκοπίασα καὶ εἰς μάταιον.

¹⁰⁷ 1 Cor 15:2 (εἰκῆ), 58 (κενός). See Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 1177.

¹⁰⁸ See Pearson, *The Pneumatikos-Psychikos* 21.

¹⁰⁹ Philo, *Leg. All.* 3:161, where he speaks of the soul as a “divine fragment.”

as the “divine spark” within humanity.¹¹⁰ As the famous Messina Colloquium on Gnosticism in 1966 clearly recognized, “the idea of divine consubstantiality” is a defining notion of Gnosticism.¹¹¹ The *Gospel of Thomas* appears to reflect on Gen 2:7 when it proposes a “backwards creation” for Mary, moving from the “female rib into the male Adam, and back into the ‘living spirit.’”¹¹² This is nothing less than the undoing of creation, expressed most powerfully in sexual/gender transformation and liberation. There is here proposed the destruction of the opposites and a return to primordial unity.¹¹³ Such a world view eventually finds the biblical notion of a transcendent Creator, distinct from the creation, as insufferable foolishness, indeed, the epitome of evil,¹¹⁴ and Yahweh is unceremoniously thrown into Hell.¹¹⁵ Clearly, things had not reached that stage in Corinth, but a mind like Paul’s

¹¹⁰ See Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 42–43, who sees radical dualism as the “cardinal feature” of Gnosticism. For the similarity between later Gnosticism and Philo, see the Nag Hammadi text, *On The Origin of The World* 117:29–35, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977), 173: “Now the first Adam of light is spiritual. He appeared on the first day. The second Adam is soul endowed. He appeared on the sixth day, and is called <Herm>aphrodite<s>.” Bentley Layton, in *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 2–7, vol 2 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 71, proposes “pneumatikos” and “psychikos,” which the Coptic clearly indicates. Since these terms are not found in Philo, later Gnosticism must have taken Paul’s terms and read them into a Philonic reading of Genesis. I am indebted to my student Joshua Smith for pointing out this reference to Layton.

¹¹¹ Ugo Bianchi, ed., *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo*, *Numen* vol. 12 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 100–101. Irenaeus gives proof of this notion, in his ingenious argument against the Gnostic theory of consubstantiality, that is, the confusing of God and the creation. If, he argues, the emitted eon shares the same substance with the emitter, then the limited characteristics of the emitted eon (passability, ignorance) are shared by the emitter (*Against Heresies* II:17, 4–5).

¹¹² Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley, “An Interpretation of Logion 114 in the *Gospel of Thomas*,” *NovT* 27 (1985) 246. See also H. Rengsdorf, “Urchristliches Kerygma und ‘gnostische’ Interpretation in einigen Sprachen des Thomasevangeliums,” in Bianchi, *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo* 567, who sees a reference in the phrase “living spirit” in logion 114 to Paul’s “spirit that gives life” and wonders if Isis mythology, where Isis becomes a male, has influenced Egyptian Gnosticism.

¹¹³ This is doubtless a reference to original androgyny, the spiritual state beyond male and female—as a number of scholars propose (see Buckley, “Interpretation” 246), and not an expression of Thomas’s male chauvinism, as Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979) 49, believed, though later in her book retracted (p. 67).

¹¹⁴ Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* 43. The Gnostics turned the biblical names for God into proper names for inferior, demonic beings.

