

## The Resurrection of Jesus in the Pre-Pauline Formula of 1 Cor 15.3–5

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The present essay offers a fresh contribution to the long-standing debate regarding the nature of the resurrection of Christ within the pre-Pauline formula of 1 Cor 15.3–5. The article first provides an analysis of the current state of the discussion, offering new observations and lines of evidence which suggest that a number of common arguments on both sides of the debate are lacking or inconclusive. The essay then offers a new proposal regarding the verb used within the formula for the resurrection event. The article presents previously neglected evidence significant for the debate regarding Jesus' resurrection within this primitive confession.

**Keywords:** pre-Pauline formula, 1 Cor 15, resurrection, empty tomb, *egeirō*

There is almost universal scholarly consensus that 1 Cor 15.3–5 contains a carefully preserved tradition pre-dating Paul's apostolic activity and received by him within two to five years of the founding events.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, a number of facets of this primitive confession continue to be matters of dispute, including the formula's provenance, its composition history, and its function within the life of the early church.<sup>2</sup> Among these controverted issues, by far the most consequential, historically and theologically, is the on-going debate regarding the nature of the resurrection of Christ within this primitive formula. What does this ancient formula

1 Cf. H. Conzelmann, 'On the Analysis of the Confessional Formula in 1 Corinthians 15:3–5', *Int* 20 (1966) 15–25; H. Schlier, 'Die Anfänge des christologischen Credo', *Zur Frühgeschichte der Christologie* (ed. B. Weite; Freiburg: Herder, 1970) 27–8, 56; J. Kloppenborg, 'An Analysis of the Pre-Pauline Formula in 1 Corinthians 15:3b–5 in Light of Some Recent Literature', *CBQ* 18 (1978) 351–67; G. Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology* (London: SCM, 1994) 33–8; and B. Gerhardsson, 'Evidence for Christ's Resurrection according to Paul: 1 Cor 15:1–11', *Neotestamentica et Philonica: Studies in Honor of Peder Borgen* (ed. D. E. Aune, T. Seland, J. Henning Ulrichsen; NovTSup 106; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003) 75–91.

2 For compact discussion and the relevant literature, see W. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, vol. IV (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001) 14–26.

affirm, when it asserts ‘he was raised on the third day’? In this study I will offer, first, a number of observations and lines of evidence relevant to this debate which have not been previously considered, and, second, a new proposal regarding the description within the formula of the resurrection event. This fresh proposal considers previously neglected evidence that is in my judgement highly significant for the long-standing debate regarding the nature of Jesus’ resurrection within this ancient confession.

### 1. The Debate Regarding Jesus’ Resurrection in 1 Cor 15.3–5

Congruent with the traditional understanding of the passage within patristic, medieval and reformation exegesis, many scholars argue that the core kerygma of 1 Cor 15.3–5 was from its inception transmitted as the good news of Jesus’ bodily resurrection from the tomb on the third day.<sup>3</sup> Among recent treatments of the formula, Martin Hengel has offered perhaps the most thorough case for this view.<sup>4</sup> According to Hengel, this kerygmatic summary proclaims ‘a narratable salvation-event in space and time’ which ‘necessarily involved the body of the dead Jesus’.<sup>5</sup> Within this early formula, the confession that Jesus was ‘raised on the third day’ is by definition an affirmation of the revivification of Jesus’ crucified body, ‘understood as nothing other than a resurrection *from the tomb*’.<sup>6</sup> The language and thought of this terse formula, Hengel argues, presupposes a narrative of the kind we see in the synoptics and John, involving an empty tomb, and encounters with a Jesus risen from the tomb in the flesh.<sup>7</sup> Such a conclusion, Hengel maintains, has significant ramifications for our reconstruction of primitive Christianity. Hengel calls attention to Paul’s explicit claim

3 See, for example, G. Kittel, ‘Die Auferstehung Jesu’, *Deutsche Theologie* 4 (1937) 133–68; R. Sider, ‘St. Paul’s Understanding of the Nature and Significance of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians XV 1–19’, *NovT* 19 (1975) 124–41; W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991–8) II. 352–9; J. Kremer, *Das älteste Zeugnis von der Auferstehung Christi: Eine bibeltheologische Studie zur Aussage und Bedeutung von 1 Kor 15,1–11* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1970<sup>3</sup>) 12–87; M. Hauger, ‘Die Deutung der Auferweckung Jesu Christi durch Paulus’, *Die Wirklichkeit der Auferstehung* (ed. H.-J. Eckstein and M. Welker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2002) 31–58; C. Wolff, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1996) 361–70; A. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 1197–1203; N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 317–29; and C. Bryan, *The Resurrection of the Messiah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 46–54.

4 M. Hengel, ‘Das Begräbnis Jesu bei Paulus und die leibliche Auferstehung aus dem Grabe’, *Auferstehung – Resurrection* (ed. F. Avemarie and H. Lichtenberger; WUNT 135; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001) 119–83.

