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A Reflection on the Resurrection 2023

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Suggested Reading: Mark 16:1-8

Introduction

What I would like to do in this *Reflection on the Resurrection* is to express as best as I am able my understanding of something of what the Word and the Writings teach us on this vitally important yet miraculous and complex subject. I make this point because I may well see it differently to others who are working from the same teachings but it nevertheless represents the understanding I have reached at this point in my life.

In Mark chapter 16 we find these words:

And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.

I would like to focus your attention on just a few words that occur in the above account of the

Resurrection – the words which include the reference to ‘*Jesus of Nazareth*’. Mark is the only one of the gospel writers to use this name as part of the description of what happened on the first Easter Sunday, yet all the gospels use ‘*Jesus of Nazareth*’ in many other places.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem but he grew up in Nazareth and as with English names before surnames came into common use he was simply described as Jesus of Nazareth. Whereas we know that the name Bethlehem means *House of Bread* it is apparently quite unclear what the name Nazareth actually meant. It might possibly mean ‘*a watch-tower*’ or maybe ‘*a branch*’. But the thought I want to leave you with at the start of this reflection is that Jesus of Nazareth was the man, born to Mary, who grew up and lived in Nazareth for some 30 years before embarking on his Divine ministry which ultimately led to his death and resurrection.

Reflection

Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here.

Mark has Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome coming to the tomb and finding no body. Matthew tells us that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary come to the tomb and find no body. Luke is not specific about the names of the women who enter the tomb and find no body but later refers to Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joanna as the women who tell the disciples what has happened. John also has Mary Magdalene coming to the tomb but shortly followed by John and Peter who all find no body.

We can be left in no doubt then that the first key message of the Resurrection story is that despite the body of Jesus being laid to rest in a tomb late on the day of crucifixion there is no body of Jesus when his followers come to the tomb on what we know as Easter Sunday.

Further, Matthew’s gospel adds a paragraph about the chief priests bribing the soldiers who had been on guard and saying to them: *Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep’*. Today we would probably class these comments as ‘fake’ news and certainly we must not allow ourselves to be drawn away towards this sort of false thinking. There was no body, no human body, no body of Jesus of Nazareth!

Later, after the initial visits to the tomb, Jesus appears in a number of ways to his followers and disciples. John has Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene who doesn’t recognise him and thinks he is the gardener. Later John has Jesus coming to Galilee and talking with Peter who doesn’t recognise him. Luke has the lovely story of two disciples walking to Emmaus and Jesus joins them but he is not recognised. We ought to ask ourselves – Why isn’t Jesus recognised? After all he had been with them for three very busy years and they would have experienced his presence in all sorts of very different situations. It is impossible to imagine that after this level of personal contact that they would not have recognised him anywhere! And yet they didn’t. To borrow from Mark’s words – they were seeking Jesus of Nazareth but he wasn’t there. They didn’t recognise the Risen Lord because they still expected to see the man, born to Mary, who grew up

and lived in Nazareth for some 30 years. But the gospels are showing us, I believe, that this man, this son of Mary, no longer existed.

I will come back to this thought a little later. Meanwhile I want to include some New Church Teaching on the subject of the Lord's Glorification. Consider these two quotations:

True Christianity 126

There are two things for which the Lord came into the world and through which he saved people and angels: redemption, and the glorification of his human aspect. These two things are distinct from each other, but they become one in contributing to salvation.

In the preceding points we have shown what redemption was: battling the hells, gaining control over them, and then restructuring the heavens. Glorification, however, was the uniting of the Lord's human nature with the divine nature of his Father. This process occurred in successive stages and was completed by the suffering on the cross.

Doctrine of the Lord 35

Step by step he took off the human nature he had taken on from his mother and put on a human nature from what was divine within him, which is the divine human nature and the Son of God. It is generally known that the Lord was divine and human, divine because of Jehovah the Father and human because of the Virgin Mary. That is why he was God and a human being and therefore had a divine essence and a human outward nature, the divine essence from his Father and the human nature from his mother. This meant that he was equal to the Father with respect to his divinity, but less than the Father with respect to his humanity. It also meant that this human nature from his mother was not changed into or mixed with a divine essence, since a human nature cannot be changed into or mixed with a divine essence.

God came into our world as the Divine Truth in the finite human personality and consciousness of Jesus. This personality inherited from Mary a very human propensity towards evil and false approaches to life and in these Jesus was tempted just like us, but without sin. This man, this Jesus of Nazareth, was finite, he was born in time, he lived and suffered in time and was tempted in time. And at his death he died in time. And after his death this human outward nature, known to all around him as Jesus of Nazareth, ceased to exist – its consciousness, its infirmity, its space and time, its finite restriction – all ceased to exist. But in its place there was now a Divine Human nature – a Divine Humanity.

