

**CHRISTIAN SERVICE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE**  
**School of Graduate Studies**



**THE NATURE OF JESUS' RISEN BODY; A COMPARISON OF THE VIEWS OF**  
**JAMES D. G. J. DUNN AND NICHOLAS THOMAS WRIGHT**

**THESIS**

**BY**

**KWADWO NKANSAH**

**JULY, 2015**

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**BY**

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**A thesis submitted to the Department of Theology, Christian Service University College, in  
partial fulfillment for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Christian Ministry and  
Management.**

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## DECLARATION

I, Kwadwo Nkansah do hereby declare that this thesis dissertation project report is the result of my own original research except for section for which references have been duly made and to the best of my knowledge no part of it has been presented to this university college or any other institution for the award of a degree.

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## **DEDICATION**

To my lovely wife Mrs. Mary Nkansah and my lovely children Doreen Nkansah and Pearl Afriyie Nkansah and not forgetting my church, Presbyterian Church – Agogo for their support, both financially and spiritually. May God richly bless you all.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## ABSTRACT

The context within which this research project is situated is that of current debates on the nature of Jesus risen body. The resurrection of Jesus is not only central datum of the Christian faith but also regarded as unique by itself. The resurrection of Jesus is the nerve cell among most Christian traditions over the world. However, over the past few decades the debate surrounding the nature of Jesus' risen body has led to a multitude of interpretations.<sup>1</sup> This study describes and compares two main views represented by two New Testament scholars, namely James Dunn and N.T. Wright.

The study is primarily textual and conceptual analysis. It seeks to find out how the views of James Dunn on spiritual resurrection of Jesus Christ converged and diverged from the N.T. Wright's view on the physical resurrection of Jesus on their common concept of bodily resurrection. Both James Dunn and N.T. Wright affirm that Jesus risen body was bodily yet Dunn maintains that the risen body was spiritual and Wright also maintain that the risen body was physical. What does the bodily resurrection mean is not clear among them.

Remarkably, even spiritual, physical as well as bodily resurrection is clear among theologians. N.T. Wright believes that the empty tomb is necessary to maintain the facticity of Jesus' resurrection.

James Dunn thinks that one can believe the resurrection of Jesus without believing the narratives of the empty tomb. For Dunn spiritual resurrection does not depend on the empty tomb.

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<sup>1</sup>Some claim that Jesus' resurrection is without analogy in experience thus it is unique experience (Moltmann 1967: 197). Nonetheless, theologians like Crossan and Gerd Lüdemann view the resurrection as subjective, even, visional. Various Christian theologians have contributed to a more systematic discussion on the nature of Jesus' resurrection.

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

## CHAPTER ONE

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

#### 1. Introduction

The context within which this research project is situated is that of current debates on the nature of Jesus risen body. The resurrection of Jesus is not only central datum of the Christian faith but also regarded as unique by itself. The resurrection of Jesus is probably the nerve cell among most Christian traditions over the world. However, over the past few decades the debate surrounding the nature of Jesus risen body has led to a multitude of interpretations.<sup>1</sup> This study describes and compares two main views represented by two New Testament scholars, namely James Dunn and N.T. Wright.

The debate centers on whether the risen body of Jesus is physical or spiritual one. However, what the terms “physical” and “spiritual” entail is the knotty aspect of the debate within the camps of those who hold to physical resurrection and spiritual resurrection respectively. However the different conceptions of the nature of Jesus’ physical body and the nature of Jesus’ spiritual their detail arguments will not be addressed in this study. It will suffice to identify such grouping.

Another crucial term in the debate is “bodily”. Again what the phrase “bodily resurrection” mean is also hotly disputed by scholars. Notably Dunn identifies spiritual resurrection of Jesus with bodily so does Wright also see physical resurrection of Jesus as bodily resurrection. Thus among Christian theologians who affirm the bodily resurrection

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<sup>1</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 626.

of Jesus, there exists a sharp disagreement concerning the nature of Jesus' risen body. One characteristic of the debate is that, all those who hold the physical resurrection see the "empty tomb" as necessary confirmation of Jesus' resurrection. By contrast, those who hold to spiritual resurrection are divided on the necessity of the empty tomb of Jesus as determiner to the facticity of Jesus' resurrection.

In the *Evidence for Jesus*, James Dunn affirms that Jesus' risen body is spiritual. In *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, N.T. Wright, by contrast, affirms that the risen body of Jesus is 'robustly physical'. Both Dunn and Wright affirm that Jesus' risen body is bodily. This study describes and compares the arguments of Dunn and Wright with an aim of identifying where they converged and diverged. While their views are found in their interpretation of several biblical passages, this study will focus in their common primary text, 1 Corinthians 15:35–58.

## **1.2 Statement of problem**

In relation to the debates of the nature of Jesus' resurrection, confusion abounds on whether it was physical or spiritual one. There is a contention that while Luke's account presents physical view of Jesus' resurrection, Paul's view is that of spiritual one. Arguable, Luke's and Paul's accounts are seen as one from different perspective by some scholars. However, what the terms "physical" and "spiritual" entail is the knotty aspect of the debate. The crucial question that such confusion poses is how a Christian should understand the nature of Jesus' risen body.

Dunn is of the view that Luke and Paul give different, irreconcilable accounts on the nature of Jesus' risen body – physical and spiritual. Wright disagrees, proposing that Luke

and Paul are saying the same thing but different way of approaching it. While Dunn thinks that Jesus risen body could better be explained as spiritual, Wright considers physical as better concept for Jesus risen body. This study examines this and other differences between these scholars.

### **1.3 Research Question**

This study entails a critical comparison of the views of James Dunn and N.T. Wright on the nature of Jesus risen body. On this basis, the research question in this study may be posed in the following way:

How does James Dunn's view of spiritual resurrection of Jesus Christ converged and diverged from the N.T. Wright's view on the physical resurrection of Jesus on their common concept of bodily resurrection?

### **1.5 Significance**

Scholarly discourse on the nature of Jesus risen body seems to depict, at least, two contradictory views represented each by a group of highly respected theologians. The purpose of this study is to clarify these (arguable) two positions, using the views of James Dunn and N.T. Wright who represent broad spectrum of these two major views. It will also seek to move beyond the description of these two broad views, by offering the similarities and differences of the personal views of James Dunn and N.T. Wright.

### **1.6 The Methodology**

In the *Evidence for Jesus* James Dunn, affirms that Jesus risen body is spiritual. In *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, N.T. Wright, by contrast, affirms that the risen body of Jesus is 'robustly physical'. Both Dunn and Wright affirm that Jesus risen body is bodily.

This study presents and compares the arguments of Dunn and Wright, examines their views, partly, from 1 Corinthians 15:35–58. Nonetheless, other related text would also be drawn to support their arguments.

Literature review is going to be the main channel by which and information is going to be collected and evaluated for this paper. The sources of data will be secondary data from journal publications, books as well as other internet sources. The material is examined and presented in four steps.

The first gives an account and analysis of three typologies of the nature of Jesus risen body. Key proponents of each of the typologies are mentioned.

In the second step, I describe and analyse James Dunn's view on the nature of Jesus' risen body. This is done on the basis of a critical reading and analysis of his writings, with specific reference to his explicit treatment of these areas: a) the relationship between Lukan and Pauline accounts on the nature of Jesus risen body; b) the relationship between physical body and spiritual body and c) the relationship between Jesus' resurrection and the empty tomb.

Thirdly, the teachings of N.T. Wright on the nature of Jesus' risen body are examined. This is done on the basis of a critical reading and analysis of his writings, with specific reference to his explicit treatment on the following areas: a) the relationship between Lukan and Pauline accounts on the nature of Jesus risen body; b) the relationship between physical body and spiritual body and c) the relationship between Jesus' resurrection and the empty tomb.

Finally, I offer a critical comparison and analysis of the positions of James Dunn and N.T Wright based on the descriptions above. I then draw conclusions and deductions, in the direction of practical issues of evangelization.

### **1.7 Limitation of the study**

The debates of Jesus' resurrection mainly spin around on: a) facticity of the event; b) and the nature of the disciples' experience of the event, especially the nature of Jesus' risen body.

In this research project, no attempt will be made to enter into the debates on the facticity of the resurrection; neither will the researcher also attempt to enter into the debates on what constitute the nature of the disciples' experience on Jesus' resurrection. Rather, this study will explore the discussions that have taken place within the context of Western Theological discourses on the nature of Jesus risen body. More specifically, it will investigate the contributions of two Western theologians, namely James Dunn, and N.T. Wright.

