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Andrew Johnson

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## Turning the World Upside Down in 1 Corinthians 15: Apocalyptic Epistemology, the Resurrected Body and the New Creation<sup>1</sup>

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*Dr Johnson, who teaches at the Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, offers a new approach to understanding Paul's depiction of resurrection life in 1 Corinthians 15.*

**Key words:** Bible; New Testament; 1 Corinthians; eschatology; ontology.

The primary purpose of this article is to show how Paul's apocalyptic epistemology in 1 Corinthians 2 sheds light on an issue of ontology that arises in 1 Corinthians 15 (namely the nature of the resurrected body) and what this, in turn, indicates about Paul's understanding of resurrection life in the consummated 'new creation'.<sup>2</sup> Focusing on the way Paul uses *psychikos* and *pneumatikos* in chapter two offers a way forward in understanding how he uses these terms in 1 Corinthians 15. In both places the adjectives function to distinguish between what is characteristic of 'this age' and what is characteristic of the 'new creation'. Hence, the contrast Paul makes between the *psychikon* body and the *pneumatikon* body in chapter 15 is not one based on an ontology that finds fleshly existence *per se* problematic. Rather, such an ontology characterizes the way *Paul's audience* views the cosmos as a hierarchy of 'stuff' that 'ranges from fine, thin, rarified stuff down to gross, thick, heavy stuff'.<sup>3</sup> It is this hierarchical view of the cosmos

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- 1 I wish to thank Craig Koester, Howard Marshall, Robert Wall, and David Wilkinson for reading earlier versions of this paper and making several helpful suggestions which have helped me clarify my arguments.
  - 2 This is not to say that *Paul himself* would describe what he is doing as addressing an 'epistemological' issue in chapter 2 and an issue of 'ontology' in chapter 15, but that there is an implicit relationship between his arguments in these contexts that can be clarified in these particular terms. In Paul's letters, as is the case generally, 'ways of knowing' are inseparable from 'ways of being'. Epistemology and ontology go hand in hand; knowledge is knowledge of what is.
  - 3 D. B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven, 1995), 116.

that Paul attempts to 'turn upside down' by arguing that lower status elements like flesh will be transformed and incorporated into the 'new creation' at its consummation.

A secondary purpose of the article is to explore briefly how Paul's rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 15 might compel a contemporary audience to make particular theological claims on the basis of their understanding of the physical universe. This necessarily brief exploration will come in the form of some suggestions at the end of the article.

### I. Apocalyptic Epistemology in 1 Corinthians: *Psychikos* versus *Pneumatikos*

Understanding the meaning of *psychikos* and *pneumatikos* in 1 Corinthians 2 and 15 and translating the terms adequately has been the subject of extensive discussion. In both chapters *pneumatikos* is usually translated as 'spiritual' where the reference is to a 'spiritual' person or persons (2:13, 15) or a 'spiritual body' (15:44, 46). *Psychikos* is translated in a number of ways where it modifies person (*anthrōpos*) in 2:14 ('unspiritual', 'man without the spirit', 'natural', etc.) and where it modifies body in 15:44 and 46 ('natural', 'physical'). Most of the literature dealing with this terminology attempts to find outside parallels to the terms in order to determine their precise meaning in these chapters.<sup>4</sup> From the variety of solutions proposed and the lack of agreement generated, one conclusion that could be drawn is that these anthropological terms had no single unambiguous meaning.<sup>5</sup> In fact, as I will argue below, the immediate context itself clarifies Paul's usage of the terms adequately enough that one need not propose elaborate theories about their origination or even attribute their prior use to the Corinthians.

Other than the three times in chapter 15, the only other place Paul uses *psychikos* is in the context of 2:6-16. It is significant that in both places he uses it in an explicit contrast to *pneumatikos*. In this context the *psychikos/pneumatikos* distinction is one that has to do with *episte-*

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4 E.g., W. Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians* (Nashville, 1971); B.A. Pearson, *The Pneumatikos-Psychikos Terminology in 1 Corinthians: A Study in the Theology of the Corinthian Opponents of Paul and Its Relation to Gnosticism* (Missoula, 1973); R.A. Horsley, 'Pneumatikos vs. Psychikos. Distinctions of Spiritual Status among the Corinthians', *HTR* 69 (1976), 269-88; G. Sellin, *Der Streit um Auferstehung der Toten: Ein religionsgeschichtliche und exegetische Untersuchung von 1 Korinther 15* (Göttingen, 1986).

5 Cf. A. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, 2000), 226, 267-70.

mology.<sup>6</sup> The *psychikos* person cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God because they are folly to him and he is *not able to understand* them (v. 14). This is because they can only be discerned spiritually (*pneumatikōs*). *The distinction has nothing to do with one's 'true nature' but is dependent on whether or not one has received a revelation (an apocalypse), the active agent of which is the Spirit of God* (v. 10). What God revealed 'to us' through his Spirit (v. 10) are the things God prepared for those who love him (v. 9), namely God's wisdom in a mystery referred to in v. 7.<sup>7</sup> Paul clearly defines God's wisdom in 1:24 and 1:30 as the crucified Christ himself, the proclamation of which he characterizes as 'the mystery of God' (2:1).<sup>8</sup> He then specifies the revealed content of this mystery in no uncertain terms as 'Jesus Christ and him crucified' (2:2). God's wisdom is therefore Christ himself who brings redemption/salvation, and it is *located in the mystery that this Christ was crucified*. To understand God's wisdom, one must understand the mystery in which it is located.<sup>9</sup>

In these verses 'mystery' is to be understood within the context of divine revelation as something that was hidden and is now revealed by the Spirit, but only to *hoi teleioi*, i.e., to insiders who have received the Spirit of God (v. 12).<sup>10</sup> By any standard of knowing characteristic of 'this age', the idea that the highest wisdom, namely God's wisdom, consists in his bringing salvation through a crucifixion can only seem like the lowest form of foolishness. Hence the Spirit's revelation (*apocalypsis*) generates what might be termed a status reversing apocalyptic epistemology of the cross, effectively turning upside down the

6 J. L. Martyn, 'Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages: 2 Cor. 5:16', in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox* (ed. W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule, R. R. Niebuhr; Cambridge, 1967), 269-87, now updated in Martyn's 'Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages', in *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Nashville, 1997), 89-110.