5 Hengel, ‘Auferstehung’, 128, 132.

6 Hengel, ‘Auferstehung’, 138 (emphasis added).

7 Hengel, ‘Auferstehung’, 127–38.

that the content of the formula was the common proclamation of all the apostolic eyewitnesses whom he enumerates in 15.5–8, including Peter, James and the Twelve: ‘whether it was I or they, so we proclaim, and so you believed’ (15.11). Paul’s rehearsal of this foundational gospel, Hengel argues, far from being consistent with an originally pluriform Christianity, rather suggests a continuity in the proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection from the earliest kerygma until the time of the written gospels. On Hengel’s reconstruction, this early formula thus provides conclusive evidence for the primitive and apostolic character of the kerygma of Jesus’ death, burial and bodily resurrection:

If we give [1 Cor] 15:11 its due weight, it follows that there existed at the very beginning of earliest Christianity, not an unlimited diversity of conflicting Christologies and confessions, but instead this *one* gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

But is there in fact continuity between the narratives of Jesus’ death and resurrection in the canonical gospels and the early formula in 1 Cor 15.3–5? The key point of controversy is the understanding of Jesus’ resurrection in the confessional formula. To be sure, the resurrection narratives in the synoptics and John, as is widely recognised, portray Jesus as raised to life on the third day in his crucified body, leaving behind him an empty tomb. But as Nikolaus Walter points out, the traditional formula in 1 Cor 15, although proclaiming Jesus’ resurrection, does not explicitly mention an empty tomb, elaborate on what it means that Jesus has been ‘raised’ from the dead, or provide specific details regarding what kind of body the risen Lord had.<sup>9</sup> And according to one influential reconstruction, Paul and other early Christ-followers did not understand Jesus’ resurrection as an event involving the revival of Jesus’ body of flesh and bones. As Rudolf Bultmann famously remarked, ‘The accounts of an empty tomb are legends, of which Paul as yet knew nothing.’<sup>10</sup> On this view, belief in the resurrection of Jesus’ crucified body from the tomb, such as we see reflected in the gospel accounts, was a later development, unknown to Paul and the earliest Christ-followers.

A classic formulation of this thesis was provided by Hans Grass’ study *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*.<sup>11</sup> In Grass’ reconstruction, Paul had ‘freed himself entirely from the vulgar Jewish conception of the restoration to life of the old corporeity’.<sup>12</sup> In the resurrection faith of Paul and the earliest apostles,

8 Hengel, ‘Auferstehung’, 122.

9 N. Walter, ‘Leibliche Auferstehung? Zur Frage der Hellenisierung der Auferweckungshoffnung bei Paulus’, *Paulus, Apostel Jesu Christi: Festschrift für Günter Klein zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. M. Trowitzsch; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998) 112 n. 7.

10 R. Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984<sup>9</sup>) 48 (‘Legende sind die Geschichten vom leeren Grabe, von dem Paulus noch nichts weiß’).

11 H. Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962).

12 Grass, *Ostergeschehen*, 171.

Jesus' fleshly body lay mouldering in the tomb, yet in a new, heavenly body he was now 'raised' or exalted to the right hand of God.<sup>13</sup> Mark's legend of the empty tomb first introduced the concept of a resurrection of Jesus' earthly body, later augmented in Matthew, Luke and John by further legendary accounts of Jesus' appearances in the flesh to the disciples.<sup>14</sup> More recently, Adela Yarbro Collins has proposed a somewhat different version of this same hypothesis. In Collins' view, as in that of Grass, 1 Cor 15 reveals that 'for Paul, and presumably for many other early Christians, the resurrection of Jesus did not imply that his tomb was empty'.<sup>15</sup> Rather, Paul's conception of Jesus being 'raised on the third day' involved the bestowal of a new, heavenly body discontinuous with the earthly, fleshly body.<sup>16</sup> As with other early Christ-followers, 'Paul's understanding of the resurrection of Jesus did not involve the revival of his corpse'.<sup>17</sup> At a later period, Mark composed a fictional story about Jesus being 'raised' from an empty tomb to express his belief that, after his death and burial, Jesus' body had been immediately translated from the grave to heaven (divested of his flesh along the way).<sup>18</sup> Only at a still later stage do we encounter Matthew, Luke, John and Acts transmitting accounts of Jesus, his once-dead body restored to life, walking the earth and meeting with his disciples, reflecting their relatively new belief that 'Jesus' resurrection entailed the revival of his earthly body'.<sup>19</sup>

The historical scenarios offered by Collins and Grass, although differing on a number of points, are agreed that the earliest Christ-followers did not regard Jesus' resurrection as an event involving the revivification of the corpse laid in the tomb. Belief in a resurrection of Jesus' crucified body was a later development, accompanied by legendary accounts of an empty tomb and of the disciples encountering, touching and eating with the risen Jesus. On this reconstruction, in contrast with that of Hengel, belief in the resurrection of Jesus' crucified body from the tomb was neither primitive nor apostolic, but a later conception in discontinuity with the earliest kerygma. From this perspective, the good news summarised in 1 Cor 15.3-5, and the good news narrated by Matthew,

13 Grass, *Ostergeschehen*, 146-73.

14 Grass, *Ostergeschehen*, 173-248.

15 A. Y. Collins, 'The Empty Tomb in the Gospel according to Mark', *Hermes and Athena: Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology* (ed. E. Stump and T. P. Flint; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993) 114.

16 Collins, 'Empty Tomb', 111-14.

17 Collins, 'Empty Tomb', 111.

18 Collins, 'Empty Tomb', 115-31; *eadem*, 'Ancient Notions of Transferral and Apotheosis in relation to the Empty Tomb Story in Mark', *Metamorphoses: Resurrection, Body and Transformative Practices in Early Christianity* (ed. T. K. Seim and J. Okland; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2009) 41-57.