Way back in 1773, shortly after *True Christianity* had been first published in London by Emanuel Swedenborg, Rev John Clowes MA, the Rector of St John's Manchester, was persuaded by a friend to purchase a copy of the book from London. On his first reading he came across the term *Divinum Humanum* and later when reflecting on it was profoundly affected by the glory it presented to him. So much so that, despite remaining an Anglican clergyman, he dedicated the rest of his life to translating and making better known the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

Karl Barth, the influential theologian of the mid-decades of the 20th century, wrote the following in his book on '*The Humanity of God*':

God requires no exclusion of humanity, no non-humanity, not to speak of inhumanity, in order to be truly God. But we may and must, however, look further and recognise the fact that actually His deity encloses humanity in itself.

The Divine Humanity is the full embodiment and manifestation of the unknowable and unapproachable Divine Itself – the I AM. In the Divine Humanity we can know God person to person because the Divine Humanity provides the bridge that spans the gap between finite humankind and infinite God and as such is the only way to the Father.

Arcana Caelestia 1990:2 puts it this way:

The Infinite itself which stands above all the heavens and above man's inmost being cannot be manifested except by means of the Divine Human, which exists solely with the Lord. Communication of the Infinite with finite beings is not possible at all from any other source. This also explains why, when Jehovah appeared to members of the Most Ancient Church and subsequently to members of the Ancient Church which existed after the Flood, and also after that to Abraham and the prophets, He was manifested to them as a human being. That it was indeed the Lord, He Himself openly teaches in John, Abraham your father rejoiced to see My day, and saw it and was glad. Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am. John 8:56, 58.

When we approach the Risen Lord in his Divine Humanity he comes to each one of us in the way each one of us needs, adapting and accommodating himself to our particular ability to receive him and our particular perception and discernment of who he is. There is infinite variety in the people God creates and surely therefore infinite variety in the ways in which people can come to know God as a Person in the Divine Humanity. We can see this in the following extract from Arcana Caelestia 6832:2

The truth that the Lord appears to each individual person in a way suited to the kind of person he is may be recognized from the consideration that the Lord appears to those in the inmost or third heaven as the Sun from which light beyond description radiates, the reason being that those there are governed by the good of love to the Lord. He appears to those in the middle or second heaven as the Moon, the reason being that there they are governed by love to the Lord in a more remote and obscure way; for they are governed by love towards the neighbour. But the Lord does not appear to those in the lowest or first heaven either as the Sun or the Moon, only as Light, a light far more brilliant than light in the world. ... From all this one may now recognize that the Lord appears to each individual person in a way suited to the kind of person he is, for this is suited to the way he receives the Lord.

When we immerse ourselves in the literal sense of the Gospels we come to know the man Jesus of Nazareth just as his followers knew him and we can discuss what his personality may have been like and what he looked like and what made him different to others. And we would all have a substantially common view of whom we were discussing. But with the Resurrection all that changed as can be seen, I think, by the inability of Jesus' followers to recognise him.

Now, because of the Resurrection, all people can experience a personal relationship with a Personal God and find great comfort, confidence and encouragement in such a relationship. Some, like Thomas, may come to know the Divine Humanity in a very down

to earth physical and sensual way because that is what works for them. Others may come to know the Divine Humanity as a friend who walks alongside them through life, as on the road to Emmaus. And there will also be those who recognise the Divine Humanity in the breaking of bread – the experience of sharing goodness and love with others. In these and a myriad of other ways people can know a personal God with whom they can relate and form a unique mutual bond.

At Easter let us give thanks to the Lord for his great work of Redemption and Glorification which enables all people to freely come to know a Personal God in an infinite variety of unique ways that works perfectly for each person.

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures for ever!



Some further thoughts and quotations

The views that I have expressed above need to be reconciled with statements such as this one from Doctrine of the Lord 35 -

Because the Lord's human nature was glorified - that is, made divine - on the third day after his death he rose again with his whole body, which is not true of any human being, since we rise again with our spirit only and not with our body.

Now the question this raises in my mind is this – What is *his whole body* with which he rose again?

