

# Gender “Before” and “After” the Resurrection: Thoughts on Eschatological Anthropology

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## Introduction

Sex and paradise—do they have anything in common? What has bothered Christians least of all throughout the entire history of the church is the issue of whether or not we are going to have any “sex life” in the Kingdom of God. Will we have any bodily life at all after our resurrection—however we understand resurrection? And do we really need to add this matter to our spiritual agenda? One may object that there are matters of more serious dogmatic content. However, in our view—which we will demonstrate in this article—there is no more spiritual theme. Sex and paradise are directly related to each other. It is both a theological and a philosophical issue, and every such issue is worthy of due respect and attention.

Imagine that you were told to build the figure of an elephant and were given a certain number of puzzle pieces to work with. You do not know precisely how to make this figure from the puzzle pieces because you do not have any instructions. However, you have the materials and, what is most important, creative interest and intuition. Building this or that part of the figure you notice that the tail disappeared somewhere, or perhaps the elephant lacks an ear or has lost its trunk.

The same thing happens in theology. It does not matter what theological scheme you create: it can sound terrific and look attractive, but at the same time there may be something lacking. That being the case, using a whole array of compromises, we can throw out the scheme altogether, without any finishing touches. Maybe this or that gaping hole in the general system can be filled up with additional matter that is alien to the figure. Such a compromise is bound to annoy at least a few. The author of this article is no exception.

Probably it is difficult to discuss this topic because the theme of sex has been tainted in our secular society and removed from open debate among Christian theologians. It seems that even in our church fellowship this subject cannot be rid of its taboo. The Russian philosopher Berdiaev thinks that the predominant church culture of his time is responsible for this sense of shame. He writes:

Powerful sexual love was driven inward because it was refused blessing. It turned into a painful languor which is still with us. Ascetic Christian teaching permits sexual love only as a weakness of sinful human nature. Thus, sexual love remained a weakness, shame, almost dirt... The prevailing religious consciousness made the problem of sex dependant on a vulgar dualism of spirit and flesh connected with the sinfulness of the flesh, which was not only a moral but also a metaphysical mistake.<sup>[1]</sup>

In some sense we can say, following Jürgen Moltmann, that for most Christians the doctrine of last things (eschatology) is in no way connected with the beginning, but only with the final catastrophe. In his view, "Christian eschatology, however, has nothing to do with an apocalyptic final end because its theme is not 'the end' at all but its opposite—the new creation of all things."<sup>[2]</sup>

In Rev 21:1 we find the following words: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea." John talks here not only

about heaven *but also* about earth. But what about those passages in the Scriptures that clearly speak about heaven?

Some Bible scholars make an artificial distinction between the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God. We are not going to spend much time on the differences they make in describing the distinctions between these two "Kingdoms." We will only mention that there is no theological difference between them. Matthew prefers to speak of the Kingdom of Heaven, while Mark and Luke speak of the Kingdom of God. They are simply synonyms characteristic of the religious language of the Jews. Let us consider an example from Matthew and Luke. In Matt 18:3 we read, "And he said, 'Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.'" In Luke 18:17 the parallel passage reads, "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all." It is clear that the authors are not speaking of two different kingdoms but about one (see also Matt 4:17 and Mark 1:15; Matt 10:7 and Luke 9:2; Matt 5:3 and Luke 6:20; Matt 8:11 and Luke 13:29).

Let us take a look at 1Pet 1:4. The British New Testament scholar N. T. Wright gives the example of a friend who suggests cooling off on a hot summer day. At home in the refrigerator he has a bottle with a cold drink in it. Does that mean you need to climb into the refrigerator to quench your thirst? Hardly.<sup>[3]</sup> The same is valid for in the example of the treasure, i.e., the New

[1] Nicholas Berdiaev, *Eros i lichnost'* [Eros and personality] (St. Petersburg: Azbuka klassika, 2006) 28-29, 30. However, the author of this article does not agree with Berdiaev's androgynous understanding of the human being. An explanation of this disagreement is found in the course of this article.

[2] Jürgen Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes: Christliche Eschatologie* (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, Verlagshaus, 2 Auflage 2005), 12.

[3] Tom Wright, *Glavnaia taina Biblii: Smert' i zhizn' posle smerti v khristianstve* [Surprised by hope] (Moscow: EKSMO, 2009), 193.

Jerusalem that is “reserved” at the present moment in heaven. But there will be a day when this city will descend to us on earth (see Rev 21:2). We may consider other passages that use the words “heaven” or “heavens” in the corresponding context (2Cor 5:1; Php 3:20; Col 1:5; Heb 10:34).

### Historical-theological excursus

In his polemic against the Gnostics Origen tried to defend the justice of God in relation to His creation and also the fact that all people have full freedom in choosing Christ. This polemic took place in the context of debates concerning how to explain different degrees of evil and unbelief in the world. The Gnostics, being theological determinists, thought that this happens as a result of election which some have and others do not. Origen introduced the notion of the pre-existence of souls. According to him, people’s souls existed before their historical bodily incarnation. They and also the angels existed in some perfect form, contemplating the essence of the One God. Then the Fall took place, after which the gradation of souls occurred according to the measure of sins committed, whether lesser or greater. Thus appeared Satan, demons, angels and people, as well as the One who committed no sin at all—the spirit of Christ. People whose sin was not as terrible as that of Satan and the demons received a “second chance” and were incarnated on the earth. The spirit of Christ came to earth in bodily form to show people “the way home.” By following the example of Christ people can return to heaven at last in order to become part of the process of “apocatastasis” when God will become “all in all.” It is strange but Origen, who gave battle to the determinism of the

Gnostics ended up with quite a deterministic pantheistic system himself in which even Satan was supposed to return to God and become part of the divine essence.

