

## THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

### *The Witness of Reason.*

WE have said that the Resurrection of the Body, being a revealed mystery is not provable by reason, but is acceptable only on authority. As a preface to 'the Witness of Reason,' we set down the principle of St. Thomas :

'Whoever tries to prove' (a mystery of faith) 'by natural reason derogates from faith in two ways :

'*First*, as regards the dignity of faith itself, which consists in its being concerned with invisible things that exceed human reason : wherefore the Apostle says that *faith is of things that appear not* (Heb. xi, 1).

'*Secondly*, as regards the utility of drawing others to the faith. For when anyone in the endeavour to prove the faith brings forward reasons which are not cogent, he falls under the ridicule of unbelievers ; since they suppose that we stand upon such reasons, and that we believe on such grounds.

'Therefore we must not attempt to prove what is of faith except by authority alone, to those who receive the authority ; while as regards others it suffices to prove that what faith teaches is not impossible' (1<sup>a</sup> Qu. 32, Art. 1, Eng. tr.).

'... Since faith rests upon infallible truth, and since the contrary of faith can never be demonstrated, it is clear that the arguments against faith cannot be demonstrations but are difficulties that can be answered' (1<sup>a</sup> Qu. 1, Art. 8, Eng. tr.).

With these words of wisdom, which should not be forgotten, we now pass from the Witness of Scripture to the Witness of Reason to the Resurrection of the Body. It is significant that in replying to the Sadducees our Lord said : 'You err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God' (Matt. xxii, 29).

In other words, the revelation of Scripture is helped out by what our reason tells us of the omnipotent

## **Blackfriars**

power of God. Here more explicitly than elsewhere St. Thomas will be our guide.

(a) The first principle of reason is that the soul, as an intellectual and therefore simple substance, is naturally incorruptible and immortal (1<sup>a</sup> Qu. 75, Art. 6).

(b) The second principle of reason is that the soul is not man (1<sup>a</sup> Qu. 75, Art. 4). Even in the common speech of the people, that quarry of sound thinking, man is not said to be a soul, but to have a soul.

(c) The third principle of reason is that as man is not a soul, man is a soul and body. In other words, the body belongs essentially and not accidentally to the personality of man. It is almost incredible how common is a certain mild form of Manicheism, which seems to depreciate the human body as almost the sole source of sin, instead of being but a joint source and perhaps the lesser source in union with the soul. It must have been forgetfulness of the essential goodness of the body and of its essential union with the soul that dictated such words as the following :

‘As long as we suppose the mystery of death to be the division of soul and body, so long we must cling with a deep love to those remains which yet we are forced to regard with a kind of loathing. We shall be ready to believe stories of miracles wrought by them; we shall be half-inclined to worship them. Or if we reject this temptation—because Romanists have fallen into it—we shall take our own Protestant way of asserting the sanctity of relics by maintaining that at a certain day they will be gathered together, and that the very body to which they once belonged will be reconstructed out of them . . . If we did attach any meaning to that expression upon which St. Peter at Jerusalem, St. Paul at Antioch, dwelt so earnestly, that Christ’s body saw no corruption—we should not dare, I think, any longer to make the corrupt, degrading, shameful accidents which necessarily belong to that body in each of us, because we have sinned, the rule by which we judge of it here. How much less should we suppose

## *The Resurrection of the Body*

these to be the elements out of which its high and restored and spiritual estate can ever be fashioned' (Fr. D. Maurice, *Theological Essays*, 5th Ed., pp. 143, 151), quoted by H. D. A. Major, *A Resurrection of Relics* (Blackwell, 1922, pp. 49, 50).

1. It is difficult to find the exact meaning behind these words. The phrase 'corrupt, degrading, shameful accidents which necessarily belong to that body,' &c., seems to suggest either that sin has changed the substance of the body or that the body is the creation of a Manichean principle of evil.

2. It is evident that if from these 'corrupt, degrading, shameful accidents' there can be no fashioning of a spiritual estate for the body, still less can there be such a fashioning for the soul. It is clear that the qualifications, 'corrupt, degrading, shameful,' which are largely metaphorical when applied to the dying or dead body, are literal when applied to the dead soul. It is therefore evident that the incorrect doctrine of the death and resurrection of the body will lead to the denial of the spiritual resurrection and death of the soul.