### **1.8 Chapter organization**

The study is structured into six (6) chapters. Chapter one deals with the introductory aspect of the thesis: problem statement, objectives, scope of the study and methodology of the study. Chapter Two discusses the larger context of the nature of Jesus risen body; focusing on context of two major camps of the debates namely spiritual resurrection and physical resurrection. Chapter three describes James Dunn view on the nature of Jesus risen body while chapter four entails N.T. Wright views on the nature of Jesus' risen

body. Chapter 5 concludes the discussion by comparing and analysing the two views and chapter six deals with summary, conclusion and recommendations.

## **1.9 Literature Review**

### **a) Physical Resurrection**

Proponents of a material resurrection consider a historical empty tomb essential to their understanding of Easter. If the empty tomb story is historically reliable, they contend this strong evident for the truth of the resurrection. One group of scholars affirms that the risen body of Jesus was a physical body. Stephen T. Davis contends that ‘the risen body of Jesus was a physical body that was objectively present to the witnesses in space and time, and he was accordingly seen in a normal sense of that word.’ He contends that even a camera could have taken a snapshot of the risen Jesus. William Lane Craig maintains that ‘a careful exegesis of Pauline doctrine fully supports a physical resurrection body.’<sup>2</sup> He concludes that ‘Paul’s evidence serves to confirm the gospels’ narratives of Jesus’ bodily resurrection’ and ‘their physicalism.’ Robert H. Gundry states that according to the unified view of the New Testament concerning the nature of Jesus’ resurrection, Jesus ‘rose from the dead in a physical body, and the physicality of that body forms an essential element of his risen being. Norman L. Geisler, Josh McDowell and virtually all of Evangelical Christian apologists support this position.

### **b) Spiritual Resurrection**

Another group of scholars affirms that the nature of Jesus resurrection is spiritual.

O’Collins contends that ‘most New Testament scholars would be reluctant to assert that

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<sup>2</sup> William Lane Craig, ‘Dale Allison on Jesus’ Empty Tomb, His Postmortem Appearances, and the Origin of the Disciples’ Belief in His Resurrection’, *Philosophia Christi* 10: 2 (2008), 293.

the risen Christ became present in such a way that neutral (or even hostile) spectators could have observed him in an ordinary “physical” fashion.’ O’Collins here is evidently implying that Jesus’ risen body is different from the physical body that walked this earth.’ O’Collins explains that if Annas or Pilate were present when the appearances occurred to Peter and the other disciples, ‘they would most likely have seen nothing at all when Christ appeared.’<sup>3</sup> The new state of the risen Christ required ‘graced powers of perception on the part of those who saw him.’ The risen Jesus is recognized by two of his followers, ‘only when “their eyes” are “opened” (Lk. 24:31; cf. 24:15–16). Karl Rahner and some others support this position.

Some theologians prefer to speak of Jesus’ *bodily* resurrection rather than his *physical or spiritual* resurrection. Raymond E. Brown observes that many see only two possibilities: ‘either one affirms a physical resurrection that the risen Jesus was just as tangible as he was during his lifetime; or one denies the physical resurrection and reduces the appearances to an internal awareness of Jesus’ spiritual victory.’ However, Brown affirms spiritual resurrection but prefer the concept of bodily. A sharply controverted question among theologians who defend the bodily resurrection of Jesus is the nature of Jesus’ risen body.<sup>4</sup>

### **c) Bodily resurrection**

In between the views of physical and spiritual resurrection, there is another subtle view we may term as bodily resurrection. Here I will expound on Brown’s view as a key

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<sup>3</sup> Gerald O’Collins, *Christology: a Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus*, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1973), 125, 126.



representative. Brown hold a view of bodily resurrection in the sense that Jesus' body did not corrupt in the tomb. However, he insists that Jesus' risen body was no longer a body as we know bodies, bound by the dimensions of space and time. He sees this risen body as spiritual, not natural or physical. For Brown spiritual body implies that these Jesus' risen body was no longer flesh and blood.<sup>5</sup> He postulates that body is an intrinsic part of personality that will forever identify a human being. Brown admits that "body" did not mean for Paul what it means for most Christian today, since his basic anthropology did not involve a body-soul composite. However, Brown object to Willi Marxen's contention that Paul's reference to "body" is no more than a reference to the personal "I". And that Jesus' bodily resurrection entails transformation of his crucified body; not creating anew.<sup>6</sup>

Brown also noted that it is not clear that Paul does not conceive of the risen "body" in a merely physical way. He notes that, "Certainly, from Paul's description one would never suspect that a risen body could eat, as Luke reports. Moreover, Paul distinguishes between the risen body that can enter heaven and "flesh" and blood that cannot enter heaven – a distinction that does not agree with the emphasis in Luke 24:39 on the "flesh and bones" of the risen Jesus". For Brown Paul clearly rejects a crassly material conception whereby the risen body would resume the qualities of life as we know it – a conception that was current in Paul's time. My aim here has not been to take sides and be judgmental on the issues raised; but rather to acknowledge that such differences exist.

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<sup>5</sup>Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus*, 128.

<sup>6</sup> Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus*, 129.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE NATURE OF JESUS' RESURRECTION IN THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE: THE CURRENT TREND

#### 2.1 Introduction

The debates on Jesus' resurrection mainly spin around a) the facticity of the resurrection and b) the nature of the resurrection. The focus of this research project is on the latter. In this chapter, some perspectives of the nature of Jesus' resurrection with particular reference to the disciples' experience of the event and the question whether the claim of 'empty the tomb' was essential for the resurrection of Jesus is discussed. The nature of Jesus' resurrection has been explained as either physical or spiritual or even bodily. As the term resurrection defies a definition, I will rather use the key terms physical, spiritual and bodily to express the diverse understanding of what resurrection entails.

Emphasise on 'three resurrection typologies' in the New Testament is arbitrarily. There are of course more than three typologies of resurrection in the New Testament. This study however identifies three main ones, or groups. Such categorization is avoided in order to make distinction between 'spiritual and bodily' resurrection on the one side and 'physical and bodily' on the other side.

#### 2.2 Three typologies of resurrection in the theological discourses

##### a) Physical resurrection typology

There is a group of Christians who claim that Jesus' resurrection body was - and had to be - a material body. According Richard Swinburne, "The logic is clear: If Jesus rose bodily

from the dead in the same body in which He died, and if this body was a physical, material body, then it follows that the resurrection body was a physical, material body".<sup>7</sup>

The proponents of this view emphatically asserted that Jesus appeared empirically to his disciples. This view, it seems, is the belief held by many Evangelical Christian apologists. The material understanding of the resurrection is in history (space and time), the same body, a material body and dependence on the empty tomb.

A fundamental concept for this understanding of the resurrection is that the resurrection occurred in history. That is to say, when Jesus rose from the dead, he did so in space and time. Josh McDowell contends that the resurrection of Christ is an event in history wherein God acted in a definite time-space dimension.<sup>8</sup> For him it was an empirical event in real history.

The proponents also contend that Jesus' post-resurrection body was the same body as his pre-resurrection body, and therefore it was a material body. According to Swinburne the *same body* placed in Jesus' tomb on Good Friday emerged from it on Easter Sunday. Furthermore, he describe the resurrection body as a material body. According to the proponents of physical resurrection, "flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39), the crucifixion scars (John 20:27), eating (Luke 24:42-43), and touching the risen Jesus (Matt. 28:9) are all understood as material phenomenon.<sup>9</sup>

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7 Richard Swinburne, 'Evidence for the Resurrection', in Davis, Kendall, and O'Collins (eds.), *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, 2008), 27.

8 Swinburne, 'Evidence for the Resurrection', in Davis, Kendall, and O'Collins (eds.), *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, 185.

9 Swinburne, 'Evidence for the Resurrection', in Davis, Kendall, and O'Collins (eds.), *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, 26.

In the resurrection debates, there are many different conceptions of the term 'body', but the word is being used here in the sense employed by Lukan account of Jesus' resurrection body. There we find that Jesus rose in the same body in which he was crucified, but that it had been transformed as well.