7 I take the object of the verb 'revealed' in v. 10 to be the 'things God prepared' in v. 9, but understand this latter phrase as a reference to what is included in the phrase 'God's wisdom in a mystery' (v. 7) along with its salvific ramifications (cf. G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, [Grand Rapids, 1987], 107-108).

8 On accepting 'mystery' rather than 'testimony' as the reading in 2:1, see B.M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2d ed.; New York, 1994), 480.

9 Hence, one cannot distinguish God's wisdom or 'the deep things of God' (v. 10) from the mystery of the crucified Messiah in which it is revealed (so W. Schrage, *Der Erste Brief an die Korinther* [Zürich, Braunschweig, 1991-99], 1. 258; contra M. Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity* [Tübingen, 1990], 162).

10 These insiders are not a more mature class of Christians (contra M. Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery*, 158-60) but are identical to the entire audience who have received the Spirit (so Fee, *First Epistle*, 102; Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 229-33; Schrage, *Erste Brief*, 249) and thus stand on the *pneumatikos* side of the epistemological divide.

epistemological categories of 'this age'.<sup>11</sup> On the 'this age' side of the epistemological divide is the *psychikos* person for whom the things of the Spirit of God are folly because, lacking the epistemological lens provided by the Spirit, she is *not able to understand* them. On the other is the *pneumatikos* person, the side on which Paul's audience is privileged to find themselves (although they don't seem to be *acting* like it in chapters 1-4).<sup>12</sup>

So in 1 Corinthians 2, the only other place in Paul's letters where they are used in contrast to one another, *psychikos* and *pneumatikos* describe two different classes of people who have opposite paradigms for understanding reality. *The distinction between the two has been enacted by the Spirit* who effects a transformation whereby the epistemological categories of the *psychikos* person are changed in such a way that s/he becomes a *pneumatikos* person. In other words the Spirit, the harbinger of the 'new creation', fits the *psychikos* person with glasses that enable her to see by the standards of the 'new creation', standards which should be (but are not always<sup>13</sup>) instantiated in the communal life of the church. The person before the transformation is the same person after the transformation, but through the vehicle of speech about the cross, the Spirit so turns his merely human (*psychikos*) understanding of the world on its head that he must be described now as a *pneumatikos* person. S/he is now a person whose epistemological categories have been brought into line with the standards of the 'new creation'. The *pneumatikos* person, then, is one who understands the cosmos *as it truly is*, a sphere newly invaded by its creator in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Hence, the way the adjectives *psychikos* and *pneumatikos* function in 1 Corinthians 2 is to distinguish a way of knowing characteristic of 'this age' from a way of knowing brought about by the Spirit that is characteristic of the 'new creation'.

## II. Epistemology, Ontology, and the 'New Creation' in 1 Corinthians

As the last paragraph implies, this new 'order of knowing' is only possible because the 'order of being' was changed when the creator

11 As Martyn points out with reference to 2 Cor. 5:16, what separates the two ways of knowing is the turn of the ages, 'the apocalyptic event brought on by Christ's death/resurrection' (*Theological Issues*, 95).

12 Although Paul says that he was not able to speak to them *as to spiritual (pneumatikois) people* in 3:1, they are not on the *psychikos* side of the epistemological divide. His very point is that even though they have had the mystery revealed to them by God's Spirit, and therefore *know* better, their communal behavior has begun to reflect the marks of the Flesh (*Sarx*).

13 See n. 12 above.

invaded the cosmos in the death and resurrection of Christ. For Paul, there is in fact, a 'new creation'; epistemology and ontology go hand in hand. Since the phrase 'new creation' does not appear in 1 Corinthians, even though the conceptuality it assumes is present throughout, some preliminary comments that justify and clarify my usage of it here are necessary.<sup>14</sup> By this term Paul means the new age that God has inaugurated by graciously invading the cosmos in order to reclaim and establish sovereignty over a world enslaved by the powers of Sin and Death. Prior to the consummation of the 'new creation', the effects of God's invasion are most clearly present in the *ekklesia*, the concrete instantiation of the body of the crucified and risen Christ. The two-fold movement of the crucifixion and resurrection of Israel's Messiah constituted God's act of invasion, an act that sets all human standards of knowledge, social status and, as I will argue below, cosmological status on their heads. This conceptuality is implied in 1 Corinthians by the way Paul structures the epistle as a whole and by the fact that many of his specific arguments rely on the 'logic' generated by it.

The way Paul structures 1 Corinthians resonates with the two-fold movement of God's invasion of the cosmos in that he rhetorically brackets what he says with a beginning discourse on the cross (1:18-2:16) and an ending discourse on the resurrection (15:1-58). As I argued above, in the beginning discourse (1:18-2:16) Paul sets forth a status reversing apocalyptic epistemology of the cross, a way of understanding the world available only to those who have been acted upon by the Spirit, i.e., those who are 'in the realm of Christ' (*en Christō*). It is an epistemology 'not of *this age* nor of the rulers of *this age*' who are being brought to nothing by God's invasive act (2:6).

