

1 CORINTHIANS 15:3B–6A, 7 AND THE BODILY RESURRECTION OF JESUS

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One of the most recurring claims leveled by modern exegetes against the historicity of the bodily resurrection of Jesus has been that the pre-Pauline creed in 1 Cor 15:3–7, at best, implies that Jesus' earliest disciples believed in a spiritual resurrection which did not necessarily vacate his tomb.¹ Two lines of argument are normally given in support of this premise. (1) Since Paul employs the same Greek verb as the tradition, ὤφθη ("he was seen"), to describe his visionary experience of the risen Christ, Paul's experience was the same in character as that of the preceding disciples.² (2) The formula contains no mention of the empty tomb, thereby suggesting that the corpse of Jesus was irrelevant to the concept of his resurrection held by the Jerusalem church.³ Such an understanding of the resurrection was shared by Paul, as displayed in his contrast between the physical and spiritual bodies (1 Cor 15:44). However, this understanding evolved during the second Christian generation into the doctrine of physical resurrection featured in the Gospel appearance narratives.⁴ The purpose of this essay will be to challenge (1) and (2) on form-critical grounds and to reveal in the process that the earliest followers of Jesus both believed in his physical resurrection and recounted resurrection appearances qualitatively different from that of Paul.

I. PROLEGOMENA

Form criticism has established that within 1 Cor 15:3–7 Paul quotes a primitive Christian creed originally formulated during the earliest years of

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¹ Recent examples of this allegation include Gerd Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1994) 33–109; Marcus J. Borg, "The Truth of Easter," in Marcus Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999) 130–35; Michael Goulder, "The Explanatory Power of Conversion-Visions," in Paul Copan and Ronald K. Tacelli, eds., *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000) 96–99; James M. Robinson, "Jesus from Easter to Valentinus (or to the Apostles' Creed)," *JBL* 101 (1982) 7–17; Pheme Perkins, *Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984) 94.

² Lüdemann, *Resurrection* 48–54; Borg, "Truth of Easter" 132.

³ Marcus J. Borg, "The Irrelevancy of the Empty Tomb," in Paul Copan, ed., *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 122–23.

⁴ Lüdemann, *Resurrection* 171–72.

the Jesus movement.⁵ Although scholars differ concerning its precise length, there has emerged a consensus that at least verses 3b–5 belong to the ancient tradition based on the following linguistic data. First, Paul prefaces the creed by reminding the Corinthians, “For I delivered (παρέδωκα) to you as of first importance what I also received (παρέλαβον)” (v. 3a), where παρέδωκα and παρέλαβον are technical terms used by Jewish rabbis for the transmission of sacred tradition. Therefore, Paul admits that the creed is not his own, but that he received it from an earlier source who handed it down to him.⁶ Second, several words in the creed are found almost nowhere else in Paul’s writings, which indicates that Paul is quoting an earlier source. Such non-Pauline phrases include ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν (“for our sins”), κατὰ τὰς γραφάς (“according to the Scriptures”), ἐγήγερται (“he has been raised”), τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς τρίτης (“on the third day”), ὤφθη (“he was seen”), and τοῖς δώδεκα (“by the Twelve”).⁷ Finally, there are indications that the creed has a Semitic source, including the use of the transliterated Aramaic Κηφᾶ (“Cephas”) for Peter, the threefold καὶ ὅτι (“and that”) characteristic of Aramaic and Mishnaic Hebrew narration, and the faithfulness to the Hebrew Bible reflected in the qualification of both Jesus’ death and resurrection with the parallel κατὰ τὰς γραφάς.⁸

Concerning the date of the creed, virtually all critical scholars agree that Paul received the tradition no later than five years after the crucifixion, with a majority holding that the material was passed on to him when he visited Jerusalem three years after his conversion (Gal 1:18–19), and a minority maintaining that the material was conveyed to him in Damascus via the community in Antioch immediately upon his conversion.⁹ The former group points to Paul’s description of his visit with Peter and James by the participle ἱστορησαί (Gal 1:18), which literally means “to visit and get information” and refers to an investigative mission where he carefully examined these apostles to discover facts.¹⁰ Since the gospel of the death and resurrection of

⁵ Joachim Jeremias, *Die Abendmahlsworte Jesu* (4th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967) 95–98; Jacob Kremer, *Das älteste Zeugnis von der Auferstehung Christi* (3d ed.; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1970); Reginald H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (London: SPCK, 1972) 10–11.