Craig and Gundry in support of this physical resurrection argue that, Paul uses *anastasis* to refer to what happened to Jesus (Rom. 1:4, 6:5; 1 Cor. 15; Phil. 3:10). Craig argues that the term is used to describe a physical resurrection in Heb. 11:35, and is found as well in 1 Peter. Gundry also argue that the use of *soma* in other literature of the period shows that it refers to the physical "thingness" of a body. How physical risen body differs from resuscitation of a corpse – difference between the risen Jesus and the people whom Jesus is reported to have restored to ordinary life during his ministry (Lazarus, the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Nain) is another contention. Here the Proponents of a material resurrection consider a historical empty tomb essential to their understanding of Easter. If the empty tomb story is historically reliable, they contend, this is strong evidence for the truth of the resurrection; but if the empty tomb tradition is not trustworthy, this casts enormous doubt on their whole superstructure of resurrection belief.

#### **b) Spiritual resurrection typology**

It has been argued, largely, on the basis of Paul's testimony that Jesus' resurrection was spiritual in nature and that his resurrected body was spiritual in the sense of being immaterial and intangible. There are several scholars (Küng, Rahner, Borg) who deny the material nature of Jesus' resurrection. For the proponents of this view, Jesus' resurrection

is not in history (not in space and time). Jesus' resurrection body was a different body, an immaterial body – bone and flesh and does not depend on the empty tomb.<sup>10</sup>

First, the proponents of spiritual risen emphasize that the resurrection was not a historical event. For Borg the resurrection could not have been captured on video".<sup>11</sup> According to Karl Rahner the resurrection of Jesus neither can be nor intends to be a 'historical' event. Hans Küng echoed such view.<sup>12</sup> However, when Küng says that the resurrection is not a "historical event," he does not mean in any way that the resurrection is not *real*. For Küng, the early Christians' experiences of the risen Lord are events in space and time but the nature of Jesus' risen body was not physical event. In other words the disciples experience was historical but the resurrection of Jesus did not take place in space and time.

The second important feature of the view of spiritual resurrection is that Jesus' resurrected body is not the same body of the pre-risen one. The proponents argue that there is no continuity of the body.

Thirdly, for the proponents of spiritual resurrection, the corporality of the resurrection does not require the tomb to be empty. Rahner says, an empty tomb as by itself can never testify to the meaning and to the existence of a resurrection. Küng argues that if the

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10 Jeffrey R. Asher, *Polarity and Change in 1 Corinthians 15: A Study of Metaphysics, Rhetoric, and Resurrection* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2000), 267.

11 Asher, *Polarity and Change in 1 Corinthians 15: A Study of Metaphysics, Rhetoric, and Resurrection*, 49.

12 Asher, *Polarity and Change in 1 Corinthians 15: A Study of Metaphysics, Rhetoric, and Resurrection*, 277.

empty tomb story is true, "faith in the risen Christ would not be made any easier and for some people today it would even become more difficult."<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, for Kung, in agreement with Max and Crossan the corporeality of the resurrection does not require the tomb to be empty.<sup>14</sup> For some who adhere to spiritual resurrection, the tomb of Jesus was genuinely empty, by that, it does not necessarily conclude that the body did not decay. The suggestion here is that, Jesus' resurrected body may be replica (recreation) in his place.

However, what entails of 'spiritual resurrection' is bone of contention. The contention lies with the manner in which this resurrection *became known* to the disciples. For some scholars, the disciples experience was visionary. There are debates on whether it was objective/ external – *seeing with the eyes* (O'Collins) or internal (Schillebeeckx) visions – *just merely vision* to the disciples. The latter view talks about spiritual resurrection without resort to any form of (spiritual) body – except reminisce of Jesus earthly body.

### **c) Bodily resurrection typology**

Those who hold to bodily resurrection contend that Jesus resurrected with a body: *transformation* of his crucified body. They reject a *crassly material* conception, bone and flesh, whereby the risen body would resume the qualities of life. On the other hand they also reject a view of spiritual resurrection which reduces the resurrection of Jesus as internal visions and awareness of Jesus' spiritual victory over death. James Brown is a representative of this view. However, all the theologians who hold to physical

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13 Asher, *Polarity and Change in 1 Corinthians 15: A Study of Metaphysics, Rhetoric, and Resurrection*, 267.

14 O'Collins, *Christology: a Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus*, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 89.

resurrection also identify the views of bodily resurrection. But it is only some of the theologians who describe their view as spiritual also see it as bodily.

Brown holds a view of bodily resurrection in the sense that Jesus' body did not corrupt in the tomb but was transformed into a glorious body. Brown contends that Jesus' risen body was no longer a body as we know bodies, bound by the dimensions of space and time. He sees this risen body as spiritual, not natural or physical. By contrast to Craig and others, Brown spiritual body implies that Jesus' risen body was no longer flesh and blood.

Brown postulates that body is an intrinsic part of personality that will forever identify a human being. He admits that "body" did not mean for Paul what it means for most Christian today, since his basic anthropology did not involve a body-soul composite.

However, he objects to Willi Marxen contention that Paul's reference to "body" is no more than a reference to the personal "I". What Brown sees as Jesus' bodily resurrection is *transformation* of his crucified body. For Brown Paul clearly rejects a *crassly material* conception whereby the risen body would resume the qualities of life.<sup>15</sup>

Brown also noted that it is not clear that Paul does not conceive of the risen "body" in a merely physical way. He notes that, "Certainly, from Paul's description one would never suspect that a risen body could eat, as Luke reports. Moreover, Paul distinguishes between the risen body that can enter heaven and "flesh" and blood that cannot enter heaven – a distinction that does not agree with the emphasis in Luke 24:39 on the "flesh

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15 Craig, 'Dale Allison on Jesus' Empty Tomb, His Postmortem Appearances, and the Origin of the Disciples' Belief in His Resurrection', *Philosophia Christi* 10: 2, 23.

and bones” of the risen Jesus”. For Brown Paul clearly rejects a crassly material conception whereby the risen body would resume the qualities of life.

Thus bodily resurrection is distinguished from physical resurrection as not “bone and flesh” but transformed body (necessitated by empty tomb). It is also distinguished from the various views of spiritual resurrection as

### **2.3 The empty tomb and Jesus’ resurrection**

What about the empty tomb? Proponents of a material resurrection consider a historical empty tomb essential to their understanding of Easter. If the empty tomb story is historically reliable, they contend this is strong evidence for the truth of the resurrection; but if the empty tomb tradition is not trustworthy, this casts enormous doubt on their whole superstructure of belief.

Secondly, there are debates on whether Jesus’ spiritual resurrection has any connection with the empty tomb. O’Collins sees such direct link. He says, in the resurrection the corpse of Jesus is raised and transformed to become the risen Christ. For O’Collins, Jesus’ resurrected body does not appear as some kind of replica in his place (recreation) as suggested by Dunn;<sup>16</sup> there is a genuine identity in transformation.”<sup>17</sup>

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16 Craig, ‘Dale Allison on Jesus’ Empty Tomb, His Postmortem Appearances, and the Origin of the Disciples’ Belief in His Resurrection’, *Philosophia Christi* 10: 2, 127–129.

17 Craig, ‘Dale Allison on Jesus’ Empty Tomb, His Postmortem Appearances, and the Origin of the Disciples’ Belief in His Resurrection’, *Philosophia Christi* 10: 2, 127–129.



In discussing the empty tomb, O'Collins spoke of God taking Jesus' corpse and using it "as the raw material for the new creation." For Kung, in agreement with Max and Crossan the corporeality of the resurrection does not require the tomb to be empty.<sup>18</sup>

### **5. On Empty tomb**

In discussing the empty tomb, O'Collins spoke of God taking Jesus' corpse and using it "as the raw material for the new creation." In the Resurrection the corpse of Jesus is raised and transformed to become the risen Christ." He did concede that "it may be hard to refute in principle those who imagine a scenario with a risen Christ enjoying a new, glorified, bodily existence, even though his corpse decays in the tomb." O'Collins came closest to revealing what he understood by a new, glorified, bodily existence when he said that the empty tomb (which for him implies that "the corpse had been taken up into the glorified existence of the risen Christ") "very powerfully expresses *the personal continuity* between the earthly Jesus and the risen Christ. For O'Collins, the resurrected Christ remains personally identical with the Jesus who lived and died. He does not appear as some kind of replica in his place. There is a genuine identity in transformation."<sup>19</sup>

In *Jesus Risen*, responding to Hans Kung's position that "there can be identity of the person even without continuity between the earthly and the 'heavenly,' 'spiritual' body," and that "the corporeality of the Resurrection does not require the tomb to be empty,"<sup>20</sup> O'Collins accuses Kung of dispensing with any *bodily* continuity between the earthly and risen existence of Jesus: "The totally new 'spiritual' body comes into existence without

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18 O'Collins, *Christology: a Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus*, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 93.