Throughout chapters 3-14 Paul implicitly appeals to this epistemology in order to shape his audience's communal life in a way that is consistent with their being in the realm of a *crucified* and risen Christ. His arguments in these chapters rely on the 'logic' of this epistemology, and therefore only make sense if God *has* newly invaded the cosmos in the death/resurrection of Christ, thereby turning all human standards of knowledge and social status upside down. They are coherent only if the external structures of this cosmos *are* passing

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14 Paul uses the phrase 'new creation' in only two places, 2 Cor. 5:17 and Gal. 6:15 (on which see Martyn, *Theological Issues*, 89-110; 111-23). My understanding of the phrase in primarily cosmic/ecclesiastical terms is similar, but not identical to Martyn's understanding. For an opposing view which understands the phrase in primarily anthropological terms, see Moyer Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul's Letters and Thought* (Cambridge, 2002).

away (7:31),<sup>15</sup> if Paul's audience is one upon whom the ends of the ages have come (10:11). In sum, his arguments rely on there being a new ontology that corresponds to the new epistemology he describes. That is, they only make sense if what Paul later says in 2 Cor. 5:17 is true, namely, that *in the realm of the crucified and risen Christ* there is already the start of a 'new creation'.

Because of the close connection between epistemology and ontology, we should not be surprised to find Paul using the epistemological language that he develops in chapter two to deal with an issue of ontology that arises in 1 Corinthians 15, namely, the nature of the resurrected body when the 'new creation' is consummated. As we have seen, Paul uses the adjectives *psychikos* and *pneumatikos* in 1 Corinthians 2 to distinguish a way of knowing characteristic of 'this age' from a way of knowing characteristic of the 'new creation'. We will see that in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul uses these same two adjectives in a corresponding way in the context of ontology, i.e., to distinguish between a body characteristic of 'this age' and a body that will be truly changed by the Spirit to make it appropriate for the 'new creation' at its consummation.

### III. Continuity and Discontinuity in 15:35-58

Nowhere does Paul wrestle more with issues of continuity and discontinuity between 'this age' and the 'new creation' than in 15:35-58 where he addresses issues surrounding the future resurrection body. His wrestling takes place within a general cultural milieu influenced by a popular Hellenistic philosophy which held to a body/soul dualism and disparaged the body. However, what it disparaged was not the *general category of embodiment* or of *materiality*,<sup>16</sup> but *this present fleshly body* composed of heavy elements at the bottom of a hierarchy that has no place in the afterlife. In Dale Martin's words, 'The reason why the normal human body cannot experience immortality is that it occupies a relatively low place on the spectrum of stuff, which ranges from fine, thin, rarified stuff down to gross, thick, heavy stuff'.<sup>17</sup> Hence, some in Corinth, probably the more educated familiar with popular Hellenistic philosophy, disparage the normal human body of flesh because of its low place/status on the cosmological spectrum of

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15 On this translation of 7:31, see Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 585.

16 Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 3-37, 104-23; G.J. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis, 1995), 23-34, 48-58.

17 Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 116.

stuff but *not* because it is either *material* or a *body* per se.<sup>18</sup> The ‘some’ of 15:12 who are denying a future resurrection cannot imagine that such a body could participate in any form of afterlife.<sup>19</sup> In basic agreement with Martin, I take this to be the rhetorical occasion that calls forth the discourse of chapter 15. Hence, the specific issue that Paul sets up to address in vv. 35-58 is how the human body of flesh<sup>20</sup> can be involved in a future resurrection, especially in light of the way some in the audience understand it to be at the bottom of a cosmological hierarchy of stuff.

Issues of continuity and discontinuity emerge very quickly in v. 37 when Paul says: ‘And what you sow, you do not sow the body that will be but a *naked* (*gymnon*) seed, perhaps of wheat or any one of the rest’. It is surely no accident that Paul goes out of his way to describe this seed with the adjective *gymnon*.<sup>21</sup> The ‘naked’ seed sown is what is buried in the ground and thus is most naturally understood as the corruptible and decaying body of low status flesh.<sup>22</sup> This imagery of

- 18 Martin goes on to argue that Paul shares this understanding of cosmology and the place of the human body within it with his audience (*Corinthian Body*, 135). In a recent monograph and article (*Polarity and Change in 1 Corinthians 15: A Study of Metaphysics, Rhetoric, and Resurrection* [Tübingen, 2000]; ‘ΣΠΕΙΡΕΤΑΙ: Paul’s Anthropogenic Metaphor in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44’, *JBL* 120 [2001], 103), J.R. Asher makes a similar argument. Although he doesn’t agree with Martin’s language of hierarchy, he argues that Paul proves to the audience that the resurrection is ‘fully compatible with [their] cosmology where a radical opposition exists between the celestial and terrestrial realms’ (*Polarity*, 83) and that the human body must, therefore, be transformed ‘to conform to the requirements of celestial existence’ (‘ΣΠΕΙΡΕΤΑΙ’, 103). Hence, both Martin and Asher portray Paul as sharing, or accommodating to, an ontology in which the fleshly ‘stuff’ of the terrestrial human body is, *by nature*, problematic.
- 19 Efforts to reconstruct the original community situation behind 1 Corinthians 15 usually center on why those of 15:12 are denying a resurrection of the dead (see J.S. Vos, ‘Argumentation and Situation in 1Kor 15’, *NovT* 41 [1999], 313-33 for a recent summary of the main options). The usual options include their holding to: (1) Disbelief in any form of afterlife; (2) Over-realized eschatology; (3) Some form of body/soul dualism. I am opting for a *nuanced* version of option three. I have summarized my understanding of the rhetorical situation of 1 Corinthians 15 and argued against options one and two in ‘Firstfruits and Death’s Defeat: Metaphor in Paul’s Rhetorical Strategy in 1 Cor. 15:20-28’, *W&W* 16 (1996), 457-58.
- 20 Contra Asher, *Polarity*, 70-71.
- 21 He uses this adjective again in a similar resurrection context when he speaks of not being found naked (*gymnoi*) after ‘putting on’ (reading *endysamenoi*) our ‘building from heaven’ (2 Cor. 5:3).
- 22 Contra Asher, ‘ΣΠΕΙΡΕΤΑΙ’, 108. Right after framing the question about the sort of body involved in the resurrection, Paul immediately uses an analogy that draws its specific terminology from his prior language *clearly referring to death and resurrection* (cf. 15:22 with 15:36). Hence, the seed imagery is most naturally read as an analogy to the involvement of the human body in the resurrection of the dead.