⁶ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 319.

⁷ Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (New York: Scribner, 1966) 101–2.

⁸ Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983) 98.

⁹ It should be noted that the place where Paul received the tradition is irrelevant to the question of where the tradition originated. The linguistic evidence marshaled by Eduard Lohse (*Martyrer und Gottesknecht* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963] 113) and Berthold Klappert (“Zur Frage des semitischen oder griechischen Urtextes von I. Kor. XV. 3–5,” *NTS* 13 [1966–67] 168–73) seems to me overwhelming in favor of the creed’s Jerusalem origin; as Lüdemann correctly observes, “For even if the tradition came to Paul by way of the community in Antioch, it would only have reproduced what it too had received—from Jerusalem” (*Resurrection* 36).

¹⁰ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 vols. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989) 1.453, 2.125; BDAG 383.

Jesus would in all probability have been the primary subject of discussion, a Jerusalem reception of the creed from Peter and James, both of whom were recipients of postmortem appearances, seems preferable.¹¹ Hence, the *terminus ante quem* for the origin of the creed is AD 35, assuming the truth of the majority view that Jesus' crucifixion occurred in AD 30 and Paul's conversion in AD 32. Remarkably, however, form-critical analysis reveals the existence of two earlier stages in the development of this tradition. Since the creed would have been formulated before Paul received it, the creed in its final form should be dated even earlier than AD 35. For this reason, even the radical Jesus Seminar, in its book *The Acts of Jesus*, dates the tradition no later than AD 33.¹² Moreover, Gary Habermas observes that "the independent beliefs themselves, which later composed the formalized creed, would then date back to the actual historical events."¹³ Taken together, these considerations have led a broad spectrum of scholars from widely divergent schools of thought to identify this creed as eyewitness testimony of those who believed they saw literal appearances of Jesus alive after his death. As the Jewish NT scholar Pinchas Lapide concludes, "[T]his unified piece of tradition which soon was solidified into a formula of faith may be considered as a statement of eyewitnesses for whom the experience of the resurrection became the turning point of their lives."¹⁴

II. THE LENGTH OF THE CREED

Although all critics agree that verse 8 is a parenthetical remark appended to the tradition by Paul when writing 1 Corinthians in c. AD 55, due to its distinctly Pauline vocabulary and stylistic discontinuity from the preceding lines, the authorship of verses 6–7 remains in dispute.¹⁵ In his analysis of this problem, however, Peter Stuhlmacher persuasively argues that verse 6b—ἐξ ὧν οἱ πλείονες μένουσιν ἕως ἄρτι, τινὲς δὲ ἐκοιμήθησαν ("most of whom are still living, but some have fallen asleep")—is typically Pauline.¹⁶ To his argument I would add that both μένω (lexical form of μένουσιν) and κοιμάομαι (lexical form of ἐκοιμήθησαν) are frequently employed by Paul elsewhere (the former in Rom 9:11; 1 Cor 3:14; 7:8, 11, 20, 24, 40; 13:13; 2 Cor 3:11, 14; 9:9; Phil 1:25; the latter in 1 Cor 7:39; 11:30; 15:18, 20, 51; 1 Thess 4:13–15). It seems, therefore, that we should regard verse 6b as the product of the apostle's hand. But the question remains whether or not verses 6a and/or 7

¹¹ Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus* (Joplin, MO: College, 1996) 155.

¹² Robert W. Funk and the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus* (San Francisco: Polebridge, 1998) 454. Lüdemann, one of the seminar's most prominent members, flatly declares regarding 1 Cor 15:3b–6a, 7 that "all the elements in the tradition are to be dated to the first two years after the crucifixion of Jesus" (*Resurrection* 38).