19 Collins, 'Empty Tomb', 131; cf. 'Transferral', 147.

Mark, Luke and John, are different gospels indeed, for they are fundamentally at variance regarding the core of that kerygma: the meaning of the affirmation that Jesus ‘has been raised on the third day’.<sup>20</sup>

Did the apostolic kerygma which Paul recounts in 1 Cor 15.3–5 concur with the later narratives of the synoptics and John in centring this good news on the resurrection of Jesus’ crucified body, or did the earliest proclamation envision a resurrection of Jesus which did not involve the revival of the corpse laid in the tomb? Given the long-standing character of the debate, and the sparseness of the textual evidence (the formula preserved in 1 Cor 15.3–5 contains a total of twenty-nine words), one might reasonably question whether there is anything new to be said on the matter. Indeed, the debate appears to have reached a sort of stasis or deadlock. However, I am convinced that, even within this brief formula, a number of important lines of evidence remain untapped. In what follows I wish to offer several new observations relevant to this discussion. Space precludes a full discussion of the formula here; rather, I will focus only on central issues in the debate concerning the nature of Jesus’ resurrection within this ancient confession. Arguments within this debate may be conveniently divided into three types: (1) arguments based upon the sequence of verbs within the formula; (2) arguments from Paul’s discussion of the resurrection within the larger chapter; and (3) arguments from the formula’s description of the resurrection event itself. In sections 2, 3 and 4 of this study I will take up each of these in turn, offering fresh evidence and observations to show that a number of common arguments *on both sides of the debate* are weak, unpersuasive, or at least incomplete. That will constitute the negative, ground-clearing portion of this study. In section 5, then, I will offer a new proposal regarding the language of this primitive formula, which I believe is of sufficient weight to advance, indeed perhaps even to resolve, the long-standing debate regarding the nature of Jesus’ resurrection envisioned in this early confession.

20 For similar reconstructions of the origins of Christian belief in Jesus’ resurrection, see J. M. Robinson, ‘Jesus – from Easter to Valentinus (or to the Apostles’ Creed)’, *JBL* 101 (1982) 5–37; P. Lampe, ‘Paul’s Concept of a Spiritual Body’, *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments* (ed. T. Peters, R. J. Russell, M. Welker; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 103–14; D. A. Smith, *Revisiting the Empty Tomb: The Early History of Easter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010) 13–45; M. J. Borg, ‘The Truth of Easter’, in M. J. Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999) 129–42; A. Lindemann, *Der Erste Korintherbrief* (HNT 9/1; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000) 325–36; J. Holleman, *Resurrection and Parousia: A Traditio-Historical Study of Paul’s Eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15* (NovTSup 84; Leiden/New York/Cologne: Brill, 1996) 142–4; H. Conzelmann, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981<sup>2</sup>) 305–18; and Walter, ‘Auferstehung?’, 109–27.

## 2. Arguments Based upon the Fourfold Sequence of Verbs within the Formula

We begin with arguments relating to the formula's fourfold affirmation of Jesus' death, burial, resurrection and appearances to eyewitnesses. An important argument of those scholars who hold that the resurrection of Jesus is understood within the confessional formula as an event unrelated to Jesus' corpse is the absence of any mention within that fourfold sequence of an empty tomb. In the view of these interpreters, the empty tomb is *conspicuous by its absence* within the early confession. If an empty tomb had been known from the beginning, it seems unlikely that it would have been omitted from this primitive formula. The fact that the formula speaks only of Jesus' death, burial, resurrection and appearances to the disciples, with no mention whatsoever of an empty tomb, suggests that belief in an empty tomb was a later development.<sup>21</sup> Bultmann's terse apophthegm remains the classic statement of the thesis: of these later legends of an empty tomb 'Paul as yet knew nothing'.<sup>22</sup>

However, this argument must be judged unconvincing. Two lines of evidence are of extraordinary importance, although to my knowledge neither has been previously brought to bear on the question. The first involves the source we know as Luke-Acts. This document, although significantly later than the pre-Pauline formula in 1 Cor 15, nevertheless provides relevant evidence. As a result of its distinctive two-part composition, Luke-Acts is unique within ancient Christianity in containing both a *narrative* of the resurrection (Luke 24), and *confessional summaries* of this event (within the apostolic speeches in Acts). This permits us to see a striking feature of early Christian traditions regarding the resurrection: whereas the empty tomb has a prominent place within the full resurrection *narrative* in Luke's gospel (Luke 24.1-12; cf. 24.23-4), it is never mentioned explicitly in the *narrative summaries* within Acts. These summaries, like the formula in 1 Cor 15.3-5, instead focus exclusively on Jesus' *death*, his *burial*, his *resurrection* and his *appearances* to the apostles (Acts 13.26-37), or, more narrowly, on his *death*, *resurrection* and *appearances* (10.36-41), or, more narrowly still, on his *death* and *resurrection* (2.22-32; 3.13-15; 4.10; 17.31). The empty tomb, although implicit within the confessional summaries in the kerygmatic claim that Jesus' body did not undergo decay (Acts 2.25-31; 13.34-7), is never itself an explicit theme within these summaries. This would suggest that, for the author of Luke-Acts, and most likely also for his readers, the empty tomb had its proper home within narratives of the resurrection event, but was not to be expected within shorter formulae, or even narrative summaries, concerning this event.

21 For the argument, see Grass, *Ostergeschehen*, 146-7; Robinson, 'Easter', 12; Conzelmann, *Korinther*, 310-11; Lindemann, *Korintherbrief*, 331-2; Borg, 'Truth', 132.