the *nakedness* of the seed presses the audience to imagine *the corrupted and decaying body* as something that is naked and thus needing to be clothed,<sup>23</sup> imagery that Paul explicitly returns to in vv. 53-54 to describe the eschatological transformation that happens to human bodies. Hence, it is not pressing the seed analogy too far<sup>24</sup> to insist that although the 'body that will be' is certainly not identical with the naked seed that was planted, there is a definite *material continuity implied in the whole process*.<sup>25</sup> For it is this naked seed *from which* the body of wheat is raised, i.e., the seed's material is somehow incorporated into or 'clothed' with the material of the stalk of wheat. Hence, with this imagery Paul forces his audience to imagine the body that will be raised, for all its discontinuity and newness, as still having a definite *continuity of 'stuff'* with the naked seed that was sown, namely, the corruptible and decaying body of flesh. The upshot of this is that God does not abandon even the decomposed fleshly material, but somehow redeems and transforms it so that it becomes capable of being the material of the new creation. The way Paul uses the seed and sowing imagery informs his imagery throughout this section, especially when he returns to 'sowing' language in 15:42f.<sup>26</sup>

Before he does, however, in vv. 39-41 he prepares his audience for the argument he will be making in vv. 42f with a series of short, highly repetitive statements, the whole lot of which somehow functions as an analogy to the resurrection of the dead. *He is not saying that the body as it is involved in the future resurrection will be similar (or for that matter*

23 Cf. M. E. Dahl, *The Resurrection of the Body: A Study of 1 Corinthians 15* (Naperville, 1962), 29.

24 Contra an overcautious attitude exemplified by Ben Witherington (*Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* [Grand Rapids, 1995], 308), et. al.

25 For various interpretations as to extent and nature of the continuity/discontinuity, see the literature cited in J. Gillman, 'Transformation in 1 Cor. 15:50-53', *ETL* 58 (1982), 309-33. A. Lindemann is typical of those who see only discontinuity between the two bodies. He argues that 'the body that will be' is newly created both in terms of matter and form. Hence, any continuity between the two bodies 'lies not in the  $\sigma\acute{\omega}\mu\alpha$  itself but in the action of God' (*Der Erste Korintherbrief* [Tübingen, 2000], 357). In contrast, I understand at least some continuity to be located in the body that is sown and raised, *but only because God wills such continuity to be located there* and is the understood agent of the transformation. Hence there is no inherent potentiality in the old, nothing 'natural' about the continuity that exists.

26 Human beings are the only ones in the rhetorical context (vv. 36-37) to ever explicitly 'sow' anything. Hence, while Paul is certainly depicting God as the agent of the raising in this context, he is not making God the agent of the 'sowing' in a way that refers to God's initial creation of human beings (contra Asher, 'ΣΠΕΙΡΕ ΤΑΙ', 108-11; *Polarity*, 110; C. Wolff, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* [Leipzig, 1996], 406).

*dissimilar*) to the various forms of flesh and/or earthly and celestial bodies.<sup>27</sup> What Paul wants to drill into his audience before he comes to v. 42 could be expressed in general terms by using a portion of the language of v. 39, namely, 'Not all \_\_\_\_\_ is the same \_\_\_\_\_'. That is, not all flesh is the same flesh, not every body is the same body, and not all bodily glory is the same bodily glory. Because, as noted above, the *general category of embodiment* is not problematic for the 'some' in the audience, they would readily agree to all of this. Based on their cosmological assumptions, they are obviously able to distinguish between types of flesh, types of bodies in general, and types of glory associated with various bodies. 'So also is the resurrection of the dead in terms of the human body involved in it', Paul continues.<sup>28</sup> In other words, so also can one distinguish between the type of human body that is buried and the transformed human body that is raised. But that distinction will not be one that will conform to the cosmological assumptions constraining the imaginations of the 'some' in Paul's audience. Rather, with the following series of antitheses, Paul *evokes* the cosmological assumptions of his audience,<sup>29</sup> *not to accommodate to them* but to begin turning them upside down.

The series of antitheses comes in vv. 42b-44a and runs as follows:

It is sown (*speiretai*) in corruption (*phthora*), it is raised (*egeiretai*) in incorruption (*aphtharsia*).

It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory.

It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

It is sown a normal human (*psychikon*) body, it is raised a spiritual (*pneumatikon*) body.

There are three important things to note about this series of antitheses. First, *in the context of 'sowing' a dead body of flesh*, the initial term, *phthora*, takes the general meaning of 'dissolution, deteriora-

27 If Paul had wanted to argue here that the resurrected human body will have similar light, celestial material as the heavenly bodies thereby fitting it for its future region of existence (Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 126-32), it would have been more natural to *explicitly* oppose the low-status fleshly stuff of the earthly bodies to a corresponding high-status material of the celestial bodies. If the point of vv. 39-41 is that the resurrected body, which will be raised in glory (v. 43a), will be like the celestial bodies and unlike earthly bodies, why would Paul risk obscuring the contrast by attributing any glory to earthly bodies (v. 40)?

28 Although v. 42 initially makes it sound as though the subject of the analogy in 42b-44a is 'the resurrection of the dead' in general, this is clearly not the case. The passive subject in 42b-44a is *the human body involved in the resurrection of the dead*, both in its pre and post-resurrection form.

29 Whether expressed in terms of cosmic hierarchy (Martin) or cosmic polarity (Asher).

tion, corruption'.<sup>30</sup> The second term, *aphtharsia*, can take the more broad meaning of 'immortality' or the more narrow meaning of 'incorruption', i.e., non-decaying.<sup>31</sup> In this context, *aphtharsia* takes the latter meaning since Paul is using the *phthora/aphtharsia* terminology to refer to what is sown (a dead human body subject to decay) and its antithesis (a raised body no longer subject to decay). Recognizing this is important for determining how Paul uses these terms and their cognates in vv. 50-54.