¹³ Habermas, *Historical Jesus* 155.

¹⁴ Lapide, *Resurrection* 99.

¹⁵ William Lane Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1989) 3–4.

¹⁶ Peter Stuhlmacher, *Das paulinische Evangelium* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968) 268–69.

belong to the formula. I believe an extremely strong case can be made for identifying both of these verses as original to the creed, in which case, if successful, would then yield the following six-line *Urtext* extending from verses 3b–6a, 7:

ὅτι Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν κατὰ τὰς γραφάς
 (“that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures”)

καὶ ὅτι ἐτάφη
 (“and that he was buried”)

καὶ ὅτι ἐγήγερται τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ κατὰ τὰς γραφάς
 (“and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures”)

καὶ ὅτι ὤφθη Κηφᾶ εἶτα τοῖς δώδεκα·
 (“and that he was seen by Cephas, then by the Twelve”)

ἔπειτα ὤφθη ἐπάνω πεντακοσίοις ἀδελφοῖς ἐφάπαξ·
 (“then he was seen by over five hundred brethren at once”)

ἔπειτα ὤφθη Ἰακώβῳ εἶτα τοῖς ἀποστόλοις πᾶσιν.
 (“then he was seen by James, then by all the apostles”)

The case for the inclusion of both verses 6a and 7 consists of two categories of evidence: (1) contextual; and (2) structural. We will discuss each of these in turn.

(1) In addition to ὤφθη, verse 6a contains two other non-Pauline terms: ἐπάνω is found nowhere else in Paul’s writings; and the only Pauline instance of ἐφάπαξ (Rom 6:10) carries the connotation “once for all,” which is quite different from its meaning “at once” in the line under examination.¹⁷ Moreover, Paul’s use of ἔως ἄρτι (“still”) in his parenthetical remark, “most of whom are still living, but some have fallen asleep” (v. 6b), indicates that Paul is here giving his own commentary on a phrase that was formulated at an earlier time concerning the 500 brethren (v. 6a). Hence ἔως ἄρτι constitutes Paul’s own admission that verse 6a is non-Pauline. Linguistically, then, it seems undeniable that verse 6a should be included in the tradition. Equally powerful are the reasons why verse 7 should be regarded as part of the original formula. It should be noted that the group of τοῖς ἀποστόλοις πᾶσιν (“all the apostles”) does not include Paul, even by Paul’s own admission in his parenthetical appendage to the tradition (v. 8). This fact is quite stunning because Paul, throughout the Corinthian correspondence, is constantly fighting for the recognition of his apostolicity and insists that no one has the authority to deny that he is an apostle alongside those regarded as apostles by the Jerusalem church (1 Cor 4; 9; 2 Cor 11–12). Verse 7 thus flies in the face of Paul’s stark assertion in 1 Cor 9:1, in which he grounds his apostleship in his experience of a resurrection appearance: “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” In my judgment, therefore, it is simply unthinkable that Paul, after boldly and repeatedly asserting his apostleship in the same epistle, would compose a line in which he excluded himself from the group of “all the apostles.” Such a line is explicable only if τοῖς ἀποστόλοις πᾶσιν designates

¹⁷ Ibid.

the pre-Pauline circle of all those recognized as apostles in the earliest years of the Jerusalem church, a limited group which included but was somewhat broader than the Twelve (Acts 1:21–23), before the persecution associated with Stephen (AD 30–34). Just as the non-Pauline ὄφθη is also found in verse 7, it seems historically certain that τοῖς ἀποστόλοις πᾶσιν is a non-Pauline phrase and pre-Pauline group.¹⁸ Moreover, the presence of “James” in verse 7, coupled with “Cephas” in the undisputedly credal verse 5 as the only two properly named recipients of resurrection appearances, makes perfect sense if verse 7 is credal, since it is already probable that Paul received the creed from Peter and James when he visited Jerusalem.¹⁹ Our hypothesis is reinforced by the fact that Paul, when recounting his trip to Jerusalem, claims to have gathered information from Κηφᾶν (“Cephas”; Gal 1:18), not Πέτρον (“Peter”), and Ἰάκωβον (“James”; 1:19), precisely the two names found in the verses postulated as belonging to the original formula and the two people from whom the formula is already known to have likely come. For these reasons, the contextual evidence provides powerful evidence in support of the credal identification of verses 6a and 7.