19 O'Collins, *Christology: a Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus*, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 127–129.

20 Edward Quinn, *On Being a Christian, trans* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), 366.

any continuity with the former, earthly body, and yet without imperiling the genuine personal identity of Jesus. In his risen state he is identical with, and no mere substitute for, the person who died on the cross and was buried.”

Rahner emphasizes that the apostles’ experience of encounter ‘with someone “from the other world”, who has to “show” himself, who no longer belongs to human spatio temporality, is not an event “comprehensible” in terms of human experience. Brown rightly concludes, with reference to the idea of sight/appearance in Paul’s description of the experience of the risen Jesus, ‘Our language of space-time experience breaks down when it is used to describe the eschatological.’

## CHAPTER THREE

### JAMES D. G. DUNN ON THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to explain what Dunn meant by spiritual resurrection, as he holds that this is the best description of the nature of Jesus' death. Dunn's understanding of (what entails of) physical and bodily resurrection will be highlighted and compare with his view of spiritual resurrection.

James D.G. Dunn contends that the Easter was visionary (not physical) experiences, which was understood by the first Christians as appearances of Jesus, raised by God from the dead. For Dunn the emptiness of Jesus' grave was a contributory factor to this earliest conviction of the first Christians. Nonetheless Dunn contends that Paul's understanding of the resurrection body as a spiritual body strictly speaking does not require an empty grave. For Dunn the tomb of Jesus was genuinely empty, by that, he does not necessarily conclude that the body did not decay. He however suggested that Jesus' resurrected body may be replica (recreation) in his place. This chapter expound on this view.<sup>21</sup>

#### 3.2 Background

James D.G. Dunn was born in 21 October 1939. He is a British New Testament scholar in the Department of Theology at the University of Durham, now Emeritus Lightfoot Professor. Dunn has an MA and BD from the University of Glasgow and a PhD and DD from the University of Cambridge. In 2002, Dunn was the President of the Studiorum

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<sup>21</sup> D. G. James Dunn, *Christianity in the Making: Vol. 1, Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 10.

Novi Testamenti Societas, an international body for New Testament study. Only three other British scholars had been made President of the body in the preceding 25 years. In 2006 he became a Fellow of the British Academy. Dunn is especially associated with the New Perspective on Paul, along with N. T. (Tom) Wright and E. P. Sanders. He is a minister of the Church of Scotland. Dunn has written or edited numerous books and papers, including: *Jesus and the Spirit*<sup>22</sup>, *The Evidence for Jesus*.<sup>23</sup> *Christology in the making: New Testament inquiry into the origins of the doctrine of the incarnation*.<sup>24</sup> *Christianity in the Making: Vol. 1, Jesus Remembered*.<sup>25</sup> *Christianity in the Making: Vol. 2, Beginning from Jerusalem*.<sup>26</sup>

### **3.3 James Dunn on the nature of Jesus risen body**

#### **a) Lukan (Physical) and Pauline (Spiritual) accounts : Two contradictory resurrections?**

Dunn contends that the New Testament writers present different conceptions of what a “resurrection body” is. Particular reference is made to Lukan and Pauline account of Jesus resurrection. He notes that in Luke's account Jesus' resurrected body is very 'physical': Jesus himself says, 'Handle me and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have' (Luke 24.39). Paul however makes a clear distinction between the body of this life ('physical or natural body') and the resurrection body ('spiritual body') (I

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22 D. G. James Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1975), 55.

23 D. G. James Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 89.

24 Dunn, *Christology in the making: a New Testament inquiry into the origins of the doctrine of the incarnation*, 78.

25 Dunn, *Christianity in the Making: Vol. 1, Jesus Remembered*, 23.

26 Dunn, *Christianity in the Making: Vol. 2, Beginning from Jerusalem*, 80.

Cor. 15:42-46). Thus what Luke affirms (Jesus' resurrection body was flesh and bones) Paul denies (the resurrection body is *not* composed of flesh and blood)!<sup>27</sup>

Dunn argues that Paul believed in the resurrection of the *body*, but not the resurrection of *this* body. Thus properly speaking, then, Paul believed in a 'spiritual' resurrection; 'spiritual' is *his* word. Nonetheless, on the one hand Paul insists on the resurrection of the *body*. But at the same time he makes his distinction between *this* body and the resurrection (spiritual) body. There will be continuity between the person that was and the person that will be. But there will also be difference.

**b) James Dunn's interpretation of 1 Cor. 15:51–54.**

On this text, Dunn explains that: Redemption for Paul was not some kind of escape from bodily existence but a transformation into a different kind of bodily existence (1 Cor. 15:51–54). He argues that 'Body' is the common term. But not fleshly body, or body made of dust, or corruptible body. That is only the present embodiment, the embodiment appropriate to a physical world subject to death and decay. The embodiment of the resurrection body will be different, an embodiment appropriate to the world of the Spirit, beyond death.

Dunn points to, what he sees as distinction in this passage 'between a "flesh and blood (which) cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (15:50) and a *body* which will (15:44). For him, "Body" can be transformed and raised again. "Flesh" cannot. Dunn explains that an essential difference between body and flesh consists in the fact that the human person is

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<sup>27</sup> It also means that as Luke and Paul differed in their emphases at this point, so Christians today can have similar differences in emphasis, without thereby calling in question the canonical validity or orthodoxy of each other.

to continue to exist in the resurrection reality as body whereas the flesh will not continue to exist.

He therefore argues that in the understanding of Paul, it would be impossible to speak of a “resurrection” of the flesh. Paul holds that by definition ‘human bodies will always be embodied beings. But the climax of salvation is the final leaving behind of the flesh with all its inherent weakness and corruptibility.

### **c) Jesus’ resurrection as vision experience?**

On the nature of Jesus resurrection, Dunn says that it is almost impossible to dispute that the Easter event was visionary experiences, which was understood by the first Christians as appearances of Jesus, raised by God from the dead.

He adds that, it is almost as difficult to deny that the emptiness of Jesus' grave was a contributory fact to this earliest conviction of the first Christians. Nonetheless Dunn contends that Paul's understanding of the risen body as a spiritual body strictly speaking does not require an empty grave. He contends that at the *historical* level it is very hard to explain how the belief in Jesus' resurrection arose unless his tomb was empty. At the *theological* level, however, the emptiness of the tomb is not necessary to belief in the resurrection.

Dunn lists some conclusions to take away from his examination and states that it is impossible to deny that the origins of Christianity lie in some visionary experience of Jesus that lead to the belief that God raised Jesus. The empty tomb was a "contributory fact" to this belief. And finally in the terms Paul has given us, Christian belief in the

resurrection is not properly speaking a belief in a physical resurrection. Nor is it properly speaking a belief in immortality (the true 'me' will never die). The Christian believes rather that death is followed by resurrection more in the sense of recreation.<sup>28</sup>

#### **d) The nature of Jesus risen body and the Empty tomb**

Dunn's arguments about the empty tomb and Jesus' resurrection in the Gospels are based on: [Matt 28:1-10](#), [Mark 16:1-8](#), [Luke 23:1-11](#) and [John 20:1-10](#) (1985:57). He notes that, in Matthew, two women discovered the tomb, Mark has three women while in John one woman is at the tomb of Jesus. Dunn however contends that these inconsistencies in the Gospels are insufficient to dismiss the accounts of resurrection. For him, a degree of confusion is expected as the participants as the narrators were very emotionally involved. The question Dunn asks in these regard is what do we make of Paul's silence on the empty tomb? Nonetheless, Dunn provides some key arguments in favour of the authenticity of the Gospels testimony

According to Dunn the confusion between the different accounts in the Gospels does not appear to have been contrived. For him, the conflict of testimony is more a mark of the sincerity of those from whom the testimony was derived than a mark against their veracity.

He further argues that, all the Gospels agreed that it is the women who discovered the empty tomb of Jesus first. He adds that in the historical context the testimony of women was not worth as much as a man's. It is unlikely that a manufactured story would attribute

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<sup>28</sup> Dunn, *Christianity in the Making: Vol. 1, Jesus Remembered*, 75-76.

the discovery of the empty tomb to women, especially if there was a high chance of their testimony being rejected.

It follows that in Palestine the ideas of resurrection and of empty tomb would naturally go together for many people. He well noted that the hallmark of a created witness would be a unified testimony. In Mark the empty tomb is ambiguous and does not lead directly to the realization of resurrection. While the early creed of [1 Corinthians 15](#) has no empty tomb but has resurrection appearances, Mark has an empty tomb and no resurrection appearances - both are independent in some sense and do not contrive to apologize for, or expand the other.