Second, in v. 44a Paul does not say, 'A normal human (*psychikon*) body is sown and a spiritual (*pneumatikon*) body is raised', thereby implying that what is sown is left behind and does not participate in being raised. Rather, he stays with the pattern of the preceding antitheses where 'it' is the understood passive subject of both *speiretai* and *egeiretai*<sup>32</sup> and where the prepositional phrases describe *how* 'it' is sown and raised. The rhetorical effect is that the *psychikon* body and the *pneumatikon* body act in an adverbial sense to describe *how* 'it' is sown and raised.<sup>33</sup> Hence, what is sown, namely a decayed/decaying fleshly body, is also raised, albeit in a changed form that can only be described as a *pneumatikon* body.

Third, once he begins the pattern, 'it is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption', he leads his audience to expect that he will follow 'it is sown in dishonor' with 'it is raised in honor/glory'. When he says, 'it is sown in weakness',<sup>34</sup> the audience, caught up in the rhythm of the form, desires the completion of the pattern that they know is coming, 'it is raised in power'. In assenting to the rhythm of the form, even the some in the audience who are represented by the interlocutor are swept along and encouraged to accept the content associated with it.<sup>35</sup> By the time, then, that Paul comes to the last set

30 BDAG, 1054. What is sown is in the process of decaying, i.e., of its organic matter being broken down. That cognates of *phthora* could naturally apply to corpses in a state of decomposition is clear from Plutarch's narration of the fate of Mithridates whose death was so engineered *as to mimic the fate of a decomposing corpse*. His flesh was allowed to decompose in a boat, being consumed by worms and maggots as a result of the overall corruption (*phthora*) and rottenness of his excrement and decaying flesh. Plutarch summarizes: 'Thus, Mithridates died painfully by decomposing (*phtheiromenos*) for seventeen days' (*Art.* 16.7). I owe this reference to BDAG, 1054.

31 LSJ, 289. Or perhaps even, 'decay's reversal' (Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1272).

32 So also Fee, *First Epistle*, 785; contra Gillman, 'Transformation', 327.

33 Contra Fee, *First Epistle*, 785.

34 Asher argues that to describe a dead body as 'weak' would be a gross overstatement since weakness 'describes a lack of power, not its complete absence' (ΣΠΕΙΡΕΤΑΙ, 110). If Paul is guilty of overstatement here it is explicable in light of his tendency at times to associate weakness and death (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:30).

35 See K. Plank, *Paul and the Irony of Affliction* (Atlanta, 1987), 71-84.

of antitheses, if his rhetoric has been effective, he has the audience swinging along with the antithetical succession in such a way that the last set catches them off-guard. Up to this point he has been working with conventionally paired opposites. But *in the context of a discussion of the body's place in the afterlife* carried on in a culture whose 'common sense' categories assume a cosmological hierarchy of stuff, Paul's pairing of *psychikon* body with *pneumatikon* body is jolting. The jolt comes because *in this context* they are not normally conventionally paired opposites. By leading the set of antitheses with words that apply to the very *fleshly* component of the human body (*phthora/aphtharsia*), he encourages his audience to expect that when he refers in the last pair to the word 'body' some cognate of 'flesh' (*sarx*) is going to be the word used to describe how it is sown.<sup>36</sup> But he jolts his audience by refusing to play the game by the hierarchical rules. The careful hierarchy represented by the first three pairs of antitheses is disrupted by this antithesis. In a hierarchy of 'stuff' composing the human body in the ancient world, the material of *psyche* and that of *pneuma* simply aren't at opposite ends of the scale. The most natural opposite of *pneuma* on the cosmological scale is clearly flesh (*sarx*), not *psyche*.<sup>37</sup>

As we have already noted, however, the terms *psychikos* and *pneumatikos* are at opposite ends of Paul's epistemological scale and function to distinguish an epistemology characteristic of 'this age' from an epistemology characteristic of the 'new creation'. Here Paul is using these same adjectives in a way that corresponds to his use of them in chapter two except that now, in this context, an issue of *ontology* rather than epistemology per se is his *focus*. In this context they point to two distinct ontologies that correspond to the two distinct epistemologies in chapter two, one characteristic of 'this age' and one characteristic of the 'new creation'. Paul's refusal to introduce a cognate of flesh (*sarx*) into the series of antitheses suggests that the distinction between these two ontologies is *not* that the former has room for fleshly existence whereas the latter does not. As we will see, the discontinuity between 'this age' and the 'new creation' lies elsewhere. For now it is enough to say that by '*psychikon* body' Paul means a normal human body appropriate for 'this age' whereas by '*pneu-*

36 He certainly had such cognates at his disposal with which to forge a possible opposite of *pneumatikon* (see 3:1, 3) but he does not *equate* these cognates with *psychikon* in 1 Corinthians (see n. 12 above; contra Wolff, *Erste Brief*, 407).

37 This is problematic for views like those of Asher and Martin, both of whom admit this as a difficulty (Asher, *Polarity*, 112, esp. n. 48; Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 21, 263, n. 68) and then offer unconvincing reasons why Paul nevertheless used a cognate of *psyche* rather than a cognate of *sarx*.

*matikon* body' he means a human body that has been truly changed by the Spirit to make it appropriate for the 'new creation' at its consummation. Hence, the *psychikon/pneumatikon* terminology here distinguishes the state of the human body of 'this age' from the state of that same human body after it has been transformed to enable its participation in the consummated 'new creation'.

If we understand the terminology this way and keep in mind Paul's preceding contrasts between Adam and Christ in vv. 21-22, there is no need to propose an elaborate theory about the origination of this terminology. That Paul is using the terminology in the way I am proposing is both corroborated by, and helps to clarify, his argument in 15:45-49 which begins unfolding as follows:

If there is a *psychikon* body there is also a *pneumatikon* body.