22 Bultmann, *Theologie*, 48.

This is confirmed by a further striking fact: the phenomenon we see at work in Luke-Acts is consistent with early Christian formulae and creeds as a whole. Despite their great variety, none of the confessional formulae or creedal fragments known to us from the first two centuries contains any reference to the empty tomb. These formulae make explicit mention only of Jesus' death and resurrection or, more rarely, of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection.<sup>23</sup> This situation remains the same even after the rise of full creeds in the latter half of the second century: all the creedal statements of the ancient church known to us from the latter half of the second century onward focus exclusively on Jesus' death, burial and resurrection (or, less frequently, only on Jesus' death and resurrection), omitting any reference to a vacant tomb.<sup>24</sup> And yet these creeds had their *Sitz im Leben* within a theological milieu in which the empty tomb narratives of the canonical gospels were widely known and received as authoritative, and in which the understanding of the future resurrection as a resurrection of the flesh was a theological given (regularly expressed explicitly within these creeds themselves).<sup>25</sup> This situation (in which the empty tomb is assumed, but not creedally expressed) coheres

23 Cf. Rom 1.3–4; 4.24–5; 8.34; 10.8–10; 1 Thess 4.14; 1 Pet 3.18–22; Ignatius of Antioch, *Smyrn.* 1.1–2; *Trall.* 9; Justin, *1 Apol.* 21.1; 31.7; 42.4; 46.5; *Dial.* 63.1; 85.2; 132.1; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.10.1; 3.4.2; 3.16.6; Tertullian, *Prax.* 2; *Praescr.* 13; *Virg.* 1.

24 Cf. the *Old Roman Creed* (ca. 175 CE): τὸν ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου σταυρωθέντα καὶ ταφέντα, καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἀναστάντα ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν ('who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was buried, and on the third day rose from the dead'); *Creed of Jerusalem* (ca. 350 CE): τὸν σταυρωθέντα καὶ ταφέντα καὶ ἀναστάντα ἐκ νεκρῶν τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ('who was crucified and buried and rose from the dead on the third day'); *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.41 (fourth century CE): σταυρωθέντα ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου καὶ ἀποθανόντα ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, καὶ ἀναστάντα ἐκ νεκρῶν μετὰ τὸ παθεῖν τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ('crucified under Pontius Pilate and died for us, and risen from the dead after his suffering on the third day'); *Creed of Milan* (ca. 375 CE): *passus, et sepultus, et tertia die resurrexit a mortuis* ('suffered death and was buried, and on the third day he rose from the dead'); *Creed of Hippo* (ca. 400 CE): *crucifixum sub Pontio Pilato, mortuum, et sepultum, tertia die resurrexit* ('was crucified under Pontius Pilate, died and was buried, on the third day he rose again'); *Creed of Ravenna* (ca. 400 CE): *crucifixus est et sepultus, tertia die resurrexit* ('was crucified and buried, on the third day he rose again'); *Creed of the First Council of Toledo* (400 CE): *crucifixum, mortuum et sepultum, et tertia die resurrexisse* ('he was crucified, died and was buried, and on the third day he rose again'); *Apostles' Creed* (sixth century CE): *crucifixus, mortuus et sepultus, descendit ad inferna, tertia die resurrexit a mortuis* ('was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose from the dead').

25 Cf. the *Old Roman Creed*: πιστεύω εἰς . . . σαρκὸς ἀνάστασιν ('I believe in . . . the resurrection of the flesh'); *Creed of Jerusalem*: πιστεύομεν . . . εἰς σαρκὸς ἀνάστασιν ('we believe . . . in the resurrection of the flesh'); *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.41: βαπτίζομαι καὶ . . . εἰς σαρκὸς ἀνάστασιν ('I am baptized also . . . into the resurrection of the flesh'); *Creed of Milan*: *credo in . . . carnis resurrectionem* ('I believe in . . . the resurrection of the flesh'); *Creed of Hippo*: *credimus in . . . resurrectionem carnis* ('we believe in . . . the resurrection of the flesh'); *Creed of Ravenna*: *credo in . . . carnis resurrectionem* ('I believe in . . . the resurrection of the flesh'); *Creed of the First Council of Toledo*: *resurrectionem vero humanae credimus carnis* ('we truly



with our evidence from Luke-Acts, and leads to an important form-critical conclusion: for all ancient Christians for whom we have evidence, reference to the empty tomb was confined to full *narratives* of the resurrection event (such as we see in the canonical gospels), and was not considered appropriate or expected within *confessional formulae* regarding that event (such as we see in 1 Cor 15.3–5).

The claim that the empty tomb is conspicuous by its absence in 1 Cor 15.3–5 is thus based on a misapprehension regarding the form and limits of such summaries. As we have seen, *no formula, creedal fragment or creed known to us from the ancient church contains any reference to the empty tomb*. The absence of the empty tomb from the confessional formula in 1 Cor 15.3–5 thus provides no evidence for an understanding of Jesus' resurrection within that formula which did not involve the body in the tomb.

In contrast to the argument we have just examined, those scholars who contend that the formula proclaims a resurrection of Jesus' crucified body often argue that an empty tomb is *necessarily implied* within the formula in its fourfold affirmation of Jesus' death, burial, resurrection and appearances. From the perspective of these scholars, the formula's explicit mention of the burial (καὶ ὅτι ἐτάφη, 15.4) is especially significant. On this view, the verbal sequence 'died ... buried ... raised ... appeared' by itself implies an empty tomb, making explicit reference redundant.<sup>26</sup> Christopher Bryan states the case with verve:

Nevertheless, however many times or however learnedly it may have been denied, the logic of the sequence 'Christ died ... he was buried' leading to 'he has been raised ... he appeared' still appears to me, on the basis of any plausible interpretation of the language, to imply that at the second stage the tomb is to be regarded as empty. ('My colleague went to her office. She sat at her desk and wrote. She went out. She was seen in the Blue Chair coffee shop.' Does the reader *really* need me to add that my colleague was now no longer at her desk?)<sup>27</sup>

The strength of this argument is its common-sense basis in the concrete realities of Greek syntax. In the ancient formula the verbs have a single subject: 'Christ died ... he was buried ... he has been raised ... he appeared' (15.3–5). Since the subject

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believe in the resurrection of our human flesh'); *Apostles' Creed: credo in . . . carnis resurrectionem* ('I believe in . . . the resurrection of the flesh').