For Dunn the resurrection beliefs had a lot to do with bones in tombs. But this also means that any assertion that Jesus had been raised would be unlikely to cut much ice unless his tomb was empty.<sup>29</sup>

Without an empty tomb, the claim of resurrection would not stand and even the Jewish polemics at the time of Matthew witness this ([Matt. 28:13-15](#)). No tomb veneration - although this was current among Jewish contemporaries (e.g. [Matt 23:29](#)). This lack of veneration is explained quite easily: The tomb was not venerated; it did not become a place of pilgrimage, because the tomb was empty!<sup>30</sup>

The verdict on the empty tomb: "As a matter of historical reconstruction, the weight of evidence points firmly to the conclusion that Jesus' tomb was found empty and that its emptiness was a factor in the first Christians' belief in the resurrection of Jesus."

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29 Dunn, *Christianity in the Making: Vol. 1, Jesus Remembered*, 67.

30 Dunn, *Christianity in the Making: Vol. 1, Jesus Remembered*, 68.



Nonetheless, for Dunn the tomb of Jesus was genuinely empty, by that, he does not necessarily conclude that the body did not decay.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

Dunn argues that the continuity between the body that was and the body that is to be, is not of that one-to-one kind. He explains that this is why the fact that some bodies are eaten by sharks or blown to pieces and that almost all bodies return to dust does not weaken in any way the Christian hope of the resurrection of the body. He therefore argues that in Christian belief (as indicated by Paul), resurrection is not properly speaking, belief in a *physical* resurrection. Nor is it properly speaking belief in *immortality* (the true 'me' will never die). The Christian believes rather that death is followed by resurrection more in the sense of *recreation*.<sup>31</sup>

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31 It also means that as Luke and Paul differed in their emphases at this point, so Christians today can have similar differences in emphasis, without thereby calling in question the canonical validity or orthodoxy of each other.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### N.T. WRIGHT ON THE NATURE OF JESUS' RESURRECTION

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to explain what Wright meant by physical resurrection, as he holds that this is the best description of the nature of Jesus' resurrection. Wright contends that the Easter was visionary (not physical) experiences, which was understood by the first Christians as appearances of Jesus, raised by God from the dead. For Dunn the emptiness of Jesus' grave was a contributory factor to this earliest conviction of the first Christians. Nonetheless Dunn contends that Paul's understanding of the resurrection body as a spiritual body strictly speaking does not require an empty grave. For Dunn the tomb of Jesus was genuinely empty, by that, he does not necessarily conclude that the body did not decay. He however suggested that Jesus' resurrected body may be replica (recreation) in his place. This chapter expound on this view.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4.2 Background

Nicholas Thomas "Tom" Wright (born 1 December 1948) is a leading New Testament scholar and retired Anglican bishop. In academia, he is published as N. T. Wright, but otherwise tends to be known as Tom Wright. Between 2003 and his retirement in 2010, he was the Bishop of Durham.<sup>33</sup> He is now Research Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at St Mary's College in the University of St Andrews in Scotland. Among modern New Testament scholars, Wright is an important proponent of traditional views on theological matters including Christ's bodily resurrection and second coming.

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<sup>32</sup> Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 25.

<sup>33</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 44.

Wright was born in Morpeth, Northumberland. He was educated at Sedbergh School, then in Yorkshire, Wright specialised in classics. From 1968 to 1971, he studied *literae humaniores* (or "classics", i.e. classical literature, philosophy and history) at Exeter College, Oxford, receiving his BA with first class honours in 1971. During that time he was president of the undergraduate Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union. In 1973 he received a BA in theology with first class honours from Exeter.

From 1971 to 1975 he studied for the Anglican ministry at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, receiving his (Oxford) MA at the end of this period. He was later awarded a Doctor of Divinity (DD) degree by Oxford University. In 1975 he became a junior research fellow at Merton College, Oxford and later also junior chaplain. From 1978 to 1981 he was a fellow and chaplain at Downing College, Cambridge. In 1981 he received his DPhil from Merton College, Oxford, his thesis topic being "The Messiah and the People of God: A Study in Pauline Theology with Particular Reference to the Argument of the Epistle to the Romans".

In 2003, he became the Bishop of Durham. On 4 August 2006 he was appointed to the Court of Ecclesiastical Causes Reserved for a period of five years.

On 27 April 2010 he retired from the See of Durham on 31 August 2010 to take up a new appointment as Research Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at St Mary's College, St Andrews in Scotland, which enabled him to concentrate on his academic and broadcasting work.

He served as assistant professor of New Testament studies at McGill University, Montreal (1981–86), then as chaplain, fellow and tutor at Worcester College and lecturer in New Testament in the University of Oxford (1986–93).

He moved from Oxford to be Dean of Lichfield Cathedral (1994–99) and then returned briefly to Oxford as Visiting Fellow of Merton College, before taking up his appointment as Canon Theologian of Westminster Abbey in 2000. He has the fourth-highest position in the Church of England. He was previously canon theologian of Westminster Abbey and former university instructor at Cambridge, Oxford, and McGill in Montreal. He enriches the resurrection debates with his 817 –page publication.

#### **4.3 N.T. Wright on the nature of Jesus' Resurrection**

##### **a) Lukan (Physical) and Pauline (Spiritual) accounts : Two contradictory resurrection?**

Wright contends that among both pagans and Jews in the ancient Mediterranean world the word resurrection almost always meant that the body would be raised. Even those who rejected the doctrine still used this definition for the term. He notes that, if one spoke about one's soul or spirit being glorified or living after death, they did not use the term resurrection. Thus, the term resurrection basically refers to physical event.

On contradiction between Luke 24:40 (“Touch me and see: no spirit has flesh as you can see I have.”) and 1 Corinthians 15:50 and 45 (“Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.”) Wright contends that the contexts of both passages make it quite clear that the terms are being used in the same senses, only that one makes the risen Jesus

fleshly, while the other says the opposite. He uses 1 Peter 3:18 to support the idea that the Lucan and Pauline accounts of resurrection say the same thing in different ways. He did this by claiming to offer a better fresh interpretation of the text to read: Jesus was “put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison, etc.”). However, Wright is accused of impugning the text to make it say what he wants: “he was put to death *by* the flesh, and brought to life *by* the Spirit.”

For Wright, the appearance of the risen Christ and the discovery of his empty tomb prompted the resurrection faith in Jesus. He contends that the newly embodied life of the resurrected Jesus ‘involved a glorious transformation of his human existence, the “spiritual body”. Wright contends that what Paul meant by “spiritual” was that after resurrection the body is “animated by the spirit,” not that it is a nonmaterial body. According to Wright, Christianity has always believed that after death and an undefined period in the presence of God, each individual will receive a resurrection body like that of Jesus. He also notes that the physical reality of a future world after death shows the created order matters to God and Jesus’ resurrection is the pilot project.

The gospels do not say, “Jesus is raised, therefore we’re going to heaven.” Rather, Jesus is raised, therefore God’s new creation has begun and we have a job to do. Each of the stories pictures Jesus neither as a resuscitated corpse, nor as one “shining like a star” as in Daniel 12, nor as a ghost or disembodied spirit, nor as one with the same kind of body that he had before.

#### **4.4 N.T Wright's interpretation of *Corinthians 15:35–58***

Wright notes that in verses 35–49 of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul discuss the question which directly concerns this study: ‘the what’ of the resurrection. In verse 40 and in verses 50–58, Paul concludes the argument concerning resurrection bodiliness that began in verse 35.

*Verses 35–49.* As a descriptive heading for verses 35–49, Wright proposes: ‘what sort of body? If ‘resurrection’ for Paul meant ‘bodily resurrection,’ these verses address the question: what type of body is involved in bodily resurrection? Wright states that Paul goes beyond previous Jewish explanations. Paul argues that resurrection is not merely a resuscitation into the same kind of body’ which preceded death. It is a metamorphosis ‘into a new transformed embodiment. Wright question, how does Paul understand this? He contends that Paul develops his thought in two progressive sections: a) verses 35–41 and b) verses 42–49.<sup>34</sup>

After presenting an outline of 1 Corinthians Chapter 15 and a summary analysis, Wright concludes that the Chapter ‘is intended by Paul as a long argument in favor of a future bodily resurrection. He contends that since ‘there was no indication in Judaism, either before or after Paul, that “resurrection” could mean anything other than “bodily” ’ and since Paul structured ‘his argument in such a way as to give the appearance of articulating a Pharisaic . . . world view,’ no doubt should remain that ‘when Paul said “resurrection”, he meant “bodily resurrection”.’<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> N. T. Wright, ‘Resurrection in Q?’ in *Christology, Controversy and Community* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 67.