So also it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living *psychē*'.

The last Adam became a making alive spirit (*pneuma*).

But the *pneumatikon* (body<sup>38</sup>) is not first but the *psychikon* (body), then the *pneumatikon* (body).

Although there are numerous views on the background of Paul's exegesis of Gen. 2:7 (LXX),<sup>39</sup> *the way he actually uses it* here is fairly clear and hints at his understanding of the nature of the discontinuity between the *psychikon* body and the *pneumatikon* body. The fact that scripture says the first man, Adam, was created a living *psychē*, Paul uses as warrant for claiming that there is indeed a *psychikon* body. He is drawing the simple implication from this Genesis passage that if scripture says that the first person was created a living *psychē*, then his body was, by definition, a *psychikon* body. That is, it was a mere human body that had the negative potential of becoming subject to death and decay, a potential that Paul assumes his audience knows was actualized through Adam's sin.<sup>40</sup> And if this is the sort of body that the first man, Adam, had, it is also the sort of body that 'all' have who 'continue to die in Adam', namely, a merely human body now subjected to death and decay *because of Sin*. This is what Paul has been referring to all along with the sowing imagery, i.e., the 'naked' human body that at death is subject to decay. He is not using *psychikon* to denote a component part of the human person or a type of material of which s/he is composed but rather to indicate the untransformed body appropriate for 'this age' when the effects of Sin are

38 Lacking an expressed noun for these neuter singular adjectives, body (*sōma*) makes the best contextual sense.

39 See n. 4 above.

40 Paul's argument in vv. 21-22 only works if the audience knows that in the story of Genesis 2-3, it was through Adam's sin that death came into the cosmos (see my 'Firstfruits', 461).

continuing.

Similarly, he is not using *pneumatikon* to denote a component part of the human person or a type of material of which s/he is composed.<sup>41</sup> This is confirmed by the way he contrasts the two Adams in v. 45. When Paul refers to the *first* Adam as a living *psychē* and then refers to his opposite (i.e., a *last* Adam) the natural expectation would be that he would describe this *last* Adam in opposite terms.<sup>42</sup> But once again, Paul destabilizes the audience's expectations by saying that the last Adam became a 'making alive spirit (*pneuma*)' rather than a 'living spirit (*pneuma*)'. The two are in fact opposites but not necessarily with regard to the material of which they are composed. Rather, they are opposites because the first *passively received life* as a mere human being with a *psychikon* body and ultimately forfeited it because of Sin, a constant reality of 'this age'. The latter, whose *psychikon* body was transformed into a *pneumatikon* body, has the capacity to *actively generate the life* characteristic of the 'new creation', a life absent the effects of Sin.<sup>43</sup> Hence Paul's rhetoric here implies that the nature of the discontinuity between the *psychikon* body and the *pneumatikon* body has to do with the presence or absence of the effects of Sin.

In this context then, Paul uses the same two adjectives he had used in chapter two to distinguish an epistemology characteristic of 'this age' from an epistemology characteristic of the 'new creation'. Here, when Paul's focus is on an issue of ontology, they function to distinguish between a body appropriate for 'this age' and a body that will be truly changed by the Spirit to make it appropriate for the 'new creation' at its consummation. In chapter 2, it is the Spirit who acts upon the *psychikos* person and effects a radical *epistemological* transformation whereby he or she becomes a *pneumatikos* person fitted with glasses that enable her or him to see by the standards of the 'new creation'. Here it is the 'making alive Spirit' who will act upon the naked *psychikon* body, the body of 'this age', and make it alive by effecting a radical transformation of it into a *pneumatikon* body, a body appro-

41 So Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1276-77; Wolff, *Erste Brief*, 407.

42 Note that Paul adds the words 'first' and 'Adam' to the Genesis 2:7 quote.

43 Verse 46 functions to make the connection between the two Adams of v. 45 and the two bodies of v. 44 crystal clear leading the audience to understand the body of the 'first Adam' as a *psychikon* body and the body of the 'last Adam' (i.e., the *risen* Christ) as a *pneumatikon* body. Hence, v. 46 need not be taken as evidence of 'over-realized eschatology' at Corinth, a postulated background that is increasingly being challenged (e.g., see my 'Firstfruits', 461; Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 105; Vos, 'Argumentation', 313-33; R. Hays, 'The Conversion of the Imagination: Scripture and Eschatology in 1 Corinthians', *NTS* 45 [1999], 391-412).

priate for the 'new creation' when it arrives in its fullness.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, it becomes clear that the 'last Adam' is indeed the man through whom the future resurrection of the dead comes (15:21), the one in/by whom all will be made alive (*zōopoiēthēsontai*, 15:22), who himself as a 'making alive Spirit (*pneuma zōopoion*)', will have an active role in making alive the *psychikon* body.<sup>45</sup>

In v. 47, the conspicuous absence of 'stuff' language to describe the heavenly man shows that Paul's purpose is not to highlight the difference between the material of the first Adam and the material of the last.<sup>46</sup> The parallel structure of the two genitives (of earth, of heaven) *qualitatively* describes the two different *temporal modes of existence* to which Paul has been referring with the *psychikon/pneumatikon* contrast.<sup>47</sup> One of these modes pertains to earth and is prone to disintegration into dust, whereas the other 'pertains to heaven' (i.e., where 'heaven is not a locality as such, but the realm characterized by the immediate presence and purity of the living God in and through Christ and the Spirit').<sup>48</sup> Paul's point here is simply that just as we have borne<sup>49</sup> the image of the first Adam (i.e., a *psychikon* body composed of dust), as a result of its transformation, we will bear the image of the last Adam (i.e., a *pneumatikon* body).