<sup>26</sup> So Pannenberg, *Theology*, II.359; Kittel, 'Auferstehung', 140; Wolff, *Korinther*, 362–3; Sider, 'Resurrection', 134–6; Kremer, *Zeugnis*, 36–9; Thiselton, *Corinthians*, 1192–3; Hengel, 'Auferstehung', 129–32; Wright, *Resurrection*, 321; and E. J. Schnabel, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 2006) 882. So now also G. Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Christ: A Historical Inquiry* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2004) 69–71 (cf. somewhat differently Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Jesus*, 45–7).

<sup>27</sup> Bryan, *Resurrection*, 51.



of the first two verbs is Christ in his crucified body of flesh and bones which died (15.3) and was buried (15.4), the syntax of the formula would seem to demand that it is this same body which was raised on the third day (15.4) and was seen by the disciples (15.5).

However, an objection may be raised to this argument. Although consistency in the nature of a subject within a Greek period can normally be assumed, this is not always the case. Counter-examples can be offered. Two such examples are found in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16.19–31). This parable narrates the death of its two principal characters and (according to the usual interpretation of the parable) their subsequent entrance into a disembodied, interim state awaiting a future bodily resurrection.<sup>28</sup> In the parable, the poor man dies and is then borne away by the angels to Abraham's bosom (ἐγένετο δὲ ἀποθανεῖν τὸν πτωχὸν καὶ ἀπενεχθῆναι αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀγγέλων εἰς τὸν κόλπον Ἀβραάμ, 16.22). Lazarus is the subject of both infinitives, and yet the first infinitive (ἀποθανεῖν) refers to Lazarus in his *embodied* state, the second infinitive (ἀπενεχθῆναι) to Lazarus (according to the usual understanding of the parable) in a *disembodied* state. Perhaps more strikingly still, within the same parable the rich man is the consistent subject of the verbal triad ἀπέθανεν ('died'), ἐτάφη ('was buried') and ὁρᾷ ('he sees'). And yet the character of the subject does not remain entirely consistent. For the subject of the first two verbs (which are identical to the first two verbs within the fourfold verbal sequence of the pre-Pauline formula) is the rich man in his body of flesh and bones, but the subject of the final verb is (again, according to the most common reading of the parable) the rich man apart from that body in Hades (16.22–3).

A similar example is found near the close of Plato's account of Socrates' final hours in the *Phaedo*. In a dramatic exclamation point to the previous teaching of Socrates within the dialogue concerning the immortality of the soul, the philosopher objects to Crito's inquiry regarding how he wishes his disciples to bury him:

ὅτι δ' ἐγὼ πάλαί πολὺν λόγον πεποίημαι, ὡς, ἐπειδὴν πῖω τὸ φάρμακον, οὐκέτι ὑμῖν παραμενῶ, ἀλλ' οἰχήσομαι ἀπιὼν εἰς μακάρων δὴ τινὰς εὐδαμονίας, ταῦτα μοι δοκῶ αὐτῷ ἄλλως λέγειν, παραμυθούμενος ἅμα μὲν ὑμᾶς, ἅμα δ' ἐμαυτόν.

And as for the lengthy argument I have made, that, when I drink the poison, I will no longer remain with you, but will depart and go away into certain joyful dwellings of the blessed, it seems I say these things to Crito in vain, although I am seeking to comfort all of you and also my own self. (Plato, *Phaedo* 115d 18–22)

28 On the thought-world of the parable within its Jewish setting, see, conveniently, J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke x–xxiv* (AB 28A; New York: Doubleday, 1985) 1124–34.

In his description of his impending execution and its aftermath, Socrates is the subject of all three finite verbs, but the subject of the first verb (πίω) refers to Socrates in his *mortal body*, while the subject of the verbs which follow (παραμενῶ ... οἰχήσομαι) is the *soul* of Socrates, now freed from the body.

To be sure, in the counter-examples given, contextual factors make the change in the subject evident, and such factors are admittedly lacking in Paul's formula. Another important difference between the formula and the texts cited above is the formula's emphatic placement of the second element within the sequence, the burial, within an independent ὅτι-clause (καὶ ὅτι ἐτάφη, 15.4). Given the weight attached to it by this independent clause, Hans Conzelman's oft-repeated claim that the mention of the burial serves only to confirm the reality of Christ's death seems less likely than J. N. D. Kelly's suggestion that the burial here functions as 'the necessary prelude to the resurrection'.<sup>29</sup> One might well agree with Bryan that, on the most *plausible* reading of 1 Cor 15.3–5, the subject of the verb ἐγήγερται ('he has been raised'), consistent with the subject of the verbs ἀπέθανεν ('died') and ἐτάφη ('he was buried'), is the crucified body of Christ.