(2) The structural argument for the inclusion of verses 6a and 7 can be thus summarized. If both of these verses are original to the tradition, then a stylized and parallel form emerges which appears too intricate to be coincidental. However, if either or both of these verses are not original to the tradition, then the structure of the form is destroyed. Supposing for the sake of argument that verses 6a and 7 are part of the creed, the literary structure of the first three lines of the creed is symmetric to the literary structure of the last three lines of the creed. The first three lines form an intercalation, in which lines one and three are parallel to one another, each ending with the stylized phrase κατὰ τὰς γραφάς, and between them lies the non-parallel line two. This intercalation in the first three lines is mirrored by an intercalation formed by the last three lines. Similarly to lines one and three, lines four and six are parallel to one another, each ending with a stylized phrase consisting of εἶτα followed by a group of people in the dative case (τοῖς δώδεκα and τοῖς ἀποστόλοις πᾶσιν, respectively), between which lines is situated the non-parallel line five. Moreover, the four instances of ὅτι in the first half of the creed are mirrored by the four instances of [ἐπ]εἶτα in the second half of the creed. It should be noted that ὄφθη seems to have been replicated in lines four through six as a further mnemonic device serving the same purpose as the symmetric literary structure—namely, ease of memorization and subsequent repetition in public worship.²⁰ Taken together, all of these considerations clearly point to the oral and confessional nature of verses 3b–6a, 7 as a single unit.

In light of the preceding discussion, therefore, the cumulative force of (1) and (2) permits little doubt that both verses 6a and 7 are original to the creed.

¹⁸ Craig, *Assessing* 5–6.

¹⁹ Habermas, *Historical Jesus* 155.

²⁰ Fuller, *Resurrection Narratives* 11–12; Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words* 102–3.

III. THE CREED'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

In order to determine what Jesus' followers believed about his resurrection in the first five years after the crucifixion (AD 30–35), responsible historical criticism dictates that we consider only the most primitive material coming directly from these disciples—namely, the 1 Cor 15:3b–6a, 7 creed—rather than anachronistically reading their concept of resurrection through the lenses of later material. Astonishingly, modern exegetes who deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus commit precisely such an anachronism when reasoning that (1) Paul's use of ὄφθη c. AD 55 to describe his resurrection appearance enables us to determine the character of the appearances recounted in material fully twenty years earlier. From a historical perspective, Paul's interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus in 1 Corinthians is simply irrelevant to the original understanding of Jesus' resurrection. To illustrate, suppose for the sake of argument that Paul, by employing ὄφθη to depict his visionary experience, intended to say that his experience possessed the same character as that of the preceding disciples. But it is a *non sequitur* to conclude therefrom that the appearances of the preceding disciples were, in fact, visionary, as no reason has been given by skeptics of Jesus' bodily resurrection to think either that Paul correctly understood the character of their appearances or that Paul was being truthful when equating the character of his appearance with theirs. Certainly doctrinal misunderstandings existed between Paul and members of the Jerusalem church, as abundantly evidenced by his denunciation of the "false brothers" (2 Cor 11:26; Gal 2:4; cf. 4:17; 5:12) and "false apostles" (2 Cor 11:13) from Jerusalem. We already know, moreover, that Paul had a vested interest in portraying the Jerusalem apostles as being on a par with himself (2 Cor 11:5; 12:11; Gal 2:9), which would furnish no little motive for falsely downgrading the quality of their experiences to match the level of his visionary experience. Hence, the original understanding of Jesus' resurrection must be discerned from the 1 Cor 15:3b–6a, 7 creed in and of itself, shorn from its Pauline commentary.