Hence, contrary to his audience's expectations, Paul's rhetoric destabilizes the cosmological hierarchy with which they had made sense of the cosmos, and particularly with regard to the place of the fleshly human body within it. A *psychikon* body and a *pneumatikon* body are indeed opposites. But they are *temporal* opposites, one fit for 'this age' where Sin's power is still active and one fit for the 'new creation' when it arrives in its fullness and Sin's power is no longer present. Paul's rhetoric assumes that even the low status fleshly elements of the present human body will be transformed and incorporated into the life of the 'new creation' as a *pneumatikon* body. Hence, he is

44 In the context, the most natural object for one who 'makes alive' to act upon is the naked seed sown at death, i.e., the *psychikon* body.

45 If Paul is using the *psychikon/pneumatikon* terminology in the way I am suggesting, Asher's argument that *psychikon* is best taken as 'animated' here and therefore would not be a fitting way to describe a buried body ('ΣΠΕΙΡΕΤΑΙ', 110) simply misses Paul's point.

46 Otherwise why miss a golden opportunity to clarify the composition of the man of heaven by juxtaposing 'the man of earth composed of dust' with 'the man of heaven composed of spirit?'

47 So Fee, *First Epistle*, 792-93; Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1286-87.

48 Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1287.

49 The whole context makes it clear that the language of 'we have born' (an aorist indicative), indicates that Paul is speaking 'from the standpoint of the eschaton' (Wolff, *Erste Brief*, 411; contra Asher, 'ΣΠΕΙΡΕΤΑΙ', 111).

not constrained by the cosmology of his audience where bodies must fit their earthly or celestial locale but rather his rhetoric has the effect of turning his audience's cosmological categories 'upside down'.

#### IV. The Problem with 'Flesh and Blood'

Even if the above reading of vv. 35-49 is persuasive, one might cite v. 50 to argue that Paul believes that the resurrected body will not be composed of low status flesh.<sup>50</sup> However, there are a number of reasons for taking the phrase, 'flesh and blood (*sarx kai haima*)', as an idiom referring to living, but frail and sinful human beings.<sup>51</sup> The first and foremost reason is the way it is used in this context. The most obvious reading of vv. 51-52 is that Paul is referring to the transformation of two groups (i.e., the living and the dead). In v. 50 the inability of 'flesh and blood (*sarx kai haima*)' to inherit the reign of God stands in synthetic parallelism to corruption (*hē phthora*) not inheriting incorruption (*apharsian*).<sup>52</sup> In this rhetorical unit (vv. 42, 52, 53, 54), cognates of corruption (*phthora*) and incorruption (*apharsia*) uniformly refer to the bodily state of the dead (i.e., corruption, decay) versus the bodily state in which they are raised (i.e., incorruption, non-decay). And on the heels of v. 52, the cognates in vv. 53-54, *thnēton/athanasia* (mortal, subject to death vs. immortal, not subject to death)<sup>53</sup> most naturally refer to those alive at the *parousia*. Hence, in terms of their field of meaning the adjectives in vv. 53-54, *thnēton* and *phtharton*, correspond respectively to the distinction in v. 50 between the living (*sarx kai haima*) and the dead (*hē phthora*).<sup>54</sup>

In v. 50 then, Paul sets forth a theological principle that highlights the notion that neither mere *living* humans (*sarx kai haima*) nor dead and decayed human bodies (*hē phthora*) are able to inherit the reign of God or incorruption *as they are*. Both groups are going to be trans-

50 E.g., Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 125-26, et. al.

51 So J. Jeremias, 'Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God', *NTS* 2 (1956), 151-59. In addition to the argument below about its use in this context, the following reasons also support taking the phrase this way: (1) The most authentic reading treats 'flesh and blood' as a *singular grammatical* entity indicating that the phrase *as a whole* rather than the individual words in it functions as the carrier of meaning. (2) This is its meaning in Gal. 1:15-16 where Paul's *casual* use of it assumes that his *Gentile* audience will understand how he is using it. (3) This is the way it is used in every other occurrence in Greek literature prior to and including the first century (Matt. 16:17; Sir. 14:17-18, 17:31).

52 So Jeremias, 'Flesh and Blood', 152.

53 BDAC, 458, 23.

54 So Jeremias, 'Flesh and Blood', 153.

formed (vv. 51-52) and vv. 53-54 lead the audience to imagine this transformation as something that happens when this present body (i.e., the *psychikon* body), whether it is still flesh and blood (*thnēton*) or is already in a state of corruption (*phtharton*), is clothed with the *pneumatikon* body.<sup>55</sup> All this is consistent with Paul's rhetoric in vv. 35-49. That is, Paul is arguing throughout this chapter that future resurrection existence will be characterized by an embodied materiality and will entail a 'putting on' of this future existence 'over' this present body. Hence, rather than 'sarx and psyche having been sloughed off along the way', Paul's rhetoric assumes that lower status elements like flesh will be transformed and incorporated into the 'new creation'/coming reign of God.<sup>56</sup>

### V. Implications

In this article we have seen how Paul's apocalyptic epistemology in 1 Corinthians 2 sheds light on an issue of ontology that arises in chapter 15 (i.e., the nature of the resurrected body) and what this indicates about Paul's understanding of resurrection life in the consummated 'new creation'. To summarize, for Paul, the transformation that takes place to change one's 'this age' epistemology into one appropriate for the 'new creation' parallels the transformation that will take place to change one's 'this age' body into one appropriate for the 'new creation'. In the first case the person is not annihilated, but rather the Spirit transforms their 'this age' (*psychikos*) epistemological categories into *pneumatikos* ones enabling them to see by the

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55 The context makes it more likely that the neuter singular adjectives in vv. 53-54 modify the unexpressed neuter singular subject *sōma* (NRSV) as opposed to functioning as abstract nouns (NIV).