Verse (44) reads: it is sown as a *s m psychikon*, it is raised as a *s m pneumatikon*. Wright comments that of these four contrasts, ‘the first (v.42b) is the main thing Paul wishes to stress at the level of the nature of the new body; the last (v.44), as the sequel will show, is the point which explains how it is all achieved.

Framed by these two contrasts in verses 42b and 44, verse 43 introduces two further contrasts between the present earthly and future risen body. In verse 43a the dishonour or lowly state of the earthly body is contrasted with the splendor or glory of the resurrection body. In verse 43b the weakness of the earthly body is contrasted with the potency of the future resurrection body transformed by the power of God. The fourth and final contrast in v.44 between the *s m psychikon* and the *s m pneumatikon* is ‘a kind of summary and climax’ on which Paul’s emphasis lies.

But what do these terms mean? Wright affirms that the translations of the RSV, NRSV and NEB (‘a physical body’ – ‘a spiritual body’) can mislead the reader to assume ‘that Paul is describing the new resurrection body as something which, to put it bluntly, is non-physical – something which you could not touch, could not see with ordinary eyesight, something which, if raised to life would leave no empty tomb behind it.’

In contrast Wright explains the two terms in the following manner. In verse 44 Paul refers to two types of *s m* (‘body’): the present corruptible one and the future non-corruptible one. These are respectively *psychikon* and *pneumatikon*. He contends that the first word is derived from *psyche*, frequently translated “soul”, and the second from *pneuma*, normally translated “spirit”. Wright can speak of *s m psychikon*, the present body, as the ‘soulish’ body. Its animating principle is the soul (*psyche*) that everyone possesses. The *s m*

*psychikon* 'is the normal sort of human *s m* , a body animated by the ordinary breath of life.

Thus for Wright, a *s m pneumatikon* is: A body animated by, enlivened by, the Spirit of the true God and that it is the appropriate *vessel for* the Spirit's life. He then argues that Verse 44b states Paul's thesis: 'If there is a *s m psychikon*' (a body animated by the ordinary breath of life) 'there is also a *s m pneumatikon*' (a body animated by the Spirit of the living God). *Verses 50–58*. With this final paragraph Paul concludes the argument concerning resurrection bodiliness that began in verse 35. The argument is expanded by the new motif of the radical transformation of a group of people not mentioned before – those still living 'at the moment when Jesus reappears and the dead are raised.

Wright affirms that the central emphasis of this paragraph 'is on the transformation that will be required for those presently alive if they are to be part of the kingdom. He claims that this emphasis should have made clear Paul's view of the resurrection: people still alive when the kingdom finally arrives will not lose their bodies but have them changed from their present state to the one required for God's future.' On verse 50 "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" Wright contends that in Paul's understanding the future life would entail 'the loss of physicality.' Because the problematic verse (v. 50) is the first verse of the paragraph, the clarification of the 'thrust' of the rest of the paragraph, Wright returns to the often controversial opening words of the paragraph: This is what I mean, brothers and sisters: 'flesh and blood' cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor can corruption inherit incorruption.



Wright explains that ‘flesh and blood’ which cannot inherit the kingdom of God refers to ‘ordinary corruptible, decaying human existence. The body in its present form, composed of flesh and blood, to be sure, but subject to weakness, decay and death, and as such ill-suited for the life of the future.

#### **4.5 Empty tomb**

According to Wright we cannot account for Christian faith by suggesting that stories about appearances and about an empty tomb have nothing whatever to do with one another. He contends that the empty tomb and appearances of Jesus together constitute a sufficient condition of the rise of early Christian faith. He then argues that empty tomb and appearances constitute the necessary condition. He insists that, the Hellenistic novels which feature stories of empty graves cannot provide an explanatory context for the rise of Christian belief.<sup>35</sup>

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

Wright emphasizes that ‘flesh and blood’ ‘does not simply mean, as it often has been mistaken to mean, physical humanity’ in the normal modern sense, but “the present physical humanity (as opposed to the future one) which is subject to decay and death. Therefore, in Wright’s understanding ‘flesh and blood’ refers to human persons embodied in physical bodies subject to decay and death. In God’s eschatological future, God’s new world will entail, not an abandonment of the physical body, but a transformation into a radically new type of physical body which is incorruptible and immortal.

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<sup>35</sup> E. L. Bode, *The First Easter Morning: The Gospel Accounts of the Women’s Visit to the Tomb of Jesus* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1970); 32.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE NATURE OF JESUS 'RESURRECTION: A COMPARISON OF THE VIEWS OF JAMES D.G. DUNN AND NICHOLAS THOMAS WRIGHT

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter compares the similarities and differences of the views of James Dunn and N.T. Wright on the nature of Jesus' resurrection. Specifically we dwell on three issues namely: whether or not the New Testament present two contradictory views of the nature of Jesus' resurrection, whether or not Jesus' resurrected body was physical or spiritual and how Dunn and Wright explain the terms 'physical' and 'spiritual'.<sup>36</sup>

#### 5.2 Does the New Testament present more than one view on the nature of Jesus' resurrection?

Luke affirms (Jesus' resurrection body was flesh and bones) Paul denies (the resurrection body is *not* composed of flesh and blood). Thus for Dunn, spiritual body is nonmaterial (contrast to Wright) but capable of an objective seeing.<sup>37</sup>

By contrast, for Wright, Jesus' body was material 'animated by the spirit,' – not that it is a nonmaterial body. He argues that among both pagans and Jews in the ancient Mediterranean world the word resurrection almost always meant that the body would be raised. He notes that even those who rejected the doctrine still used this definition for the term. Conversely, if they spoke about one's soul or spirit being glorified or living after death, they did not use the term resurrection.

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<sup>36</sup> D. G. Dunn James, *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1975), 87.

<sup>37</sup> Wright, 'Resurrection in Q?' in *Christology, Controversy and Community*, 29.

Dunn is of the view that Luke and Paul held different views on the nature of Jesus' resurrection, namely physical and spiritual. It is widely accepted among New Testament scholars that the disciples did see appearances of Jesus after his death.<sup>38</sup> What is not at all agreed upon is what is to be understood by these appearances. He notes that the audiences of the two main sources, Paul and Luke, were less confused than us, modern people, about the nature of Jesus' resurrected body or about his appearances to his followers. After giving a list of all those to whom Jesus has appeared, Paul simply states that Jesus was raised in a *spiritual body* (*soma pneumatikon*) (1 Corinthians 15:5-8, 42-54). It seems furthermore clear that for Paul, the appearances happening to him were of the same kind as that experienced by the other apostles.

Luke, the other main witness about the appearances, emphasizes that in the resurrected body, Jesus could appear and disappear at random he could eat, drink and talk but was not immediately recognizable (Luke 24:15, 31, 36; Acts 1:3). Unlike first century Mediterranean people for whom no explanations are given about this resurrected body or the visionary appearances, modern Western readers and scholars are far less clear on what these authors were talking about.

For Dunn 'resurrection' is itself not part of our data. It is an *inference* drawn from our primary data - empty tomb and appearances. "Resurrection" is therefore a deduction not a datum. He contends that we cannot be sure of what it meant because it could not be witnessed. Dunn contends that Paul believed in the resurrection of the *body*, but not the resurrection of *this* body. On the nature of Jesus resurrection, he says that the Easter even

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38 Craig, 'Dale Allison on Jesus' Empty Tomb, His Postmortem Appearances, and the Origin of the Disciples' Belief in His Resurrection', *Philosophia Christi* 10: 2, 156.

was visionary experiences, which was understood by the first Christians as appearances of Jesus, raised by God from the dead. He proposes that it may at best describe Easter even as a disappearance or, “dematerialization” of the corpse as much as would be visible to the eye. Dunn notes that the empty tomb led to the conclusion, “God has raised Jesus from the dead”. The 'sightings' were also understood as appearances of Jesus as 'raised' by God on the third day after his crucifixion.

Wright disagrees, proposing that Luke and Paul are saying the same thing but different way of approaching it. While Dunn thinks that Jesus resurrection could better be explained as spiritual Wright considers physical resurrection as better concept.