When we turn to a textual analysis of this creed, the linguistic evidence renders apparent that its formulators regarded the resurrection of Jesus as a bodily, grave-emptying event. The chronological sequence of Jesus' burial and resurrection in the second and third lines of the creed reveals that the body in the tomb was physically raised: "and that he was buried and that he was raised (ἐγήγερται) on the third day."²¹ Quite significantly, the verb ἐγείρω (lexical form of ἐγήγερται) means "to cause to stand up from a lying or reclining position with the implication of some degree of previous in-

²¹ Lüdemann's thesis that the burial is here unrelated to the resurrection but is rather a qualifying remark to certify Jesus' death ("Opening Statement," in *Resurrection: Fact or Figment* 44) has been decisively refuted by Craig ("First Rebuttal," in *Resurrection: Fact or Figment* 47–48; *Assessing* 49) as contrary to the creed's chronological fourfold ὄτι-structure, which serially orders the independent events of Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and postmortem appearances as possessing equal importance and equal weight.

capacity.”²² Since dead bodies were buried in a prone position, the verb must be referring to the raising of a formerly prone corpse to the standing posture of a live body.²³ This concept of resurrection cannot refer to the immortality of the spirit, which can neither lie down nor stand up, but must refer to the resurrection of a physical body out of a tomb. For this reason, the Greek vocabulary demands that the composers of the creed believed in the bodily resurrection and empty tomb of Jesus. To argue that (2) the formula does not recount the empty tomb is therefore untenable and can only be maintained by reading verse 4 in translation while ignoring the original text. Proceeding to verse 5, the verb ὁράω (lexical form of ὄφθη) is an elastic term which, just like its English equivalent “to see,” does not by itself specify anything about the character of what was seen—in this case, whether the resurrection appearances recounted in the creed were bodily or visionary.²⁴ This qualitative question can only be settled by appealing to already known information about the character of what was seen. Since ὄφθη stipulates that “he,” that is, Christ, “was seen,” and the previous two lines clearly affirm that the same “he”—namely, his physical body—emerged from the grave, the context naturally indicates that the physical, bodily Jesus was seen by the witnesses listed in verses 5–6a, 7. Therefore, we have extremely good grounds for concluding that the earliest disciples who composed the 1 Cor. 15:3b–6a, 7 creed both regarded the grave-emptying resurrection of Jesus as historical and attested that they themselves had seen the physically risen Jesus after his death.

At this juncture of our study two further points merit attention. First, although earlier granted for the sake of argument, it is far from obvious that Paul, by using ὄφθη, intended to say that his resurrection appearance was qualitatively identical to those of the disciples listed in the creed. Rather, the context suggests precisely the opposite. Notice that Paul, in his appended verse 8, does not follow up the threefold sequence of καὶ ὅτι ὄφθη . . . ἔπειτα ὄφθη . . . ἔπειτα ὄφθη with either (a) ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων ὄφθη κάμοι (“and last of all he was seen also by me”) or (b) ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων ὄφθη κάμοι ὡσπερὶ τῷ ἐκτρώματι (“and last of all he was seen also by me, as to one untimely born”). If Paul wanted to imply that his appearance was identical in character to those of the original disciples, then he surely would have used (a) or (b). Not only would the diction of the fourfold ὄφθη in either (a) or (b) suggest that Paul claimed no difference between his experience and those of the other disciples, but the position of ὡσπερὶ τῷ ἐκτρώματι (“as to one untimely born”) after ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων ὄφθη κάμοι in (b) would render ὡσπερὶ τῷ ἐκτρώματι

²² This definition is a conflation of the two primary meanings of ἐγείρω from Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon* 1.216; cf. BDAG 214–15.