What is so absorbing about this system? We may note that Origen drew more attention to what happened in the pre-historic spiritual sphere where, in his opinion, the Fall and its reconciliation took place. Historical reality plays a lesser role because everything was decided beforehand: all must turn to God and aspire to unity with Him. Unity generally was understood in terms of merging with God. In this way, in the East thanks to the tradition of Origen, salvation came to be understood first of all as an ascent to God, a return to the heavenly sphere, and not to earth.

Because of Gregory of Nyssa who, in many ways, shared Origen’s worldview, the Eastern Orthodox tradition absorbed in some sense “Origenistic contraband.” Gregory also greatly emphasized the spiritual rather than the physical resurrection of humanity. On the one hand, he denied that there should be resurrection of “other” bodies, because that would suggest *another new creation*. On the other hand, Gregory spoke about the sojourn in paradise of the bodiless souls of people after they have been raised from the dead. This is an obvious inconsistency. For Gregory it was also natural to talk about the pre-cosmic, pre-historical Fall, and he mainly understood unity with God in terms of absorption into the Godhead.

Origen’s influence on Gregory of Nyssa was so great that the latter’s attempt to reverse his teacher’s anathema was unsuccessful. The division of humanity into two genders, male and female, corresponds to the differentiation in Origen’s thought between soul and body. In the

case of Origen this division took place after the Fall; however, in Gregory's case it happened because the Fall itself was foreseen by God.<sup>[4]</sup> But the result actually remains the same: the plurality, diversity, sensibility, and materiality of humankind *are not* part of God's initial plan. Rather they became a necessity in the face of the Fall. This idea of Gregory's is expressed succinctly by George Florovskiy:

In addition, there will be no organs or any parts associated with the needs of this earthly life in resurrected bodies—"death will cleanse the body from the superfluous and unnecessary for the enjoyment of the future life..." This relates to the digestive apparatus and to the functions of growth, which are associated with cell renewal and with growth. Above all, it relates to the differentiation of the sexes. Generally, all coarse materiality is overcome and the heaviness of the flesh disappears. The body becomes light, striving upward...<sup>[5]</sup>

Further, Gregory clearly follows Origen, pointing out that all three vessels of evil will be healed by Christ—the devil's nature, and the male and female sexes.<sup>[6]</sup> In this way, although not in all its fullness, the Cappadocian Father restores Origen's scheme of salvation in his eschatology.

According to the Orthodox understanding of spirituality which, as it is supposed, finds its full reflection in the monastic tradition of hesychasm, one may conclude that a human body, including

its concern for food, as well as its thoughts and emotions, is a kind of obstacle for reaching union with God, which is understood in deeply mystical terms as contemplation of the divine light. In spite of the fact that the body is an object of theosis, i.e., glorification according to hesychast tradition, many monks nevertheless went to extremes when they despised their flesh. Syrian hermits remain the clearest examples in church history of a scornful attitude to the body—they buried themselves in the earth, perched on columns, and made vows that demonstrated their disdain for anything sensual as something sinful.

Tomáš Ďpidlik refers to Merezhkovskiy who, following Nicholas Berdiaev in his critique, asserts that one can accuse the traditional church of an overestimation of asceticism and bodiless spirituality, and of insufficient concern for the meaning of conjugal union and to everything that is associated with body. Therefore, the contemporary teaching of the church and contemporary culture are mutually impermeable.<sup>[7]</sup> We may also note here the praise of virginity by the Church Fathers and ascetic monks. However, one gets the impression that virginity is extolled as a merit in itself. In defending virginity two arguments are used: 1) Jesus Christ was single and 2) a life of virginity is the life of angels, i.e., it is devoid of passions.<sup>[8]</sup>

We may object that celibacy (not virginity!) is praised in the Scriptures, not

<sup>[4]</sup> Donald Fairbairn, *Lectures on Soteriology in Church History*, (Erskine Theological Seminary, 2004).

<sup>[5]</sup> George Florovskiy, *Vostochnye otsy IV veka* [The eastern fathers of the IV<sup>th</sup> century] (Moscow: ACT, 2002), 251.

<sup>[6]</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>[7]</sup> Merezhkovskiy, *Griadushchii khram* [The future

temple] (Petersburg, 1906), 123; *Ne mir, a mech* [Not peace, but a sword] (St. Petersburg, 1908), 28; quoted by Tomáš Ďpidlik, *Russkaia ideia: inoe videnie cheloveka* [The Russian idea: Another vision of man] (St. Petersburg: Izdatelstvo Olega Abishko, 2006), 277.

<sup>[8]</sup> Ďpidlik. 279.

because of moral-ethical norms or the possibility of more effective theosis/sanctification, but because of more dedicated ministry to people (1Cor 7:25-35) which implies self-giving. Paul was an apostle who sacrificially dedicated himself to ministry. An illustration from sports training is quite acceptable and biblical (1Cor 9:24). An athlete has to abstain from certain kinds of food, alcohol, and from an active sexual life. But this is not because everything listed is harmful, unnecessary or bad. Rather, it is because one sets a goal in order to reach a reward and a result.

What is more, the Bible nowhere judges passion as such, but only the outpouring of passion outside the lawful borders of marriage (1Cor 7:1-10). The Greek word *epithumia* (passion, strong desire, lust) is used in the New Testament to denote strong desire, a longing both for God and fellowship with the brethren (1Thess 2:17); at the same time this word is used to indicate a sinful uncontrolled lust (1Jn 2:16). It all depends on the object of the desire: whether it is directed for good, both toward humanity and God or toward something sinful.

The Orthodox-Byzantine attitude to bodily reality also becomes clear when we look at icons: there we see only the domain of grace, while the body of the saint is depicted on the icon as being completely absorbed by divine energy. The saint participates in the “grace” of God’s Kingdom, while his body is intentionally portrayed in a somewhat distorted way to demonstrate deification, the transformation of humanity. In addition, there is an emphasis on dispassion (*apatheia*). Only

during the Renaissance (with all the secular character of this cultural phenomenon) did the body, and indeed all of nature, return to their proper place. Since Jan van Eyck, there appeared in Renaissance painting a new tradition in which artists portrayed a more realistic view of the environment, including saints.<sup>[9]</sup> However, in the Byzantine tradition the greater position is still given to “grace.” In his post-mortal state the human being participates in the grace of the highest reality.