However, in light of the counter-examples given above, it seems to me that the evidence from this verbal sequence alone falls short of being positively conclusive. In the context of the Platonic doctrine of the immortality of the soul, the reader of the *Phaedo* understands that Socrates' drinking of the hemlock involves his earthly, mortal body, but that his post-mortem journey does not. The reader of Luke's gospel likewise grasps from signals within the passage and shared understandings of the afterlife that, although buried in his fleshly, mortal body, it is the rich man's soul that is in Hades. In the same way, I would suggest, if the formula's affirmation that Jesus has been 'raised' signified, within its original context, his elevation to heaven in a celestial body (as Hans Grass and a number of scholars have argued), a sequence involving a burial followed by a resurrection not involving the revivification of the entombed body would be quite conceivable. In other words, it is not the verbal sequence of burial, resurrection and appearances that is ultimately decisive for the nature of the resurrection event envisioned in the formula, but the meaning of the middle term within that sequence – 'he has been raised' (καὶ ὅτι ἐγήγερται, 15.4). Can light be shed on this by Paul's treatment of the future resurrection of the faithful later in the same chapter? We must go on to consider arguments based upon Paul's discussion of the resurrection body in 1 Cor 15.36–58.

29 J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (New York: Longman, 1972<sup>3</sup>) 151; contrast Conzelmann, 'Analysis', 21.

### 3. Arguments from Paul's Description of the Resurrection in 1 Cor 15.36–58

Paul's quotation of the early confession in 1 Cor 15.3–5 functions as part of his larger discussion of resurrection within the chapter. Paul's wider discussion therefore, most interpreters agree, offers relevant evidence regarding the primitive formula. But the interpretation of 1 Cor 15.36–58 is itself contested. Three distinct views may be delineated. (1) A number of scholars argue that Paul's conception of the resurrection in 1 Cor 15 assumes the mainstream ancient Jewish belief in the resurrection of the once-dead body of flesh and bones from the tomb.<sup>30</sup> (2) Other interpreters, however, argue that Paul's understanding in the chapter represents a modification of the mainstream Jewish viewpoint, envisioning a heavenly or celestial body which excludes participation of the earthly, fleshly body in final salvation.<sup>31</sup> (3) Along similar but somewhat different lines from the second reading, Troels Engberg-Pedersen (building on the earlier work of Dale Martin and Jeffrey R. Asher) has recently argued that Paul's concept of the resurrection, involving a unique fusion of Jewish apocalyptic expectations and Stoic cosmology, envisioned an ethereally material resurrection body composed not of flesh but of the corporeal substance of *pneuma*, fitting the new pneumatic body to be 'raised' or elevated to heavenly habitation.<sup>32</sup>

What are the implications of these competing readings of 1 Cor 15.36–58 for Paul's conception of Jesus' resurrection proclaimed in the formula? According to the first view, Paul would understand Jesus' resurrection in a straightforward manner as the revivification of his crucified and entombed body. On the second reading, by contrast, Paul would understand the formula's confession that Jesus has been 'raised' to refer not to the revival of his corpse, but to an elevation or assumption of some kind into heavenly glory. Engberg-Pedersen's third view is distinctive, for on this reading (in agreement with view 2) Paul would understand the formula's affirmation of Jesus' resurrection to denote his elevation in a celestial body to the heavenly realm, but (in agreement with view 1) in Paul's

30 See, for example, Thiselton, *Corinthians*, 1257–1306; Wright, *Resurrection*, 340–61; Hengel, 'Auferstehung', 119–83.

31 See, for example, Grass, *Ostergeschehen*, 146–73; Collins, 'Empty Tomb', 111–14; Smith, *Empty Tomb*, 27–45; P. Fredriksen, 'Vile Bodies: Paul and Augustine on the Resurrection of the Flesh', *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective* (ed. M. S. Burrows and P. Rorem; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 75–87.

32 See T. Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 8–38; id., 'Complete and Incomplete Transformation in Paul: A Philosophical Reading of Paul on Body and Spirit', *Metamorphoses: Resurrection, Body and Transformative Practices in Early Christianity* (ed. T. K. Seim and J. Okland; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2009) 123–46. Similarly D. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale, 1995) 108–30 and J. R. Asher, *Polarity and Change in 1 Corinthians 15: A Study of Metaphysics, Rhetoric, and Resurrection* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2000).

thinking this event, involving a transformation of the fleshly body into a pneumatic one, would of necessity entail an empty tomb. And yet, on Engberg-Pedersen's reading, Paul's Stoicised conception of resurrection excludes the revival of Jesus' body of flesh and bones, and is strongly at variance with the accounts in the synoptics, John and Acts of the disciples encountering, touching and eating with a Jesus risen from the tomb in the flesh.

What are we to make of these varied proposals regarding Paul's understanding of the resurrection in 1 Cor 15.36–58? An adequate discussion of this contested and complex passage, in an essay devoted to the pre-Pauline formula, is hardly possible. But given its relevance for the interpretation of the formula, I will here briefly sketch certain key but hitherto neglected features of Paul's exposition which I believe will illumine Paul's thought within the chapter. For many interpreters, Paul's series of oppositions between the present and risen body, with their reference to what is sown being *x* and what is raised being *y* (15.42–4; cf. 15.52–4), points to a radical discontinuity between the mortal body and the risen body in Paul's thought which precludes the possibility that Paul conceived of resurrection in straightforward bodily terms. However, I would propose that this assumption fails to grasp the actual function of this series of contrasts within the structure of Paul's exposition. Five observations are crucial:

1. Within 15.36–49, which is structured by twelve antithetically paired verbs (that is, six pairs of verbs) denoting death (or the mortal state) and resurrection (or the risen state), the *subject* of these antithetical verbal pairs is *one and the same* both for verbs denoting death, and for those denoting resurrection. The subject throughout is the perishable body, which 'dies' but 'is made alive' again by God (15.36), which is 'sown' (σπείρεται) in mortality and death, but 'raised' (ἐγείρεται) to imperishable life (15.42–4).<sup>33</sup> This basic observation, which is nonetheless commonly ignored by interpreters, has profound exegetical implications. Paul does not describe resurrection as an event in which *x* (the present body) is sown, but *y* (a body distinct from the present body) is raised, but in which a single *x* (the present body) is sown a perishable *x*, but raised an imperishable *x*. Paul's sequence of paired verbs in 1 Cor 15.36–49 indicates that in Paul's thought it is precisely that which perishes – the mortal body – that in the resurrection is given new, imperishable life.