²³ Craig (*Assessing* 90–115) supplies further creedal evidence for the empty tomb by illustrating through a careful consideration of all the possible interpretations of τῆ ἡμέρᾳ τῆ τρίτῃ that this phrase most probably served as a time indicator for the women’s discovery of the empty tomb “on the third day,” according to Jewish reckoning, after Jesus’ crucifixion.

²⁴ Wright, *Resurrection* 323; Robert H. Gundry, “Trimming the Debate,” in *Resurrection: Fact or Figment* 116–17.

as a temporal indicator, affirming simply that a period of time elapsed between the appearance to τοῖς ἀποστόλοις πᾶσιν and himself, with no bearing upon the quality of his experience. Instead of either (a) or (b), Paul intentionally breaks the diction of the threefold ὄφθη by writing ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων ὡσπερὶ τῷ ἐκτρώματι ὄφθη κάμοί (“and last of all as to one untimely born he was seen also by me”), thereby separating his experience from that of the previous disciples. This observation rules out the possibility that Paul is here attempting to convey that he experienced Christ in a manner qualitatively identical to those listed in the creed. But Paul moves one step further. By placing ὄφθη κάμοί (“he was seen also by me”) after ὡσπερὶ τῷ ἐκτρώματι, Paul explicitly shows ὡσπερὶ τῷ ἐκτρώματι to be a qualifying phrase which modifies ὄφθη κάμοί rather than a temporal indicator. Hence Paul uses ὡσπερὶ τῷ ἐκτρώματι to explain how the character of his appearance was qualitatively distinct from those recounted in the primitive tradition. While the previous disciples “saw” Jesus in the normal fashion, Paul admits to have “as to one untimely born seen” Jesus—namely, to have seen him in an abnormal fashion. This is one reason why Paul asserts in the next sentence, “For I am the least of the apostles, who does not deserve to be called an apostle” (v. 9). For these reasons, John Dominic Crossan is forced to rightfully conclude on this score:

I take very cautiously, therefore, the presumption that Paul’s entranced experience of the risen Jesus was the only or even dominant experience of earliest Christianity after the crucifixion. Paul needs, in 1 Corinthians 15:1–11, to equate his own experience with that of the preceding apostles. To equate, that is, its validity and legitimacy but not necessarily its mode or manner. Jesus was revealed to all of them, but Paul’s own entranced revelation should not be presumed to be the model for all others.²⁵

Far from alleging that his experience possessed the same character as the resurrection appearances recounted in the creed, then, Paul goes to great pains to insist that his experience differed in character from the appearances to “those who were in Christ before I was” (Rom 16:7).

Second, many commentators, most notably Robert H. Gundry in his magisterial *Sōma in Biblical Theology*, have exploded the old ploy to construe σῶμα ψυχικόν as “physical body” and subsequently oppose it to σῶμα πνευματικόν (“spiritual body”).²⁶ By way of summary, σῶμα is never used in the NT to denote anything other than the physical body or the human being with special emphasis on the physical body.²⁷ Hence to maintain that σῶμα πνευματικόν refers to a σῶμα made out of πνεῦμα (“spirit”) is self-contradictory, for an immaterial body composed of πνεῦμα, by definition, ceases to be a

²⁵ John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994) 169.

²⁶ Robert H. Gundry, *Sōma in Biblical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) 29–80; see also Craig, *Assessing* 120–59; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 775–86; Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 315–16; Wright, *Resurrection* 347–56.

²⁷ Gundry, *Sōma* 168.