Some speak of the Hellenistic influence on the Christian worldview. This is partially valid, with some reservations. Christians often think of death as a means of crossing over into the highest reality (heaven) from the lowest (earth). In this way death is considered as a kind of “friend,” while for the apostle Paul it is a mortal enemy (1Cor 15:54-56).<sup>[10]</sup>

### Biblical Analysis

How did the ancient Jews understand resurrection? In Eze 37:1-10 we may observe the process of resurrection from the dead as witnessed by the prophet. Ezekiel saw dry bones lying on the ground. At the word of the prophet, they were covered with sinews, flesh and skin. Then the spirit came upon them and they became alive.

We also read in Isa 66:22-23: “For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me, says the Lord, so shall your descendants and your name remain. And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, *all*

<sup>[9]</sup> For more detail see Francis Schaeffer, *On zdes' i On ne molchit* [Escape from reason] (St Petersburg: Mirt, 2002), 185-189.

<sup>[10]</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 596.

*flesh* shall come to worship before me," says the Lord" (italics added).

We see that here the subject is bodily resurrection (Hebrew *basar* – "flesh"). In addition, to finally establish the argument in favor of a real physical and material view of resurrection we quote Isa 65:17-25:

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth [see Rev 21:1.5]; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy and its people as a delight [see Rev 21:2]. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people [see Rev 21:3]; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress [see Rev 21:4]. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—and their descendants as well. Before they call, I will answer, while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt nor destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

This passage is important because the apostle John alludes to it in Rev 21-22. However, John does not quote the passage

in full. In other words, John, in making use of expressions such as "new heavens and a new earth," alludes to Isaiah, who draws a broader panorama of the coming age associated with the new creation. True, in Revelation John lays out the events of the Kingdom of God in more symbolic language.

Some scholars think that Isaiah is speaking here about the millennial reign of Christ. However, this is doubtful because John speaks about "a new heaven and a new earth" in chronological order only after "the millennial kingdom" (Rev 20). Secondly, Isaiah speaks of offspring that will never be brought forth in trouble. The fact that the descendants of people once gathered under the rule of Satan will be destroyed by fire from heaven (Rev 20:7-9) suggests that the millennial reign is not being discussed. In any case, those interpreters of the Scriptures who see the millennial kingdom in Isa 65 assume that this reign has nothing to do with the earth or material things at all.

According to the vision of the prophet we can make the following conclusions:

1. We will live on a new earth and we will eat food;
2. We will rejoice in the work of our hands; there will be no exploitation;
3. We will also have blessed offspring.

In any case, it is clear that if descendants are mentioned, there must be room to talk about a nuptial bed. And if that is so, we may assume that humankind in the Kingdom of God will still keep its sexual differences. However, this conclusion already conflicts with the general ecclesiastical and historically determined way of understanding paradise. It seems to contradict some passages, as for example Mark 12:25: "For when they rise from

the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” It is strange that many quote Mark 12:25 without bringing their conclusions to the logical end: will we have bodies, and what will then distinguish us from the angels themselves? We refer to an excerpt from a book by Ben Witherington III who writes:

In the first place, the discussion is about levirate marriage, not all marriages, and in a deathless state there will be no more point to levirate marriage. Levirate marriage is unlike regular marriage in that it only exists because of death: the obligation to raise up an heir for a deceased brother was felt to require such an institution. Furthermore, Jesus does not say there will be no more state of marriage in the kingdom; he says there will be no more new acts of marrying—no marrying (the male’s role in a patriarchal situation) or being given in marriage (the bride’s role). To this one may add that early Jews did not generally think that angels were sexless creatures (cf. Bar. 56:14). There is thus nothing in Mark 12 to support the notion that Jesus saw marriage as ceasing in the resurrection. What Jesus taught was that there would be no more change of status in the resurrection.<sup>[11]</sup>

Thus, Jesus is speaking of levirate marriage (Deut 25:5.6) not about marriage as such. Of course, the Sadducees themselves approached the issue of bodily resurrection literally because their question implies some irony which even gentiles could share: if there is a resurrection, whose wife will she be? In addition, questions like

this were raised in early times not only by gentiles, but also by Jewish rabbis.<sup>[12]</sup>

Witherington also notes that Jews in the inter-testamental period did not consider angels sexless. For example, in Gen 6:1-4 it says that the “sons of God” took the daughters of men to marry. The phrase “the sons of God” may be an allusion to Job 1:6 where it is used for angelic beings. In this light we can understand the context of Jude 6 and 1Pet 3:19-20 where the authors speak about the spirits who were imprisoned. Of course, by far not all scholars think that Gen 6 refers to angels. However, in our previous example of the “elephant” the trunk has not yet been confused with the tail. The ancient Jews, the Church Fathers and the Reformers shared the view that Gen 6 concerns angels. Looking at Jude 6 and 1Pet. 3:18-20 we may conclude that some angels did not keep “their proper domain” (“authority, domain, ministry” – *arhe*) during the time of Noah. It follows that these angels entered into relations with women, leaving their dwelling and ministry.

But this begs the question, how could “spiritual” beings produce material bodies? How could they have the capacity to reproduce? It seems that the Bible, in this case, does not allow us to build any detailed theories. However, it is clear that after the union of the “sons of God” with the daughters of men, the latter gave birth to giants, in other words “mutants” or “hybrids.” Thus, we can explain the wrath of God on humankind. On the other hand, the Scriptures indicate that spiritual beings have the capacity to materialize, which is different from the incarnation which took place in the case of Jesus. Materialized angels can be visible, tangible; they can eat (Gen 18:3-8), and they seem always to appear like men (Joshua 5:13-15),

<sup>[11]</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Seer: The Progress of Prophecy* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 267.