56 Contra Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 126, cf. 132. Technically, Paul's rhetoric in this chapter does not totally exclude Asher's contention that Paul conceives of the transformation as one in which the terrestrial substance (flesh) is not sloughed off but transformed into the celestial substance of *pneuma* (*Polarity*, 156, n. 20). However, Paul simply has not juxtaposed the fleshly material of the present human body to some sort of pneumatic material of the resurrected body as evidenced by: (1) His use of a cognate of *psyche* rather than a cognate of *sarx* as the adjective to describe the body he explicitly opposes to the resurrected *pneumatikon* body; (2) The way he contrasts the two Adams in v. 45 indicating that their being opposites is not primarily because of the 'stuff' of which they are composed; (3) His refusal in v. 47 to juxtapose 'the man of earth *composed of dust*' with what, on Asher's reading should be his opposite, i.e., 'the man of heaven *composed of pneuma*', (4) Paul never speaks about believers permanently *ascending into heaven* so that their bodies would have to meet the requirements of some sort of celestial existence. Even in 1 Thess. 4:17, following the meeting in the clouds, the context implies a descent, not an ascent.

standards of the 'new creation', standards which should be instantiated in the communal life of the church. In a similar way, in the resurrection the human body of flesh is not annihilated but rather the 'making alive Spirit' transforms its 'this age' (*psychikon*) characteristics into *pneumatikon* ones enabling that person to participate in the 'new creation' at its consummation. Therefore, it is a body characterized by freedom from the ravaging effects of Sin, a body so pervaded by the influence of the 'making alive Spirit' that it has no propensity to death and decay.

Since the problem for Paul is not with the fleshy material of 'this age' per se, but with how Sin has corrupted it, there is no compelling reason to imagine that his view of resurrection life is characterized by something other than embodied materiality, possibly even non-corruptible fleshy materiality. Interesting theological implications begin to emerge if we take into account what were probably 'common sense' background assumptions operative in the audience hearing 1 Corinthians 15. In the ancient Mediterranean milieu two related assumptions about the human body (in Paul's terms, the *psychikon* body) and the cosmos were prevalent and therefore were probably shared by many, especially the more educated, in Paul's Corinthian audience. The first was that 'the human body was not *like* a microcosm; it *was* a microcosm—a small version of the universe at large'.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, it was commonly assumed that 'the human body is of a piece with the elements surrounding and pervading it and that the surface of the body is not a sealed boundary'.<sup>58</sup> If these assumptions were operative in Paul's audience, his rhetoric would have implications that he doesn't make explicit. If indeed the *psychikon* body is understood as a microcosm of the cosmos and as having all types of material substances coursing around and through it, to affirm the final redemption of all the human body's elements would be to affirm the final redemption of all the elements of the cosmic body (and vice versa). This would make very good sense of Rom. 8:18-25 in which he unambiguously connects the redemption of our bodies with the redemption of the entire created order.

We no longer understand the physical cosmos in the same way as did those in the ancient Mediterranean world. However, it is appropriate to explore briefly how Paul's rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 15 might compel us to make particular theological claims on the basis of our own understanding of the physical universe. The conceptual-ity of the human body being porous and connected with all types of

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<sup>57</sup> Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 16.

<sup>58</sup> Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 18.

material substances coursing around and through it is somewhat analogous to current scientifically informed conceptions of the body. Scientists tell us that our bodies are not static entities but continually change over time. Our very flesh is constantly interchanging elements with the rest of the material universe in such a way that '[t]he human body is actually a living crossroad, a midway point between the most distant galaxies and the most minute subatomic particles'.<sup>59</sup> The material of our *psychikon* body literally shares a history with the rest of the material of the created order, a history stretching back to the Big Bang.<sup>60</sup> Hence, in our understanding of the human body and the physical cosmos, *neither is static. Both have histories inextricably woven together at the physical level.*

Using Paul's rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 15 to shape our contemporary eschatological imagination would compel us not only to imagine the redemption of the material composing our body at death, but also the redemption of our body's unfolding history along with the unfolding history of the cosmos. To claim to completely understand all this would be absurd, but it is one way of restating what Paul says in Rom. 8:18-25 in a contemporary way. Such conceptuality sews together the eschatological images of resurrection and new creation moving us to confess that God will redeem the whole diachronic extent of a person's life as well as the life of the cosmos.<sup>61</sup> Hence, while there is clearly more to the redemption of the cosmos and the human body than the redemption of physical 'stuff',<sup>62</sup> 1 Corinthians 15 pushes us to affirm that it too cannot be excluded from redemption and reclamation for God's coming reign.

### Abstract

This article shows how Paul's apocalyptic epistemology in 1 Corinthians 2 relates to an issue of ontology that arises in 1 Corinthians 15 (i.e., the nature of the resurrected body). Using the *psychikon/pneumatikon* terminology in both contexts, Paul's rhetoric in 1 Corin-

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59 Mary Timothy Prokes, *Toward a Theology of the Body* (Grand Rapids, 1996), 45.

60 This is true no matter what 'matter' ultimately turns out to be at a subatomic level and no matter how it behaves at that level, i.e., as a wave or as a particle.

61 Cf. Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, *Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids, 1999), 122-32.

62 In the words of Lyle Dabney, '[I]n raising our mortal body, God will redeem not just that body, the locus of our existence, but the entirety of our embodied life: the whole of our relationships, our experiences and our encounters, all that makes up our identity' ('Justified by the Spirit': Soteriological Reflections on the Resurrection', *IJST* 3 [2001], 61-62).

ans 15 turns the cosmological hierarchy held to by 'some' in his audience upside down. Paul argues that the fleshly human body, rather than being at the bottom of a cosmological hierarchy with no place in the afterlife, will be elevated by God to the level of what will be redeemed/transformed in the new creation. This, in turn, suggests a definite material continuity between 'this age' and the new creation and that the discontinuity between them does not have to do with fleshly existence per se, but rather with how Sin has corrupted our current fleshly existence. The article concludes by suggesting that Paul's rhetoric in this chapter ought to shape our contemporary eschatological imagination in a particular way. It should compel us not only to imagine the redemption of the material composing our body at death, but also the redemption of our body's unfolding history along with the unfolding history of the cosmos.

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