3. It is astonishing that men like Maurice are found to belittle the human body as if it was no part, or no essential part, of our being, when it is a question of the Resurrection. But in other matters, as, for example, in the matter of Asceticism, they are found to exalt the human body as if it were a great and even a noble part of our being. Indeed, how otherwise could they retain a high opinion of human beings whose activities and pleasures are for the most part concerned with the body? How, too, could it be said, as it has been said by some, that the bodily procreative act is man's highest act?

From these exaggerations, and consequent contradiction, we are spared by the Catholic doctrine that

## *Blackfriars*

the body is essentially good and is essentially joined to the soul as part of the human personality. St. Thomas has summed up the value of this in these words :

‘ If the resurrection of the body is scorned, it is not easy, nay, it is hard, to hold the immortality of the soul. For it is evident that the soul is joined to the body naturally ; since to be separated from it is against nature and is accidental (*per accidens*). Hence the soul separated from the body is imperfect as long as it is without the body. But it is impossible that what is natural and essential (*per se*) should be finite, as it were, nothing, whereas what is unnatural and accidental should be infinite. This would be the case if the soul were to endure without the body. Hence the Neo-Platonists who admitted immortality supposed reincarnation ; but this is heretical. Hence if the dead do not rise again our only hope would be in this life ’ (In I. Cor. xv).

(d) The fourth principle of reason is the goodness not only of the body, but of matter. Those who, in order to deny the resurrection of the body, are obliged to deny the goodness of matter, must find themselves in opposition to modern science, on two counts :

First, modern science, by its own definition, is mostly, if not wholly, concerned with what it perceives by the five senses ; in other words, with matter. Now unless matter is essentially good, then modern science is mostly evil !

Secondly, if science is the knowledge of what comes to us through our bodily senses, and in the next world we have not bodily senses because we have not a body, then the next world will have no science !

(e) Sometimes it is urged that modern science, with its new views of matter, has made it impossible to believe the Resurrection of the Body.

Mr. H. D. A. Major, in *A Resurrection of Relics*, quotes the following authorities :

Bishop Goodwin of Carlisle : ‘ This view of the possibilities of the future resurrection is one *which our present*

## *The Resurrection of the Body*

*knowledge of matter* and its laws renders it imperative on all wise men to discard. Matter which appertains to one body at one time appertains to another body at another. The notion of particle being joined to particle, so as to reform a certain body involves an impossibility (*The Foundations of the Creed*, 2nd ed., p. 384).

' . . . It is the enunciation of a theory which a knowledge of the laws of matter shows to be untenable ' (*Ibid*, 390).

Canon C. H. Robinson, D.D. : ' The belief was widespread in early times that the material bodies of Christians would one day be literally resuscitated and would rise from their graves in a form visible to material eyesight . . . Modern science by showing that the particles of matter of which our present bodies are composed have previously formed part of the bodies of other beings, has rendered such a belief impossible ' (*Studies in the Resurrection of Christ*, 1911, pp. 13—17).

The most unscholarly, not to say uncharitable, quotation made by Mr. Major is from the same Canon Robinson, D.D. :

' . . . *In an age when physical science had hardly come to the birth, and when a man would have been excommunicated or put to death as a heretic* had he ventured to suggest that the particle of matter of which his body was composed might already have formed part of the bodies of others who had lived and died before him, the only way by which a belief in the preservation of human identity could be expressed in unambiguous terms was by the use of the language which was adopted in the Creed ' (*sic!*) *Ibid*.

On this we may say four things.

Firstly, this view of the constant flux of matter in the human body is so old that in the thirteenth century it has been elaborated by St. Thomas in a manner that almost defies the untrained thought of our day. If excommunication and death awaited the daring thinker who would have propounded the 'modern' theory, then through some miscarriage of justice the Angelic Doctor died a natural death in full communion with the Holy See!

## *Blackfriars*

It is almost incredible that a Doctor of Divinity should have made any such statement, and still more incredible that it should be quoted by one who holds an influential place at the University of Oxford. It will go far to discredit the Modernist claim to scholarship, which we have hitherto admitted on the admitted claim of the Dean of Carlisle.