Firstly, this cannot be a reference to a material physical body, the body of the man Jesus of Nazareth, because the teaching is clear - *Step by step he took off the human nature he had taken on from his mother and put on a human nature from what was divine within him.* Secondly, then, through a miracle as great as the miracle of the incarnation, the body of the man, Jesus of Nazareth, disappeared completely in the tomb – as the gospel accounts tell us, there was no body. There is only one reference, as far as I am aware, in the Writings that can completely clarify this situation for us. It can be found in the posthumous work on the *Athanasian Creed* paragraph 162 -

The Lord, in the sepulchre, thus by death, cast off all the human from the mother and dissipated it, (from which He underwent temptations and the passion of the cross, since the maternal could not be conjoined with the Divine Itself), and so He assumed the Human from the Father, and thus the Lord rose with the Human completely and manifestly glorified.

The miracle of how the body of the man Jesus of Nazareth was *dissipated* in the tomb is a mystery as great as the miracle of how Mary conceived Jesus at the incarnation and we can perhaps see these two ends of the life of Jesus of Nazareth as states of *creation* and *de-creation*. But leave that thought and move on instead to contemplate what, in the context of the Divine Human, is meant by *his whole body*. I personally have great difficulty in knowing how to begin to describe what these words mean and yet we are invited in *True Christian Religion* 508 to *enter with understanding into the mysteries of*

faith. So all I can do here is to place before you just a few quotations from the Writings that might, with the Lord's help, begin the process of opening this mystery.

Arcana Caelestia 2658:2

Once it had become Divine the Lord's Human was no longer an organ or recipient of life; it was now Life itself, the same as that of Jehovah Himself. It had this life at the start from its very conception from Jehovah, as is plainly evident from the Lord's own words in John, Man however is not life but an organ or recipient of it, see 2021, and in various places elsewhere. From this it may be evident that when the Lord was made Jehovah even as to the Human, that which was not life in itself, that is, the merely human, was banished.

AC4735:2

The Lord's Human, now that it has been glorified or made Divine, cannot be thought of as something merely human but as Divine Love within a human form. This is more true of Him than it is of angels, who - when they come to be seen, as I myself have seen them - are seen as forms of love and charity taking on a human appearance, the Lord enabling this to be so. For it was by Divine Love that the Lord made His Human Divine, even, as has been stated, as heavenly love serves to make someone an angel after death, so that he too is seen as a form of love and charity taking on a human appearance.

AC5077:1

It is well known that the external or bodily senses are five in number - sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch - and also that these constitute the entire life of the body. For without those senses the body has no life at all, for which reason also when deprived of them it dies and becomes a corpse. The actual bodily part of the human being therefore is nothing else than a receiver of sensory impressions and consequently of the life resulting from these. The part played by the senses is the principal one and that by the body the instrumental. The instrumental without its principal which it is fitted to serve cannot even be called the body that a person carries around while living in the world; but the instrumental together with its principal, when they act as one, can be called such. The two together therefore constitute the body.

AC5078:2

The reason why here and in the rest of this chapter external sensory powers of both kinds are dealt with in the internal sense is that the previous chapter dealt with how the Lord glorified or made Divine the interior aspects of His Natural, and therefore the present chapter deals with how the Lord glorified or made Divine the exterior aspects of that Natural. The exterior aspects of the natural are rightly called bodily ones, being both kinds of sensory powers of perception together with their recipient members and organs; for these recipients together with those powers make up that which is referred to as the body, see above in 5077. The Lord made Divine all that constituted His body, both its sensory Powers and their recipient members and organs, ...

AC5576:5

For now that the Lord has made His Human completely Divine, His 'flesh' is nothing else than Divine Good, and His 'blood' nothing else than Divine Truth. One has to understand that in the Divine there is nothing material;

AC6135:3

I have been able to see quite clearly from the angels that 'body' in the genuine sense is the good of love. When they are present, love floods out of them, so much so that you think they are nothing but love; it floods out of their entire bodies. Also their bodies have a dazzling appearance, full of light shining from them; for the good of love is like a flame sending out from itself light, which is the truth of faith derived from that good. If this therefore is what the angels of heaven are like, what of the Lord Himself? He is the Source of every spark of love among the angels, and His Divine Love is seen as the Sun from which the whole of heaven receives its light, and from which all who are there derive their heavenly heat, that is, their love and so their life. The Lord's Divine Human is what appears in that way and is the Source of all those things. From this one may now see what is meant by the Lord's body - Divine Love, the same as is meant by His flesh. Also, the Lord's very body - having been glorified, that is, made Divine - is nothing else than such Love; so what else can one feel the Divine, which is the Infinite, to be?