2. In 15.50–8, which is structured by seven verbs denoting resurrection or transformation, it is again the *present perishable body* which is the subject of

33 The common assumption (cf. Martin, *Body*, 126–30) that Paul's ellipsis of the subject in 15.42–4 permits the conclusion that the paired verbs lack a subject, or that the paired verbs have distinct subjects, is founded upon misunderstanding of the conventions of ancient Greek syntax; see especially R. Kühner and B. Gerth, *Ausführliche Grammatik der griechischen Sprache* (2 vols.; Hannover: Hahnsche, 1890–1904<sup>3</sup>) II.1.32–6; II.2.560–71, and cf. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934<sup>4</sup>) 391–3.

this resurrection and transformation (15.51, 52, 53–4). In 15.53–4, the subject which clothes itself with imperishability is explicitly ‘this perishable body’ (τὸ φθαρτὸν τοῦτο) and ‘this mortal body’ (τὸ θνητὸν τοῦτο); Paul’s fourfold repetition of ‘this’ (τοῦτο) emphasises that it is *this* mortal, perishable body – corruptible human flesh – which is the subject of the transformation. Paul’s exposition is illuminating, for unlike the brief formula, in which the single subject of the fourfold verbal sequence is the *person* of Christ, in 1 Cor 15.36–58 the one subject of Paul’s verbs of death and resurrection is explicitly the mortal *body*. Paul’s treatment thus explicitly envisions a resurrection event involving the revivification of the earthly body.

3. In addition to ἐγείρω (15.42–4, 52; cf. 15.12–17, 20, 29, 32, 35), the verb used within the formula for Jesus’ resurrection, Paul also employs a variety of additional verbs to denote the resurrection event: ζωοποιέω (‘make alive’, 15.36, 45; cf. 15.22), φορέω (‘be clothed’, 15.49), ἀλλάσσω (‘change’, 15.51, 52) and ἐνδύω (‘clothe’, 15.53, 54). These additional verbs are significant, for they each express, in different ways, not the annihilation or replacement of the fleshly body, but its revival (ζωοποιέω), investiture (φορέω, ἐνδύω) and transformation (ἀλλάσσω). Due to limitations of space, I will focus here only on the last of these, ἀλλάσσω or ‘change’ (15.51, 52). The implications of Paul’s language of ‘change’ have not, I would argue, been fully appreciated within the current discussion. For *x* to *change*, *x* must *continue to exist*. Paul’s affirmation that the present body will be ‘changed’ thus of necessity implies its continued existence and enhancement.

Perhaps not surprisingly, it is the philosophically trained Troels Engberg-Pedersen who has grasped most perceptively the problem of reconciling Paul’s assertion that the body will be *changed* with an interpretation of resurrection in Paul in which the body of flesh and bones will *cease to exist*, being replaced by a body composed either of immaterial ‘spirit’ or of ethereally material *pneuma*. By way of solution, Engberg-Pedersen proposes that Paul here invokes the specialised Aristotelian concept of *substantive change*.<sup>34</sup> This technical philosophical conception involves a unique kind of ‘change’ whereby a subject or substance passes into or out of existence, comes into being or ceases to be, or undergoes a simultaneous process of destruction and generation which produces an entirely new entity.<sup>35</sup> This conception of ‘substantive change’ contrasts with Aristotle’s notion of *qualitative change* (ἀλλοίωσις). In qualitative change, the substance or essence of an entity remains intact, but the entity changes in its qualities, properties or mode of existence.<sup>36</sup> Engberg-Pedersen proposes that Paul uses ‘change’ in the specialised sense of substantive change, to denote the ‘passing-away’ of the body composed of flesh and the ‘coming-to-be’ of the body

34 Engberg-Pedersen, *Material Spirit*, 32; cf. 220–1 n. 84.

35 See Aristotle, *Cat.* 1.4; *Phys.* 5.1; *Gen. corr.* 1.3–4.

36 See Aristotle, *Phys.* 7.2; *Cael.* 1.3; *Cat.* 1.4; *Metaph.* 8.1.7–8.

composed of *pneuma*.<sup>37</sup> However, the common signification of ‘change’ in antiquity, in agreement with the philosophical concept of qualitative change, implies the continued existence of the substance which is changed. Engberg-Pedersen’s claim that Paul uses ‘change’ in a technical sense of Aristotelian philosophy which is contrary to the normal meaning of the term – with no indication that he is doing so – is most improbable, and has the air of an ad hoc expedient.