σῶμα (“physical body”). Rather, as William Lane Craig points out, Paul discloses the meaning of ψυχικόν and πνευματικόν in 1 Cor 2:14–15: “A ψυχικός ἄνθρωπος (‘soul-ish human’) does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him or her . . . but the spiritual human (πνευματικός) discerns all things.”²⁸ Here we find that ψυχικός and πνευματικός represent opposite dominating principles towards which a person can be fundamentally oriented—either the person’s own ψυχή (“soul”) or the πνεῦμα (“Spirit”) of God.²⁹ Clearly ψυχικός ἄνθρωπος does not signify a “physical human,” but rather a human primarily inclined towards the selfish desires of his or her own soul. Likewise, πνευματικός does not refer to an immaterial human, but rather a human primarily inclined towards the desires of the Holy Spirit. It logically follows, therefore, that a σῶμα ψυχικόν (“soul-ish body”) is a body instinctively steered by the will of the soul, while the σῶμα πνευματικόν (“spiritual body”) is the same body of flesh as the σῶμα ψυχικόν but instinctively steered by the will of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the notion that Paul’s doctrine of resurrection in 1 Cor 15:44 opposes the physical body to an immaterial spiritual body is seen to be vacuous.

IV. CONCLUSION

We close this essay with a synopsis of its principal findings. The precise length of the 1 Corinthians 15 creedal formula, which dates no later than AD 35 and was drawn up by the original followers of Jesus in the Jerusalem church, spans verses 3b–6a, 7. We have found fallacious the two arguments against the bodily resurrection of Jesus most commonly associated with this creed. The proposition that (1) we can infer from Paul’s use of ὄφθη to describe his visionary experience of Jesus that the previous disciples also had visionary experiences suffers from two fatal flaws. First, (1) is guilty of extremely poor historiography, as it is simply anachronistic to assert that the Pauline portrayal of Christ’s resurrection c. AD 55 has any bearing on the preceding disciples’ understanding of his resurrection at least twenty years earlier. To give a parallel from Reformation studies, (1) would be analogous to recovering Luther’s theology from the writings of Melancthon or Calvin’s theology from the writings of Beza, which any historian of the early modern period would deem absurd. Second, Paul intentionally qualifies ὄφθη with ὥσπερ εἰ τῷ ἐκτρόματι in order to emphasize that the resurrection appearances to the earliest disciples were qualitatively different from his experience of the post-mortem Christ: while the recipients listed in the creed saw Christ in the normal fashion, Paul saw him in an abnormal fashion. By his own admission, then, Paul recognized that Christ appeared to him in a different mode or manner than to the original disciples. Moreover, all three rungs of the historical trajectory traced by (2) from the formula’s omission of the empty tomb to the irrelevance of the tomb for the Christian Way to the Pauline dichotomy between physical bodies and immaterial spiritual bodies are seen

²⁸ Craig, *Assessing* 126.

²⁹ William Lane Craig, “Resurrection and the Real Jesus,” in *Real Jesus* 172–73.

to be specious. Both the chronological sequence and Greek vocabulary in verse 4 demand the empty tomb, thus revealing the indispensability of the vacant tomb for earliest Christianity. Since ἐγήγερα necessitates that the corpse of Jesus emerged from the grave, the object seen by the credal witnesses is naturally taken to be the physically risen Jesus. Hence the creed itself indicates the bodily character of the resurrection appearances reported therein. This doctrine of physical resurrection was shared by Paul, whose language of σῶμα ψυχικόν and σῶμα πνευματικόν serves not as a contrast of substance but of orientation. The former is a physical body predisposed to carrying out the desires of one's own soul, while the latter is the same physical body but now predisposed to carrying out the desires of the Holy Spirit as a result of divine transformation. By implication, if believers will in the apostle's estimation physically rise from death at the general resurrection and Jesus was "the first fruits" of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:23), then it follows immediately that Paul himself regarded Jesus as having physically risen from the dead.³⁰ In sum, all three layers of the Jesus tradition—including within the first layer, most importantly, the earliest creed formulated by his original followers—unambiguously affirm the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

³⁰ A plethora of additional considerations, of course, also demonstrate the bodily nature of the Pauline doctrine of Christ's resurrection, including the apostle's metaphor of sowing and raising (1 Cor 15:42) and the fourfold use of τοῦτο (1 Cor 15:50–55), both of which emphasize the historical continuity and numerical identity between the body interred in the tomb and the spiritual body. For two extremely thorough analyses of such considerations see Wright, *Resurrection* 207–374 and Craig, *Assessing* 117–59.