AC6849:5

The presence of the Divine itself is such that no angel can bear it unless he is protected by a cloud which tempers and moderates the rays of light and the heat from that sun. From this one may recognize plainly that the Lord's Human is Divine, for if it were not Divine it could never have become so united to the Divine itself, called the Father, that they are one, according to the Lord's words in John 14:10 and following verses, and elsewhere. For that which is to receive the Divine in this way must be wholly Divine; what was not Divine from such a union would be plainly reduced to nothing [Potts translation – utterly dissipated].

AC10125:4

For the same reason the Lord took up into heaven His entire Humanity that had been glorified, that is, had been made Divine by Him; He left nothing of it in the tomb, which is different from what happens with anyone else. The fact that the Lord glorified His actual body right down to the last and lowest constituents of it, which are its bones and flesh, the Lord also made plain to the disciples, ...

AC10252:7

Because myrrh served to mean the most external truth, which is truth on the level of the senses, and perception of that truth, the bodies of those who had died were anointed in former times with myrrh and aloes. That anointing served to mean the preservation of all of a person's truths and forms of good, and also to mean resurrection. Therefore also such [spices] were used as served to mean the last and lowest level of a person's life, called the life of the senses. The Lord's body was anointed with such, and together with them was wrapped in a linen cloth; and this was the custom among the Jews, see John 19:39,40, and also Luke 23:55,56. But it should be remembered that things said in the Word about the Lord Himself are to be understood in a pre-eminent sense. Consequently the spices mentioned in those verses mean His Divine life on the level of the senses, which is the life proper to the body, and also the resurrection of this with Him. As is well known, unlike anyone else the Lord rose again with the whole body He had in the world, for He left nothing in the tomb.

Apocalypse Revealed 504

'Where also our Lord was crucified' signifies no acknowledgment of the Lord's Divine Human, and thus a state of rejection. It is said in the Church that they 'crucify the Lord'

who blaspheme Him, as do those also, like the Jews, who deny Him to be the Son of God. The reason why those who deny that His Human is Divine are like the Jews is that every man regards the Lord as a man, and one who regards His Human as equal to the human of another man cannot then think of His Divine, howsoever this is said to be the Son of God, born from eternity, equal to the Divine of the Father. When this is being stated and read it is indeed heard, but yet it is not at the same time in the faith when concerning the Lord it is thought that He is a material man like another man, equally retaining the properties of the flesh; and as he then removes His Divine and does not regard it, he is in the same state as if he denied it, for he denies that His Human is the Son of God, just as the Jews also did, for which reason they crucified Him.

Divine Love and Wisdom 233

It has been told me from heaven that in the Lord from eternity, Who is Jehovah, before the assumption of the Human in the world, the two prior degrees [celestial and spiritual] existed actually, and the third degree in potency, as they do also with angels. But that after the assumption of a Human in the world, He put on also the third degree, which is called the natural, thereby becoming Man, like a man in the world, the only difference being that in the Lord, this degree as were the prior ones, is infinite and uncreate, while in angels and in man these degrees are finite and created.

True Christian Religion 109

For in the world He put on the Divine Natural too, in which He is present with human beings. The Lord's glorification is the glorification of His Human, which He took upon Himself in the world; and the glorified Human of the Lord is the Divine Natural. The truth of this is clear from the fact that the Lord rose from the tomb with His whole body which He had in the world, and left nothing of it behind there. It follows that He took with Him from there the Human Natural itself from first to last.

TCR728

When a person is being regenerated, the Lord is certainly present, and by means of His Divine action prepares the person for heaven. But in order really to enter heaven, the person must really present himself to the Lord; and because the Lord really presents Himself to the person, the person really receives him, yet not as He was hanging on the cross, but as He is in His glorified Human, in which He is present. Divine good is His body, Divine truth His blood. These are given to the person and are the means of his regeneration, so that he is in the Lord and the Lord is in him. For, as shown above, the eating which occurs in the Holy Supper is a spiritual eating. A correct perception of this establishes that the Holy Supper is a guarantee and seal put upon the adoption as sons of God of those who approach it worthily.

I conclude with these helpful but very challenging words from AC5302:1

People who are stupid imagine that a human being is a human being by virtue of his outward appearance, that is to say, because he possesses a human face. Others who are a little less stupid say that the human being is a human being because he has the ability to speak, while others again who are less stupid still say that the human being is a human being because he has the ability to think. But a human being is not a human being for any of these reasons but because he has the capacity to think what is true and to will what is good; and when he thinks what is true and wills what is good he has the capacity to behold what is Divine and, perceiving what it is, to accept it.