¹¹⁵ For Yahweh as a “fool,” see *Sophia of Jesus Christ* 112:19; 114:14–25; *On the Origin of the World* 100:5–10, 26–27; *Apocalypse of Adam* 64:14–16; *Apocryphon of John* 15–19; cf. 21:30; *Letter of Peter to Philip* 135:16. Texts describing Yahweh cast into hell are *Hypostasis of the Archons* 95:8ff; *On the Origin of the World* 103:25; 126:20–30. See also Giovanni Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism* (trans. Anthony Alcock; Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) 132. Many of the Nag Hammadi texts seek in some way to undermine the teaching of Genesis 1–3, indicating a fundamental antipathy to the biblical notion of creation. According to Elaine Pagels, “‘The Mystery of the Resurrection’: A Gnostic Reading of 1 Corinthians 15,” *JBL* 93 (1974) 276–88, the Gnostics believed in the resurrection but not the way the church understood it. According to Origen the Gnostics do not believe in the resurrection of this flesh and they consider belief in bodily resurrection the “faith of fools” (Pagels, “Mystery” 278). This is not simply another approach to the same subject, as Pagels suggests. Since Paul also dismisses Christians who refuse to believe in bodily resurrection as “fools” (1 Cor 15:36), we are clearly confronted again with mutually exclusive world views.

could surely anticipate these logical conclusions. Thus he urges, with insistence, that the thinking of his Corinthian converts be “sanctified” by this essential, biblical notion of God the *good* Creator, understood in the light of its redemptive, Christological, and eschatological fulfillment.

Indeed, in the view of certain scholars, the concept of a transcendent creator is unique in the ancient world. Colin Gunton offers the interesting judgment:

Far from being one ancient myth among many, [the Genesis account] was unique in saying things that no other ancient text was able to say. . . . The Bible is different, and, it might be suggested, the conveyor of a unique message, and so could not be dismissed as simply another instance of ancient myth.¹¹⁶

Clearly the personal, transcendent God, distinct from the creation, who creates *ex nihilo*, represents the fundamental presupposition of the world view Paul wishes to teach to the Corinthians. This rises to visibility in the verb of verse 45. As noted above, ἐγένετο εἰς (“became”) is an intransitive, ingressive aorist, indicating entrance into a state that presupposes God as the acting subject.¹¹⁷ In the case of the first Adam, through divine agency Adam passes from a state of non-existence into a state of created existence. For paganism generally, the soul, as a piece of God, has always existed. Of this there is no hint in Genesis. Only the Creator has the attribute of eternity. Adam is only ever a creature, created *ex nihilo* at a point in time. There are further implications.

Since the same verb and tense modify the act of resurrection, the “last Adam” also passes from one state to another, specifically from the state of natural physical existence to the state of resurrected physical existence, at a point in time, in an event that had never happened before. In other words, the gospel on which the church stands (1 Cor 15:3) involves a particular event in space/time history, such as Paul carefully argues in the first part of chapter 15 (vv. 1–11). At the center of the church’s message is a unique act of God at a moment of time, identifiable within the warp and woof of this-worldly human history, which leaves in its wake the disturbing residue of an empty tomb for which pagan or liberal notions of “spiritual” resurrection are inadequate responses.

The “spiritual” opponents of Paul *think* they understand the “Spirit,” but it is another spirit (2 Cor 11:4), the Great Spirit in all things. They believe in life after death, but it is based on the pagan notion of the immortality of the soul. They have a notion of “the divine,” but it is the divine whose essence

¹¹⁶ Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 7–9. See also the judgment of Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (trans. J. J. Scullion; London: SPCK, 1984) 127, who contrasts the Genesis account with the Babylonian creation myths: “What distinguishes the [priestly] Genesis account of creation among the many creation stories of the Ancient Near East is that for Genesis there can be only one creator and that all else that is or can be, can never be anything but a creature” (cited in Gunton, *Triune Creator* 17–18). See also Bavinck, *In the Beginning* 24. Bavinck (pp. 25–34) discusses all the religious and materialist options throughout history and shows the uniqueness of the Bible’s account.

¹¹⁷ Wallace, *Beyond the Basics* 576.

they share.¹¹⁸ They are, like many of our neighbors and colleagues today, very spiritual.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, says Paul, they are “ignorant of God”—ἀγνοσίων γὰρ θεοῦ (1 Cor 15:34).