### **5.3 The nature of Jesus risen body: physical or Spiritual?**

On Gospels and Paul's ideas of Jesus' resurrection, Dunn contends that Jesus' body is 'spiritual' not 'physical'. 'Flesh and blood,' Paul declares roundly, 'cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor. 15:44, 50). Of the passages about eating and touching, he concluded that if one emphasises [Jesus'] *physical* presence to counter 'spiritualizing' aberrations, she/ he should also allow for a certain 'heavenly otherness' to prevent crassly materialistic views which would reduce the resurrection to the reanimation of a corpse.<sup>39</sup> He however asserts that the resurrection of the dead will mean the full personalizing and spiritualizing of matter, not its abolition.

For Dunn a pneumatic body created by the divine Spirit is no longer 'flesh and blood'. It is also not fleshly in substance in continuity with the earthly body. Jesus' pneumatic body

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<sup>39</sup> *What Are They Saying about the Resurrection* (New York: Paulist, 1978) 49–51; also *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ* 84–85.

which is in the divine dimension a reality transcends space and time. It therefore, cannot be fleshly. Dunn further argues that, Jesus risen body could not be a 'new type of physicality, but a new type of body or embodiment which is transphysical or transcends the physical and which is the result of 'a transformation of a radical kind. N. T. Wright contends that the risen body of Jesus was 'robustly physical.' He bases this conclusion on an analysis of Paul's statements in 1 Cor 15:35–58.

However, an evaluation of Wright's analyses leads to the conclusion that Wright has not established that the risen body of Jesus was 'robustly physical.' What are the reasons for this conclusion?

First, Wright's analysis of 1 Corinthians 15:35–58 contains two deficiencies which invalidate its conclusion that the body of the risen Jesus was 'robustly physical.' The analysis (1) does not recognize the open character of Paul's statements about risen bodiliness and (2) proceeds without warrant to specify risen bodiliness as physical bodiliness.

Second, Wright's analyses of 1 Cor 15:35–58 and of Paul's witness to his experience at Damascus contain two deficiencies which invalidate the conclusion that the body of Jesus was 'robustly physical. The analyses of the passage does not appreciate (1) the scope of the radical transformation of the risen body, which does not effect merely a new type of physicality, but a new type of body which transcends the physical.

In 1 Corinthians 15:8 where Paul bears witness to his own experience of the risen Christ, he uses the same phrase ( *phth* + dative of the person) to describe this mysterious

‘happening’ that was used in the pre-Pauline traditions (1 Corinthians 15:5–7) which he incorporated into his letter.

Wright concedes that when Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:8 says, ‘Last of all . . . he appeared also to me,’ ‘nothing much can be made either way of the verb *phth*, “he appeared”. This could be used for either a private vision or a public, and very ordinary and matter of fact “appearance” of somebody.

But Wright contends that some factors bear strong witness that Paul has in mind ‘a real “seeing” with his ordinary eyes rather than a nonphysical “seeing” in the sense of a private or internal “experience”. Consequently, Paul’s ‘seeing’ of the risen Lord ‘was of a different order’ than spiritual experiences. But the passage does not yet necessarily imply that Paul refers ‘to a real “seeing” with his ordinary eyes’ as in everyday life.

Third, Wright’s conclusion to the analysis of Luke’s presentation of Paul’s Damascus experience is not persuasive. Luke’s presentation of Paul’s Damascus experience is vague about the way the appearance took place. Therefore it leaves passage undecided on the mode of the appearance of Jesus in Luke 9:17 and Luke 26:16. Similarly, the mode of Paul’s seeing Jesus in Luke 9:27 and Luke 22:14, which, provides the basis for Wright to say that Luke was convinced that Paul ‘saw’ the risen Jesus is indecisive.

This in turn undermines Wright’s contention that Luke’s presentation of Paul’s experience in Acts rules out an ‘interior seeing’ or a seeing with the inner eye. Consequently, it has not been established that the seeing was a real seeing with his ordinary eyes, nor that he saw a Jesus who was ‘robustly physical’.

## 5.4 Conclusion

Taking all of his positions into account, there is some ambiguity in Wright reflections about the nature of Jesus' risen body as 'robustly physical'. For Wright the resurrection body is not identical with the original body; it has not, that is, merely been resuscitated; it is, rather, the *transformation* of the existing body into a new mode of physicality. It is a *transformed* physicality, with new properties and attributes but still concrete and physical. Jesus' resurrected body was a material object which took up space, occupied a certain location and could be seen.

One wishes that he would struggle more with distinguishing, between "body conceived in chemico-physical terms" and a risen body conceived as "a transphysical reality". This will make his view become more specific about "the radical break between the present life and the future one" in regard to his understanding of the relation of "bodiliness" and "matter" beyond death.

What was the nature of Jesus' risen body? Despite the variety of answers to this question, they share a common element: if Jesus was seen after his death, he must have occupied a material physical body. Probably the most common conception among ordinary people is that Jesus resurrection meant that his corpse was resuscitated.

As Brown says, it is probably true that a great number of Christians who believe in the resurrection of Jesus have confused this resurrection with the resuscitation of a corpse. There is assumption that if Jesus was *seen* by his followers, his body must have been

resuscitated because only physical, material bodies can be seen by human beings.<sup>40</sup> The major feature of such bodies is that they must die a second time and that would then be permanent. Therefore, most scholars agree that Jesus resurrection was no resuscitation. As Brown contends, the New Testament evidence is lucidly clear that Jesus was not restored to ordinary life his risen existence is glorious and eschatological, transported beyond the limitations of space and time; and he will not die again.

While New Testament scholars generally agree that it was no resuscitated body, they do not agree what kind of body it was. The most popular viewpoint among conservative and evangelical scholars is that something mysterious has happened to Jesus' body after his resurrection. The question that immediately arises is what on earth is a glorious, an eschatological or a body of transformed physicality? Just as interesting as what they think the resurrected body actually was, they think this kind of body was indeed a physical, material one

An alternative way of looking at the resurrection appearances and Jesus' resurrected body is of visionary experiences, represented by Dunn among others. However, the challenge here is to show what kind of *resurrection body* is produced by this kind of *seeing* and what kind of world-view is presupposed. Thus, addressing the challenge of the nature of Jesus' risen body is still ongoing academic debate. That is to say, both Dunn and Wright positions are part of the solution yet they are far from offering solution to the challenge.

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40 Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus*, 73.



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SUMMARY CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

The debate on the nature of Jesus' risen body centers on whether the risen body is physical or spiritual one. What constitute spiritual body and physical body are also disputed by scholars. Another crucial term in the debate is "bodily". Again what the phrase "bodily resurrection" mean is also hotly disputed by scholars. One characteristics of the debate is that, all those who hold the physical resurrection see the "empty tomb" as necessary confirmation of Jesus' resurrection. This clearly shows that over the decades what constitute the nature Jesus risen body is not clear cut issue and that has lead to a multitude of interpretations. This study describes and compares two main views represented by two New Testament scholars, namely James Dunn and N.T. Wright as a means to understand the ongoing debates on the subject. The chapter report on the research findings as well as summing up the entire work. In addition, some recommendations have been given as suggestion for future research.

#### **6.2 Research Findings**

The debate on the nature of Jesus' risen body centers on whether the risen body is physical or spiritual one. Another crucial term in the debate is "bodily". However, while Dunn refers to spiritual resurrection as bodily resurrection, Wright also refers to physical resurrection as bodily resurrection. This study entails a critical comparison of the views of James Dunn and N.T. Wright in this regard. On this basis, the research question that the study addressed was "How does James Dunn's

view of spiritual resurrection of Jesus Christ converged and diverged from the N.T. Wright's view on the physical resurrection of Jesus on their common concept of bodily resurrection?"

In response to the research question, Dunn and Wright converge in at least three areas and diverged in three major areas.

**a) Converging**

Firstly, both Dunn and Wright agrees that Jesus' resurrection was factual capable of an objective seeing and that the risen body was bodily. Secondly, the two also agree that Jesus' empty Tomb was necessary to account for his resurrection. Thirdly, Dunn and Wright do agree that the narrative accounts of Jesus' resurrection were not falsified.

**b) Diverged**

Firstly Dunn contends that Luke and Paul presented two irreconcilable accounts on the nature of Jesus' risen body. Wright disagrees. For Wright the two accounts are two different ways of presenting the same account. Secondly, Wright contends that Jesus risen body was robustly physical and was capable of been photographed. Dunn disagrees. For Dunn, the "seeing" of Jesus' resurrected body was not physical but spiritual which demanded special grace to do that. Thirdly, the two agree that the empty tomb account was necessary to affirm the belief of Jesus' resurrection but Dunn thinks that whether the tomb was empty or not is necessary for the very act of Jesus' resurrection. For Dunn God did not need the physical corpse to raise Jesus from the death.