Secondly, if the physical theory that the body is a passing flux of material particles disproves the survival of the body, then a kindred theory would seem to disprove the survival of the soul. Now, it is argued by very subtle thinkers that what we call the soul is but a series of states of consciousness—indeed, of states of present consciousness which as such are not sufficient to guarantee us the certitude of their being in organic unity with past consciousness.

If it be urged that although there is a succession of States of Consciousness, yet there is an abiding unity, it may be urged in reply that *mutatis mutandis* the same applies to the body. The patent empiric fact is the persistent unity, the scientific deduction in the flux of elements.

Thirdly, granted the fact—which personally I cannot call a verified fact—of the constant flux of particles in matter, it would seem that this does not disprove, but rather seems to prove the possibility of bodily resurrection. The alleged fact is that every particle in a body changes, and yet that the body remains the same.

Now consider the opposite theory, that no particle ever changes in a body. If this theory were true, there would be no evidence that a body can remain the same with change of matter. But as death does make a change of matter, the evidence for this theory would go to prove that a change of matter betokened a change of soul; in other words, that death makes it impossible that the same body should rise again.

## *The Resurrection of the Body*

Fourthly, the modern recent theories of matter are almost overwhelming on the side of the resurrection of the body. A recent scientific writer in *The Times* summed up the present views of the Nature of Matter :

‘ On the physical side the phenomena of light, electricity and magnetism are all being explained in terms of the electron. On the chemical side the properties and qualities of the arrangements of identical electrons are being explained in terms of the arrangements of identical electrons in different systems. There is, in fact, one unit of matter, the electron. And this unit of matter is itself immaterial ’ (*The Times*, 7 March, ‘ The Progress of Science ’).

‘ Modern Science,’ by saying that the unit of matter is itself immaterial, can hardly be taken to deny the possibility of the resurrection of the body; unless indeed it denies the immortality of mind, *i.e.* of the soul.

(*e*) The fifth principle of reason is that the soul is the *Causa Efficiens* of the Body from the moment of its union to the body.

When the soul is reunited to such a part of its body as will allow us to call it the same body, we may well see an instantaneous recapitulation of the formative process. Cytology seems to tell us that the really living essential of the unit-cell is almost infinitesimally small. Yet that microcosm has within it to form the microcosm of the finished organism. If it is only acceleration of motion we need for the full acceptance of the Resurrection or re-formation of the body in modes akin to the formation of the body, science has now given us that almost frictionless multiplying gear which has no limit save the adhesive power of the gear metal.

(*f*) Perhaps in this hard matter of the bodily resurrection some hope of recalling men to unity may be found in the condition of the risen body. Theology lays it down that not the substance of the body, but only its condition shall be changed. Body will not

## *Blackfriars*

become spirit; but whilst remaining body, it will become pliant and obedient to the spirit. Time and space will still remain. Some of the soul's supremacy over time and space will be given by the soul as a dowry to the body.

One last thought may end this defence of the Immortality of Man in terms of the Resurrection of man's body. The Church in thus seeming to cherish the lesser doctrine more than the greater is keeping her own customary way. When once the doctrine of the divinity of the Son and thus of Jesus Christ was officially defined, the Church was almost more intent on safeguarding His humanity than His divinity. The Oriental disregard for human freedom and personality made little account of denying the human will, and therefore the human freedom of Christ. But the Church understood that the sacred humanity could not be kept with the denial of a human will and freedom; and that ultimately, though the divinity of Jesus Christ did not rest on His humanity, man's belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ did and does rest on the belief in His humanity.

In a kindred way the Church is certain that, whilst the immortality of the soul does not rest on the resurrection of the body, yet man's belief in one may be imperilled by his disbelief of the other. For this reason the Church seems more concerned for the lesser than for the greater, for the sheath than for the sword, for the husk than for the kernel. Yet it is not in any mistaken view of the scale of values; but in a consciousness that what is of less importance may be in greater danger of being overlooked; and that the whole orb of truth, which the Church is commissioned to teach, must find a place not for what is most and best, but for what is all.

VINCENT McNABB, O.P.