In Acts Paul speaks about the ἄγνωστος θεός, the “unknown God,” whom the Athenian intellectuals ignorantly worship *via* the vague notions of their poets (Acts 17:23, 28). The God they do not know and whom they must know, explains Paul, is God, the Creator. Thus, in something of a parallel situation to that of Corinth, we see Paul already arguing for creation on his first missionary voyage to Athens, just a few miles away from Corinth. Perhaps Paul never expected to have to deal with both evangelized and unevangelized pagans, but the arguments he uses, both at Athens and Corinth, are essentially the same. Before the pagan philosophers Paul also argues the case for the doctrine of creation with reference to Gen 2:7. As some scholars have noticed,¹²⁰ Paul’s phrase, “he himself gives all men *life and breath* and everything else”—αὐτὸς διδοὺς πᾶσι ζωὴν καὶ πνοὴν καὶ τὰ πάντα—has an unmistakable parallel in the creation account (Acts 17:25). The nouns ζωὴν and πνοὴν of Paul’s speech surely allude to the OT phrase “and God breathed into him the breath of life”—πνοὴν ζωῆς (Gen 2:7a). The phrase “from *one man* he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth” also has the Adam of Gen 2:7 in mind (Acts 17:26).¹²¹ To this point, both in 1 Cor 15:45 and Acts 17:24–27, we are still in a pre-Fall situation. Even more significantly, both here in Acts, as in 1 Corinthians 15, the main point of Paul’s argument is to make the case to skeptical “Christian” and non-Christian pagans for *the resurrection of Christ* (Acts 17:18, 31). In both situations the grounds for resurrection are the goodness of created reality and the identity of God as the transcendent Creator (Acts 17:31).¹²² This,

¹¹⁸ Irenaeus produces an interesting argument against the Gnostic theory of consubstantiality, that is, the confusing of God and the creation. If, he argues, the emitted eon shares the same substance with the emitter, then the limited characteristics of the emitted eon (passability, ignorance) are shared by the emitter (*Against Heresies* II:17, 4–5).

¹¹⁹ Or as Paul says to the Athenians in Acts 17:22, “very religious”—δεισιδαιμονεστέροις. They know the Daimones.

¹²⁰ See the excellent lecture of Gregory K. Beale, “Biblical Faith and Other Religions in New Testament Theology” (plenary address, annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, November, 2002); William J. Larkin, Jr., *Acts* (IVPNTC 5; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995) 257.

¹²¹ Larkin, *Acts*, fails to note this reference to Adam, but Carson, “Athens Revisited,” does. However, Carson immediately goes to Adam’s sin and refers to Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. On the general theme of creation in the biblical record, see also Isa 42:5 which likely also stands most immediately behind Paul’s thought: “This is what God the LORD says—he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it”—οὕτως λέγει κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ πῆξας αὐτόν ὁ στερεώσας τὴν γῆν καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ διδοὺς πνοὴν τῷ ἐπ’ αὐτῆς καὶ πνεῦμα τοῖς πατοῦσιν αὐτήν. The phrase in Acts 17:25, διδοὺς πᾶσι ζωὴν καὶ πνοὴν, may well come from Isaiah; cf. Isa 57:16, but both these texts are clearly a reprise of Gen 2:7.

¹²² Carson, “Athens Revisited” 392, notes that Paul’s phrase, “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands” (Acts 17:24), refers to “the sovereignty of God over the whole universe . . . over against views that assign this god or that goddess a particular domain—perhaps the sea (Neptune), or tribal gods with

the reader will recall, is the whole reason for his rhetorical flourish in the pericope of verses 42–49, repeating in ten different ways the goodness of creation as the worthy locus for God’s final act of cosmic transformation.

The conclusion seems inevitable: for pagans in and outside the church, Paul seeks to show that the fundamental relation of creation to resurrection (and behind that the identification of the Creator as the Redeemer) is a non-negotiable of the metanarrative of the Christian gospel, an essential *sine qua non* of the Bible’s world view, without which one is lost (1 Cor 15:17; cf. Acts 17:30–31).¹²³ Rejection of this truth is the essence of believing in vain.