<sup>[12]</sup> Tom Wright, *Glavnaia taina Biblii*, p. 199.

whom people could not conceive of as something bodiless and transparent.

Also some interpreters quote Gen 18:1-2, which, according to some scholars, speaks of three *angelic* beings. In Augustine's view believes there is an indication that the passage points to God, i.e., the Trinity.<sup>[13]</sup> He, that is, God ate a meal that had been cooked in Abraham's house. However, proponents of "spiritual bodies" maintain that the visitors are "spirits," and if they are, it is not surprising that Jesus' body was also "spiritual," although He ate fish with the apostles after He had been raised from the dead. But then the situation becomes more complicated because John's Gospel intentionally describes events in such a way as to demonstrate that Jesus still had the very body He had had before his death and resurrection. He showed his disciples his wounds (20:27) and ate together with them (21:1-15). So if Jesus did not have a physical body, what did John mean to say?

In the opposite case, if in the Kingdom of God there is no difference in gender between humans, will there at least be any apparent difference between angels and people? The very idea of humanity implies gender, that there will be men and women. This question concerns our understanding of biblical anthropology, which we will address in the context of the discussion on salvation.

We may add that the words of Jesus on marriage resonate with the statement Paul made in Rom 14:17: "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." This principle plays the same role as in Jesus' comment on levirate

marriage in Mark's passage. What is the essence of the Kingdom? Is it matters of marriage and family, or matters of food and eating? Is it about social concerns? No. It is first of all about peace, joy and fellowship with God. All the rest is secondary in a world which will be not only brought back to its original state but also glorified.

With regard to food, we could say that Jesus contradicted Paul at the Last Supper when He said that He will wait for the time when He will drink wine anew in His Kingdom (Mark 14:25). If we talk about a new heaven and a new earth it is logical to assume that there will be new food as well (Isa 65:21-22). The fact that humans originally ate a vegetable diet is evident from Genesis 1.

Someone may object that Scripture itself, in speaking about the resurrection, mentions the idea of a "spiritual body" (1Cor 15:42-44): "So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body."

In our view it is evident from the context that the apostle is speaking here about the human body that will be glorified at the moment of Jesus' Second Coming. We will have a new incorruptible body which, of course, will remain physical. In the Pauline epistles the notion of "spiritual" relates to a new reality which will be brought about by God. We may consider the way Paul uses the word "spiritual" in the New Testament (1Cor 2:15; 10:3-4; Gal 6:1 and 1Pet 2:5). In this regard the Baptist theologian Stanley Grenz writes:

<sup>[13]</sup> For more detail see Augustine, *De Trinitate* Book 2, Chapter XII (Krasnodar: Glagol, 2004), 63-64.



We enter into the fullness of God's design only through a radical change. This change is, of course, ethical: our susceptibility to sin ("flesh") must be rooted out, replaced by complete conformity to Christ ("spirit"). This change is likewise physical: our mortality—our susceptibility to disease and death—must be transformed into immortality.<sup>[14]</sup>

Here Grenz follows quite a Protestant understanding of Paul's use of opposite expressions such as "spirit vs. flesh." Martin Luther pointedly explained this opposition: whoever lives according to the flesh lives in rebellion against God, and whoever lives according to the spirit lives in union with God. Thus, for Paul these juxtapositions of spirit and flesh are symbolic. We also must note that the Old Testament has a high view both of the human soul (Pss 30:12; 33:20; 119:175), and human flesh (Pss 63:1; 65:2; 73:26; 84:2; 145:21). In any case, the biblical view of soul, spirit, and flesh—keeping in mind the Old Testament witness—assumes a holistic nature. In various meanings these words sometimes simply indicate an individual. If we think of the spirit as an indistinct human substance that is completely devoted to God and then carefully consider some passages it is clear that we can exchange the word "spirit" with the word "soul" (Pss 142:3; 142:4.7).

In speaking of the so-called "spiritual body," Grenz continues, it seems that Paul really uses a contradictory term. According to Grenz Paul does not imply a body made out of spirit. The Canadian theologian refers to the authoritative Bap-

tist New Testament scholar George Ladd who thinks that the term "spiritual body" refers to that reality when "the body is transformed by and adapted to the new world of God's spirit."<sup>[15]</sup> Therefore, in our view, a "spiritual body" does not have any relation to a bodiless, ephemeral substance. N. T. Wright, referring to the First Epistle to the Corinthians, states:

We need to understand that for a Pharisee of Paul's circles the resurrection doubtlessly and unconditionally means only one thing: restoration *in the body*. ...On the one hand, Paul does not reduce it to some banal reanimation: Jesus did not show up before His disciples with his previous appearance. On the other hand, [Paul] did not think that the resurrection could happen "out of" the physical body. ...First century Jews imagined the post mortal destiny of men differently. However, in regard to the way the resurrection will happen they prefer not to guess or debate. In any case, it was associated with acquiring a new "body"—some new physical condition. And when, in chapter 15, Paul speaks about the "spiritual body," he does not mean "spiritual" in some platonic sense, as something opposite to material. He is speaking about precisely the physical *body*, but one that is *filled* with "spirit."<sup>[16]</sup>

In his other work Wright returns to this issue; he expresses these ideas in greater detail in the book *Surprised by Hope*, which is wholly dedicated to the question of resurrection:

Unfortunately, many interpreters transfer this idea completely incorrectly, and

<sup>[14]</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, p. 586.

<sup>[15]</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *Last Things* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), 83, as quoted in Grenz,

*Theology for the Community of God*, p. 587.