### **6.3 Summary**

The debates of Jesus' resurrection mainly spin around a) the facticity of the resurrection and b) the nature of the resurrection. The focus of this study is on the latter one. The debates on the facticity of the resurrection are usually between Christian and non-Christians. However there are some theologians who maintain that they are Christians yet they robustly deny that the narratives about Jesus' resurrection are not factual. On the other hand, the debates about the nature of Jesus' resurrection are basically between Christians, usually between conservative Evangelical Apologetics and Liberal academicians in the public Universities. While the conservative Evangelicals have religious duty to maintain a religious tradition the Liberal academicians have academic obligation to maintain logic and coherency over and above religious matters

Both James Dunn and Wright affirm that Jesus risen body was bodily yet Dunn maintains that the risen body was spiritual and Wright also maintain that the risen body was physical. What does the bodily resurrection means is not clear among them. Neither bodily resurrection is clear among the theologians. Wright believes that the empty tomb is necessary to maintain the facticity of Jesus' resurrection. James Dunn thinks that one can believe the resurrection of Jesus without believing the narratives of the empty tomb. For Dunn spiritual resurrection does not depend on the empty tomb.

On the nature of Jesus' resurrection debates, there are two main views of the nature of Jesus risen body; spiritual and Physical. There is also another term, "bodily which plays a major role in the debate. This section identifies these two major views and their key proponents as well the term bodily resurrection.

Luke affirms (Jesus' resurrection body was flesh and bones) Paul denies (the resurrection body is *not* composed of flesh and blood). Thus for Dunn, spiritual body is nonmaterial (contrast to Wright) but capable of an objective seeing.

By contrast, for Wright, Jesus' postmortem body was material 'animated by the spirit,' – not that it is a nonmaterial body. He argues that among both pagans and Jews in the ancient Mediterranean world the word resurrection almost always meant that the body would be raised. He notes that even those who rejected the doctrine still used this definition for the term. Conversely, if they spoke about one's soul or spirit being glorified or living after death, they did not use the term resurrection.

Dunn is of the view that Luke and Paul held different views on the nature of Jesus' resurrection, namely physical and spiritual. It is widely accepted among New Testament scholars that the disciples did see appearances of Jesus after his death.<sup>41</sup> What is not at all agreed upon is what is to be understood by these appearances. He notes that the audiences of the two main sources, Paul and Luke, were less confused than us, modern people, about the nature of Jesus' resurrected body or about his appearances to his followers. After giving a list of all those to whom Jesus has appeared, Paul simply states that Jesus was raised in a *spiritual body* (*s m pneumatikon*) (1 Corinthians 15:5-8, 42-54). It seems furthermore clear that for Paul, the appearances happening to him were of the same kind as that experienced by the other apostles.

Wright's conclusion to the analysis of Luke's presentation of Paul's Damascus experience is not persuasive. Luke's presentation of Paul's Damascus experience is vague about the

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41 Craig, 'Dale Allison on Jesus' Empty Tomb, His Postmortem Appearances, and the Origin of the Disciples' Belief in His Resurrection', *Philosophia Christi* 10: 2, 156

way the appearance took place. Therefore it leaves passage undecided on the mode of the appearance of Jesus in 9:17 and 26:16. Similarly, the mode of Paul's seeing Jesus in 9:27 and 22:14, which, provides the basis for Wright to say that Luke was convinced that Paul 'saw' the risen Jesus is indecisive. This in turn undermines Wright's contention that Luke's presentation of Paul's experience in Acts rules out an 'interior seeing' or a seeing with the inner eye. Consequently, it has not been established that the seeing was a real seeing with his ordinary eyes, nor that he saw a Jesus who was 'robustly physical'.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

Taking all of his positions into account, there is some ambiguity in Wright reflections about nature of Jesus' risen body as 'robustly physical'. For Wright the resurrection body is not identical with the original body; it has not, that is, merely been resuscitated; it is, rather, the *transformation* of the existing body into a new mode of physicality. It is a *transformed* physicality, with new properties and attributes but still concrete and physical. Jesus' resurrected body was a material object which took up space, occupied a certain location and could be seen.

One wishes that he would struggle more with distinguishing, between "body conceived in chemico-physical terms" and a risen body conceived as "a transphysical reality". This will make his view become more specific about "the radical break between the present life and the future one" in regard to his understanding of the relation of "bodiliness" and "matter" beyond death.

What was the nature of Jesus' risen body? Despite the variety of answers to this question, they share a common element: if Jesus was seen after his death, he must have occupied a

material physical body. Probably the most common conception among ordinary people is that Jesus resurrection meant that his corpse was resuscitated.

As Brown says, it is probably true that a great number of Christians who believe in the resurrection of Jesus have confused this resurrection with the resuscitation of a corpse. There is assumption that if Jesus was *seen* by his followers, his body must have been resuscitated because only physical, material bodies can be seen by human beings.<sup>42</sup> The major feature of such bodies is that they must die a second time and that would then be permanent. Therefore, most scholars agree that Jesus resurrection was no resuscitation. As Brown contends, the New Testament evidence is lucidly clear that Jesus was not restored to ordinary life his risen existence is glorious and eschatological, transported beyond the limitations of space and time; and he will not die again.

While New Testament scholars generally agree that it was no resuscitated body, they do not agree what kind of body it was. The most popular viewpoint among conservative and evangelical scholars is that something mysterious has happened to Jesus body after his resurrection. The question that immediately arises is what on earth is a glorious, an eschatological or a body of transformed physicality? Just as interesting as what they think the resurrected body actually was, they think this kind of body was indeed a physical, material one

An alternative way of looking at the resurrection appearances and Jesus' resurrected body is of visionary experiences, represented by Dunn among others. However, the challenge here is to show what kind of *resurrection body* is produced by this kind of *seeing* and

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<sup>42</sup> Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus*, 73.

what kind of world-view is presupposed. Thus, addressing the challenge of the nature of Jesus' risen body is still ongoing academic debate. That is to say, both Dunn and Wright positions are part of the solution yet they are far from offering solution to the challenge.

### **6.5 Recommendation**

The resurrection of Jesus is not only central datum of the Christian faith but also regarded as unique by itself. The resurrection of Jesus is probably the nerve cell among most Christian traditions over the world. However, over the past few decades the debate surrounding the nature Jesus risen body has led to a multitude of interpretations.

The debate centers on whether the risen body of Jesus is physical or spiritual one. However, what the terms "physical" and "spiritual" entail is the knotty aspect of the debate within the camps of those who hold to physical resurrection and spiritual resurrection respectively. Another crucial term in the debate is "bodily". Again what the phrase "bodily resurrection" mean is also hotly disputed by scholars. In this respect, the following areas need detail academic attention:

- a) the different conceptions of the nature of Jesus' risen body as physical body
- b) the different conceptions of the nature of Jesus' risen body as spiritual
- c) the different conceptions of "bodily" resurrection of Jesus for those who regard Jesus resurrection as spiritual
- d) the different conceptions of "bodily" resurrection of Jesus for those who regard Jesus resurrection as physical

Among Christian theologians who affirm the bodily resurrection of Jesus, there exists a sharp disagreement concerning the nature of Jesus' risen body. One characteristic of the debate is that, all those who hold the physical resurrection see the "empty tomb" as necessary confirmation of Jesus' resurrection. By contrast, those who hold to spiritual resurrection are divided on the necessity of the empty tomb of Jesus as determiner to the facticity of Jesus' resurrection. Thus a detail research is also needed to assess:

e) the view of spiritual resurrection without empty tomb and

f) the view of spiritual resurrection with empty tomb

Dunn is of the view that Luke and Paul give different, irreconcilable accounts on the nature of Jesus risen body – physical and spiritual. Wright disagrees, proposing that Luke and Paul are saying the same thing but different way of approaching it. There is a contention that while Luke's account presents physical view of Jesus' resurrection, Paul's view is that of spiritual one. Arguable, Luke's and Paul's accounts are seen as one from different perspective by some scholars. The crucial question that such confusion poses is how a Christian should understand the nature of Jesus risen body. Thus there is the need to find out:

g) The relationship between Lukan and Pauline account of the resurrection of Jesus.



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