VII. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

We also face paganism in¹²⁴ and outside the church,¹²⁵ a religious world view whose initial presupposition, like that of the ancient Gnostics, is an outright denial of biblical creation. This teaching has deep significance for Christian paraenesis. Paul declares that we will be judged for things done “in the body” (2 Cor 5:10); that the present “body is for the Lord” (1 Cor 6:13) and that in this life we must “honor God with our body” (1 Cor 6:20). This eschatological prophet like Moses is instructing the church that the temporal categories of redemptive history, and the biblical doctrine of creation, are those that determine living and spirituality in the Christian community (1 Cor 11:7, 14; 14:34), not the “liberating” dualistic categories of religious pagan and Gnostic mysticism.¹²⁶

If the various Gnosticizing aberrations identified by Paul at Corinth are to be avoided in our present ecclesiastical context, we must surely follow

merely regional or ethnic interests.” If, as Carson states (*ibid.* 391), we only have a brief account of Paul’s speech in Acts 17, since speeches before the Areopagus “were not known for their brevity,” it could be that 1 Cor 15:35–49 provides the kind of material that Paul may well have used in his apologetic speeches before pagans, which he can also press into use to address Gnosticizing Christian error in the church for the world view is essentially the same.

¹²³ Carson, *ibid.*, uses this term “non-negotiable” of the place of the resurrection in the Gospel account, but I believe the above study shows that one cannot understand resurrection without the non-negotiable of the Bible’s doctrine of creation, for they are the two essential acts of God that explain and presuppose one another.

¹²⁴ See Peter Jones, *Spirit Wars: Pagan Revival in Christian America* (Mukilteo, WA: Wine Press, 1997) 126–30, for documentation on the reprise of the Gnostic interpretation of Genesis 1–2 by a number of contemporary biblical scholars.

¹²⁵ Specifically, the delivery of a “new,” all-inclusive, pagan world view that joins evolutionary science with the worship of Nature as divine, in a blueprint for the coming global community, which has no place for God the Creator. See, for instance, Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era: A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992). This is sometimes confusedly called “creation spirituality”—see Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear and Company, 1983).

¹²⁶ As Pearson, *The Pneumatikos-Psychikos* 26, rightly notes: “Paul can use the same terminology [as his opponents with a non-eschatological dualism], but employs it in a completely eschatological fashion, in which a dualism of ‘the present age’ and ‘the age to come’ are the principal factors.”

Paul's theological model. In Pauline thought, humanity has sinned against God, but specifically against God the "Creator who is blessed forever" (Rom 1:18–21, 25). Soteriology thus liberates us, not to be free from creational structures, as the Gnostics believed, but to be reconciled with the divine Creator and thus willingly embrace the demands of biblical cosmology and anthropology. Is this not the ultimate explanation of why, at the very core of chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians, of one of the great *sedes doctrinae* of NT revelation,¹²⁷ we find an extended treatment of creation?

For a church beset with so many "spiritual" problems, Paul proposes the bedrock answer of the doctrine of reconciliation with the Creator, and thus, by implication, with the created order. For Paul, as he so eloquently and poignantly reminds us in verse 45 and its context, present Christian liberty, mediated by the power of the Spirit, must constantly be understood and lived, by honoring and giving thanks for God's first, still operative good work of original creation (Rom 1:21).¹²⁸ In doing this, we patiently and faithfully await his second great work of cosmic transformation. In a word, Christians live by faith and obedience in the still valid reality of the ψυχικόν by the power of the Spirit and in the hope of the coming πνευματικόν.

¹²⁷ Luther saw this as the very center of the gospel—see Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 1169.

¹²⁸ That which the pagan does not do, the Christian must do.