<sup>[16]</sup> N. T. Wright, *Что на самом деле сказал апостол Павел?* [What did the apostle Paul really say?] (Moscow: BBI, 2004), 51.

their mistake supports the conviction that Paul understood the new body as a "spiritual"—i.e., immaterial—body; if Jesus had been resurrected in this sense, He would not have left the tomb empty. Philology and exegesis allow us in this case to show that Paul had no such thing in mind. He juxtaposes what we would call the present "physical" and the future "spiritual" body, but he draws a boundary line between the present body that is animated by the ordinary human soul and the future body that is animated by the Spirit of God.<sup>[17]</sup>

Another passage that can seem difficult to understand is 1Cor. 6:13: "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food, but God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." First of all, Paul is speaking in the context of abuses that took place in the Corinthian church. Second, it is apparent that Paul differentiates between such notions as "stomach" and "body." Even if we conditionally accept such that God will "destroy" both stomach and food, what are we to do with the body which is kept in purity for the Lord? However, it seems that Paul here is thinking from within the context of the painful and unclean connection between the stomach and food in the early Corinthian church. Paul is here quoting a famous Greek philosophical saying. As Kiner affirms:

"Food for the stomach and the stomach for food" is typical for some trends in Greek philosophy analogous to the idea that the body is designed for adultery and

adultery for the body. The conviction that God will destroy both of them reflected a general unwillingness to accept the teaching on resurrection by the Greeks (chapter 15), because they thought that each person is created along with a mortal body. Paul objects to this, relying on the Old Testament view that the body is for God and he will raise it from the dead.<sup>[18]</sup>

Another passage that relates to our discussion is 1Cor 15:50-54. Paul, as may be seen from the context, is simply speaking about flesh in the present, which will either: 1) change (*allasso*), or 2) die in order to experience its future resurrection. Because the present flesh is not perfect and is under a curse (Gen 3:14), it is destined either to die or change so that it may inherit the Kingdom of God.

We may interpret 2Cor 5:1-10 along the same lines. However everything becomes clear in the context of Wright's general reflections, which were mentioned above: Paul is speaking here about the New Jerusalem (5:1, see also Rev 21).

There is also a certain parallel between the body and food. At the Last Supper Jesus mentioned the future banquet and the marriage supper of the Lamb, which implies that in the Kingdom we will be able to eat (Matt 26:29). Jesus affirmed, "And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 8:11). "Lying down" (reclining) does not suggest a state of sleep, but rather the manner of eating and enjoying conversation according to the Eastern custom.

[17] Tom Wright, *Glavnaia taina Biblii*, p. 77.

[18] Craig Keener, *Bibleiskiy kul'turno-istoricheskiy kommentariy. Chast' 2, Novyi Zavet* [The IVP Bible

background commentary: New Testament] (St Petersburg: Mirt, 2005), 396.

## Theological Reflections on the Resurrection of the Body

[I believe] in the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the *body* (Greek, *sarkos*, “flesh”)...

The Apostles' Creed<sup>[19]</sup>

If we emphasize the “spiritual” structure of the human body after its resurrection, doesn't that annul the most important, central part of theology, namely the idea of incarnation? If Jesus became a man, it is evident that He intends to redeem and resurrect the human body. As Irenaeus of Lyons and Athanasius said, “God became man so that man could become a god.” But if the body becomes the object of annihilation, what is the sense of incarnation? The idea of the incarnation of God the Word is that the Son of God came to earth to redeem, heal and raise people from the dead, including soul, spirit, and body—the entire personhood. We see from the Epistle to the Romans that our present body will be redeemed: “Not only the creation, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23). Paul also refers to the fact that the whole universe, every created thing, waits for this revelation of God's children (Rom 8:19-22).

Christian theological tradition has several views on the consequent destiny of the universe. It happens that many evangelicals (we will consider the reasons later) accept the theory, according to which (with some reservations) the whole visible material world will be destroyed (*annihilatio mundi*), including sinners. The souls of redeemed saints will remain in the

presence of God where they will contemplate His blissful vision throughout eternity. Reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann states the following in this regard:

The theological foundation for this point of view is that angels and believers will be so completely absorbed by *visio beatifica*—the bliss of the contemplation of God face to face (1 Cor. 13:12) that they will lose the necessity of contemplating God through the created world of earthly things. Thus, heaven, earth and the mortal body will be destroyed like scaffolding at the moment when the final goal of God—the salvation of souls—will be accomplished.<sup>[20]</sup>

His thought is repeated by Stanley Grenz:

The human sciences have reached a virtual consensus that the body is constitutive of humanness. We are embodied creatures, not just immortal souls housed for a time within bodies. Only the hope of resurrection takes seriously this holistic understanding of the human person. The doctrine of the resurrection affirms that we do not enter into the fullness of eternity apart from the body, but only in the body.<sup>[21]</sup>

Further, Grenz, alluding to the Lutheran theologian Wolfgang Pannenberg, asserts (and emphasizes Moltmann's point), that a human being cannot be in some disembodied state after death. Grenz states:

More critically, placing the soul in any state of conscious existence beyond death means that the disembodied soul participates in new experiences apart from the

<sup>[19]</sup> Philip Schaff and David S. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books), 14-22.

<sup>[20]</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Nauka i mudrost': K dialogu*

*estestvennykh nauk i bogosloviia* [Science and wisdom: Toward a dialogue of natural science and theology] (Moscow: BBI, 2005), 80.

<sup>[21]</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Kingdom of God*, p. 588.

body (such as disembodied cognition of events happening on earth, disembodied relationships with other souls, or disembodied experiences of bliss or torment). But because the soul brings with it these additional postmortem experiences, the resurrected person who meets God at the judgment is not identical with the earthly person.<sup>[22]</sup>

It appears that some evangelical preachers are so fascinated with eschatological ideas about the tribulation, millennial kingdom, and other extravagant thoughts about the rapture of the Church that they lose the connection with the Old Testament message, both about the holistic nature of humanity and the goodness of the material world (1Tim 4:4-5). The focus of the Jewish-Christian worldview is obscured by a tight filter of gnostic thinking.

This idea is natural for the medieval conception of paradise and bliss. It is not surprising that the Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft, having laid an excellent foundation for thinking about human gender, nevertheless, first of all, does not discard the category of "heaven" in his reflections and, second, thinks that human souls will be so focused on the vision of the Almighty that sex for them will be something comparable to children's fondness for candy.<sup>[23]</sup>

Nevertheless, Kreeft shares some of his keen insights with regard to what the male and female sexes mean. He notes that sex is not about what a human being does but who he or she is. Kreeft, obviously in a lighthearted way, suggests that his readers imagine a book titled *The Sexual Life of a*

*Nun*.<sup>[24]</sup> He insists that we can truly affirm that a nun's sexuality is expressed by who she is and how she behaves. He explains:

But it is a perfectly proper title: all nuns have a sexual life. They are women, not men. When a nun prays or acts charitably, *she* prays or acts, not he. Her celibacy forbids intercourse, but it cannot forbid her to be a woman. In everything she does her essence plays a part, and her sex is as much a part of her essence as her age, her race, and her sense of humor.<sup>[25]</sup>

That is, sexual relationships are expressed not so much in intercourse itself, as in polarities that culminate in unity. And here we completely agree. Therefore, we can understand (not without some reservations) Nicholas Berdiaev's proposal:

Sex is something that should be overcome; sex is a rupture. While the rupture remains, there is no individuality, there is no whole person. But overcoming sex is the affirmation of it, not its denial. It is the creative unification of the sexes, not the refusal of sexual languor.<sup>[26]</sup>

Once again, Kreeft is right in saying that all creation is charged with sexual languor. Pluses and minuses, positive and negative, dark and light, strong and weak, coarse and soft—the entire universe is full of these polarities. And this is most clearly seen in humanity.

There is another question that may draw our attention if we are talking about "spiritual resurrection." If God does not want to raise fallen humanity from the dead, it means that He is creating *another* humanity. And this is exactly what He is doing, according to the logic of those

<sup>[22]</sup> Ibid., 592.

<sup>[23]</sup> This is a very interesting article. Peter Kreeft, *Is There Sex in Heaven?* Hamilton Hall, Columbia University, October 21, 1996. <http://www.columbia.edu/>

[cu/augustine/arch/sexnheaven.html](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/augustine/arch/sexnheaven.html) (2 January 2009).

<sup>[24]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[25]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[26]</sup> Berdiaev, *Eros i lichmost'*, p. 37.

phave a physical body, if he does not need to eat and use the gifts and resources of earth and nature—everything natural to creation—then it follows that this will be a *different* type or humanity. Thus, the first creation was not restored or redeemed but simply *annulled*. But according to our brief analysis, this does not correspond to biblical reality. Thus the question arises, why did Christ die on the cross for the old humanity if they were marked for destruction? We also have to respond to the question of the theological understanding of creation and death. God created humanity (Adam and Eve), that is, a family consisting of man and woman. They shared fellowship with God. Sin and its consequences of spiritual and physical death *destroyed* this fellowship (*koinonia*) with God. If we understand death as a break, or a rupture in fellowship with God, then it is clear that the resurrection is thought of as overcoming death, the restoration of fellowship—and not the making of a new creation. If we understand death as something planned and the new creation after the resurrection as something bodiless and sexless, then created humanity—man and woman—does not truly reflect God’s desired image. Thus humanity as a creature of two sexes is merely an intermediate incomplete evolutionary byproduct (with the exception of the notion of “evolution,” see the works of Gregory of Nyssa). This is the redeemed spiritual, sexless creature that is the culmination of evolution thus understood!

But Scripture does not leave that impression on the reader. After each act of creation God says, “It is good.” And it is “not good” in God’s eyes for Adam to be alone (Gen 2:18). From the beginning it was God’s intention to create humanity as two, not one.

As stated above, Peter Kreeft suggests remarkable considerations about how to understand gender “in heaven.”<sup>[27]</sup> He writes, “God may unmake what *we* make, but He does not unmake what *He* makes. God made sex, and God makes no mistakes.”<sup>[28]</sup> Nevertheless, Kreeft fails to offer a solution to the question of whether sexual relationships will be retained in the Kingdom of God, not to mention his use of the phrase “in heaven.” He states:

Even the most satisfying earthly intercourse between spouses cannot perfectly express *all* their love. If the possibility of intercourse in Heaven is not actualized, it is only for the same reason earthly lovers do not eat candy during intimacy: there is something much better to do [C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*]. The question of the possibility of intercourse in Heaven is like a child asking whether you can eat candy during intercourse. The question is funny only from the adult’s point of view. Candy is one of children’s greatest pleasures; how can they conceive a pleasure so intense that it renders candy irrelevant? Only if you know both can you compare two things, and all those who have tasted both the delights of physical intercourse with the earthly beloved and the delights of spiritual intercourse with God testify that there is simply no comparison.<sup>[29]</sup>

<sup>[27]</sup> It is noteworthy that even such an insightful and in many aspects conservative a Baptist theologian as Millard Erickson, whose books are standard materials in systematic theology classes in many evangelical seminaries, is inclined to consider life in the Kingdom as a “state.” See Millard Erickson, *Khristianskoe*

*bogoslovie* [Christian theology] (St Petersburg: Biblia Dlya Vseh, 1999), 1041-42. Like Kreeft, Erickson does not recognize the ambiguity of the notion of “heaven.”

<sup>[28]</sup> Peter Kreeft, *Is There Sex in Heaven?*

<sup>[29]</sup> *Ibid.*

And here the dualism of spiritual and physical, heavenly and earthly is most evidently preserved. The logic of the Catholic philosopher is simple: people "in heaven" will be so fascinated and focused on the vision of God that they will "not be interested in candy." It appears that Peter Kreeft, having firmly underlined the relevance of the theme and alluded to the danger of Gnosticism, nevertheless cannot depart in his thinking from the framework of Catholic dogmatic theology and the *visio beatifica*. Something similar happens in evangelicalism when such authors as John Piper write books with titles like *This Momentary Marriage*. He states on his web page that, "Romance, sex, and childbearing are temporary gifts of God. So is marriage. It will not be part of the next life."<sup>[30]</sup> Piper is convinced that marriage temporarily demonstrates a covenant parallel between Christ and the church. It is a short-term gift.<sup>[31]</sup>

Kreeft is adamant: earth is akin to a colony for multiplication, but heaven is our home.<sup>[32]</sup> Why? Kreeft does not consider passages like Gen 1:28; 2:24 and does not proceed further in his reflections, because God initially intended humanity to be a dual sexual being, not unisexual. Why did God give humans reproductive organs? What will happen to them after the resurrection?

Though neither Kreeft, nor other scholars (see Erickson, Piper) discuss this subject in detail, the opinion exists that a human being has to experience on earth a special encounter with God and make a decision to be with Him in eternity. It is clear that new generations of people

who will be born "in heaven" will not have this opportunity. There will be no temptations and trials there. They may have in mind those who, logically, will be born in the Millennial Kingdom. However, the problem with such reasoning is that these thinkers do not take into consideration the millions who were victims of abortion. And what about those who died in childhood? In a certain sense, "theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mat 19:14).

If children inherit the Kingdom and also those who died without reaching the age when one can "refuse evil and choose good" (Isa 7:15-16), then the issue is closed. In the Kingdom of God there will be a generation of new people who will take part in all the blessings which their parents received by the grace of God. If all people participate in Adam's sin even though they personally did not commit sin in Eden (Gen 3), then the heirs of the resurrected will also participate in all the blessings of those who were once redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ. And they, in turn, will participate in the fruits of victory that were gained by the second Adam—Jesus Christ.

### Earth Annihilation Theory

According to this view, which we have already touched in passing, this present earth will be destroyed by God's punishing fire, and the righteous redeemed by Jesus' blood will go to heaven where they will enjoy eternal bliss in the presence of God. There are many hymns written on this theme. We will point out the problematic character of this understanding

<sup>[30]</sup> John Piper's web page, *Desiring God* (2010). <http://www.desiringgod.org> (30 January 2010).

<sup>[31]</sup> John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable*

*of Permanence* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books), 177-178.

<sup>[32]</sup> Peter Kreeft, *Is There Sex in Heaven?*

which, it seems to us, leads to an unbiblical perspective on God's Kingdom. Let us consider some passages.

In 2Pet 3:7.10 the apostle talks about fire that will destroy the earth and everything on it. We may note that Peter uses apocalyptic language here: fire for the Old Testament prophets is a symbol of God's *punishment and purification*. We hardly need think that the fire will literally burn the earth.<sup>[33]</sup> The fire will destroy the deeds of people, sin as such. If we follow the traditional view of the eternal destiny of sinners, a conservative Christian would scarcely say that sinners punished in hell will be annihilated. Hellfire is a symbol of torture and punishment.

What is more, if we follow the "literal and chronological" understanding of how these events will happen before the Kingdom comes, we see in Revelation that John says nothing about fire that destroys the earth. The fire he mentions in Rev 20:9 falls down from heaven and devours the enemies of God. In fact, John says nothing about any annihilation of the planet. In other words, the earth will not be destroyed but renewed. In this regard Jürgen Moltmann affirms:

Thereby the individuality of every created being is retained, but their present form of life—mortality—is transformed into a form of life whose name is immortality. According to the Revelation of St. John (21:5), God says, "Behold, I am making all things new." He promises not simply some new creation. He speaks about the same creation, which was already created. We should expect not the creation

of an absolutely new world but a radical change of the existing world. The basis for this statement is, first, the word "all," and second, the divine, "I am making"—in Hebrew *asa* ("to give form"), which differs from *bara* ("to create," i.e., to make the non-existing exist).<sup>[34]</sup>

Moltmann probably alludes here to Isa 66:22, although its use is different from the use of the verb *bara* in Isa 65:17. Apparently in this context they are synonyms. Nevertheless, Moltmann's idea is clear. But for a fuller picture, we would like to note a distinctive use of the adjective *kainos* ("new") by John in Rev 21:1.

*Kainos*, unlike *neos* ("new, young"), is used by biblical authors with regard to leavened dough, wine and a reborn person. The principle difference between these two words is that *kainos* conveys the idea of renewal whereas *neos* conveys the idea of youth and radical difference. In other words, *kainos* refers to things which in their substantial and material qualities remain the same but are renewed. But *neos* signifies a radical change of the substance as such. For instance, the Greeks did not use the word "juice." They spoke of "new wine." Of course there is a substantial difference between juice and wine.

This is of paramount importance for us to understand the idea of "a new heaven and a new earth." Therefore, it is necessary to clarify and complete Moltmann's idea: earth, nature, humanity, the universe will remain of the same kind, but will be renewed and glorified.

### Sex, Church, and the Trinity

The subject of sex is quite intimate and delicate. Obviously this is because sexual intimacy is in itself something private. However, we would like to call the read-

<sup>[33]</sup> Concerning apocalyptic language in Jesus' sayings see N. T. Wright who deals with it in greater detail in *Iisus i pobeda Boga* [Jesus and the victory of God] (Moscow: BBI, 2004).

<sup>[34]</sup> Moltmann, *Nauka i mudrost'*, p. 58.

er's attention to a certain fact. For all that many evangelicals would agree that sex is God's gift, most of them would consider it downright seditious that a conversation about sex, in relation to our understanding of salvation and sanctification, could be spiritual.<sup>[35]</sup> "Spiritual" is an adjective easily applied to churchly things, as in "spiritual song," "spiritual brother," "spiritual conversation," "spiritual preaching," and "spiritual way of life," but not "spiritual sex."<sup>[36]</sup> Of course, this is an exaggeration, but the reader may find a grain of truth in it.

We stated above that God came to earth to redeem humanity—the whole human being, including sex. We also indicated that the human being was designed by God in the plural, a being with two genders. The consequent reproduction that took place is not something sinful and fleshly that happened as a result of the Fall. In Gen 1 the man and woman were told, "Be fruitful and multiply." From the beginning God knew that it was not good for Adam to be alone. The Creator brought Eve to him, who according to the words of Moses was supposed to be "the mother of all the living" (3:20), although chronologically this name was given to her after the Fall. However, before this event (Gen 2:24) it was said that a man will leave his parents and be joined to his wife, thereby creating a new social unit—the family.

It follows that men and women were designed as social creatures who can express their being by means of sharing in

fellowship with other humans and with God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Thus, when people realize themselves as social beings, they demonstrate the image and likeness of God. As John Eldredge points out, the transcendent God demonstrates to the world His beauty through woman: one cannot get enough of a woman's beauty.<sup>[37]</sup> It can be said of a man that he demonstrates to the world the creative character of God: he conquers, causes to tremble, and defends the beauty that most of all needs his help and care.

Besides this, in Scripture we see some impressive passages about marriage and the relationship between the sexes. Need we mention the Song of Songs? With all the attempts to interpret this book in a typological way and see there only a prototype of the relationship between Christ and the Church (as the Church Fathers did), contemporary scholars do not doubt that initially these songs really were performed at weddings. Thus, it is clear that the Bible has a high view of marriage and sex as such.

In the Major Prophets and Revelation God often appears as the Bridegroom. God expresses indignation in the prophetic books. He found a little girl, showered her with gifts, and gave her jewelry. She grew up, became a beauty and left her lover to commit adultery and lead a dissolute life. Bitterly amazed at this betrayal, God expresses his indignation through the prophet (Ezek 16), speaking of his unrequited love for Israel.

<sup>[35]</sup> Larry Crabb, *Muzhchina i zhenshchina* [Man and woman] (St. Petersburg: Mirt, 2002), 138.

<sup>[36]</sup> In this sense we may notice certain positive changes. A group of scholars from Southern Baptist Seminary (Louisville, Kentucky) collected a volume of essays, among which there is a theme concerned with the subject of spirituality and sex. See Diana S. Richmond Garland, Wayne E. Oates, "Spirituality

and Sexuality" in *Becoming Christian: Dimensions of Spiritual Formation*, ed. by Bill J. Leonard (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster, John Knox Press, 1990): 170-187. However, the authors do not discuss the issue of sexuality in the sphere of eschatology.

<sup>[37]</sup> John Eldredge, *Neobuzdannoe serdtse* [Wild at heart] (St Petersburg: Izdatelstvo Shandal, 2007), 53-55.



John describes the relationship between the Church and Jesus using the images of the Bride and Bridegroom. The Church-Bride, filled with a single longing calls with the Spirit for the Bridegroom, "Come!" (Rev 22:17). This also speaks of the fact that the sexual relationship (not to be understood exclusively as intercourse) is a gift and, indeed, a proto-image, analogous to the spiritual relationship between God and humanity.

### Conclusion

At the beginning we stated that God's Kingdom will be realized on earth. One day Jesus will appear on earth again, not to burn it up, but to establish His Kingdom on it. Jesus will renew the earth; He will establish His new order. And if the earth is so valuable to Him, including its culture, ecology, social and civil institutions, then it is the Christian's privilege and responsibility to look at the creation God entrusted to us in a new way. God gave it to human beings, and He sent a human being to be the mediator between Him and all creation.

Christians have a creative task: to learn to know this world, acknowledging the sources of knowledge and revelation even from other religions and systems of various worldviews, which often are not Christian. Why? Because there can we discover new knowledge about our God and His world. As Jurgen Moltmann affirms:

Because of natural theology people become *wiser*, but it is not enough for salvation. Salvation is received only by means of accepting the revelation of God—the Savior. But if people, relying

only on the revelation of God, refuse to acknowledge any other knowledge of God that is received in a natural way, they will be *saved*, but they will not be *wise*.<sup>[38]</sup>

In the light of the above, we may imagine that many Christians will be pleasantly surprised after the resurrection to find themselves on earth, not in heaven. With the same conviction we may say that they will never be disappointed whether they think about heaven or earth, because they will spend eternity in fellowship with God.

Popular evangelical eschatological narratives present the following picture: Christians go to the heavenly city because of the cross that was laid down across the abyss of stinking, raging fire. Sinners are "left behind" on the earth, preoccupied with their earthly affairs. Soon Jesus will come and He will burn down the whole disgusting spectacle together with the earth.

Scripture, however, draws a different picture. Jesus intends to unite and reconcile all things in Himself, both in heaven and on earth (Eph 1:10). With the coming of Christ two realities will be united in a new alliance between God and people. Jesus did not come to us from some distant place, let us say, from another galaxy. He appears on the earth (1 Pet 5:4; 1Jn 2:28; Col 3:4). The curtain or shroud between the Kingdom of God and the realm of humanity will be taken away. We remember that Adam and Eve were driven away not from "heaven," but from a garden which was on earth (with even some geographical orientation). Humanity returns home to God on the earth, not in heaven. On earth God will continue to talk with people, as when they walked and talked together in the cool of the day (Gen 3:8).

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<sup>[38]</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Nauka i mudrost'*, 36-37.

The theme of sexual relations makes us so vulnerable when we call it to mind that we feel we need to hide behind more serious or dogmatic conversations (Gen 3:8). Do these themes sometimes resemble fig leaves covering some important subjects of theological debate? We sometimes

hide ourselves in the undergrowth like Adam, awkwardly justifying ourselves by saying that talking about sex and sexual relationships is most improper, especially in view of more complicated problems and matters such as the "spiritual salvation of humanity."

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