4. Moreover, the structure of Paul’s argument confirms that, in agreement with the common understanding of ‘change’ in antiquity, the change Paul envisions in the resurrection is a qualitative rather than a substantive one. As we saw, the series of contrasts within 15.36–58 between the ante mortem and risen body do not occur in the *subject* of these periods, but in their *predicates* (verbs and verbal complements). And the predicate complements which contrast the present and risen body invariably describe a change of *quality* rather than of *substance*, in which what was once perishable, dishonoured, weak and mortal is endowed with imperishability, glory, power and immortality (15.42–3, 52–4). Paul’s series of oppositions does not describe two different bodies, distinct in substance, but two contrasting modes of existence of the same body, one prior and the other subsequent to the resurrection.

5. One final feature of the passage must be briefly considered. Central to Engberg-Pedersen’s proposal is the assumption that the σῶμα πνευματικόν in 15.44–6 refers to a body composed of material spirit or *pneuma*, distinct from the body of flesh laid in the tomb.<sup>38</sup> However, this claim reflects a misunderstanding of the actual lexical meaning of the key terms in question. The adjective which Paul here contrasts with πνευματικός is not σάρκινος (cognate with σάρξ), referring to the *flesh*, but ψυχικός (cognate with ψυχή), referring to the *soul*. This adjective outside the New Testament is used, without exception, with reference to the properties or activities of the soul (e.g. 4 Macc 1.32; Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 3.10.2; Epictetus, *Diatr.* 3.7.5–7; Plutarch, *Plac. philos.* 1.8). Modifying σῶμα as here, with reference to the present body, the adjective describes this body as *given life or activity by the soul*. It has nothing to do with the body’s composition, but denotes the source of the body’s life and activity.

The meaning of the paired adjective ψυχικός in 15.44–6 is extremely significant, as it reveals that the exegesis of Engberg-Pedersen involves a fundamental misreading of the passage. For if (as Engberg-Pedersen suggests) σῶμα πνευματικόν in this context describes the composition of the future body, as a body composed solely of *pneuma*, its correlate σῶμα ψυχικόν would perforce describe the composition of the present body, as a body *composed only of soul*. Paul would assert the absence of flesh and bones, not only from the risen body,

37 Engberg-Pedersen, ‘Transformation’, 128.

38 So Engberg-Pedersen, *Material Spirit*, 26–34; similarly Asher, *Polarity*, 153–68 (esp. 153–4 n. 17) and Martin, *Body*, 117, 120, 126.

but also from the present mortal body as well! The impossibility that ψυχικός here refers to the body's composition rules out the notion that its correlated adjective πνευματικός refers to the body's composition. Contrasted with ψυχικός, the adjective πνευματικός must similarly refer to the source of the body's life and activity, describing the risen body as *given life by the Spirit*. The mode of existence described by the adjective πνευματικός is further clarified by the larger context of the letter, in which it is uniformly used with reference to persons or things enlivened, empowered or transformed by the Spirit of God: human beings of flesh and blood (2.15; 3.1; 14.37), palpable manna and water (10.3–4), and a very unethereal rock (10.4). Used with σῶμα in 15.44, the adjective πνευματικός indicates that the risen body will be given life and empowered by God's Spirit.

Both contextual and lexical evidence thus indicate that the phrase σῶμα πνευματικόν in 1 Cor 15.44–6 does not refer to a body composed of material *pneuma*, but to the fleshly body endowed with imperishable life by the power of the Spirit. Although the expression σῶμα πνευματικόν is unique here in Paul, the concept of *the Spirit as the agent of resurrection life* is a major theme within Paul's theology (Rom 8.9–11, 23; 2 Cor 5.4–5; Gal 5.25; 6.7–8). Within this theology, the work of the Spirit in those who belong to Christ will culminate in the resurrection, when 'the one who raised Christ from the dead will also *give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit* who indwells you' (Rom 8.11).

In sum, the specific way in which Paul shapes his argument, the structure of the syntax in which his thought is given expression, and the lexical meaning of his key terms, are not consistent with the notion that Paul in this chapter envisions a non-fleshly resurrection body composed either of non-material 'spirit' or of materially ethereal 'spirit' or *pneuma*, but rather reflect the mainstream Jewish concept of the resurrection of the body of flesh and bones from the tomb, familiar to us from Second Temple Jewish texts (cf. Isa 25.6–9; 26.11–19; Dan 12.2–3; LXX Job 19.25–7; 2 Macc 7; *Sib. Or.* 4.179–92). The evidence of 1 Cor 15.36–58 thus indicates that Paul would understand Jesus' resurrection as the revivification of his crucified and entombed body.

But what is the significance of Paul's understanding for the conception of Jesus' resurrection within the pre-Pauline formula? Paul's treatment of the resurrection within the wider chapter certainly adds further plausibility to the claim that the formula's confession of Jesus' resurrection denoted an event involving the revival of Jesus' crucified body. However, this evidence in my view falls short of conclusive proof, for Paul's own understanding can hardly constitute decisive evidence for the conception of Jesus' resurrection within a pre-Pauline formula which predates Paul's writing of 1 Corinthians by approximately two decades. Despite claims to the contrary, then, neither the fourfold sequence of verbs within the formula itself, nor Paul's treatment of the resurrection body in 1 Cor 15.36–58, provides conclusive evidence regarding the nature of Jesus' resurrection within this ancient confession. We must go on to consider the central, and



most debated, clause of the creed: the formula's affirmation that Christ 'has been raised' on the third day.

#### 4. Arguments from the Formula's Description of Jesus' Resurrection

The most contested question within the debate concerning Jesus' resurrection in the pre-Pauline formula of 1 Cor 15.3-5 involves the word which the formula employs to describe this event. A number of scholars hold that the verb ἐγείρω is an elastic one, denoting some form of ascension to heavenly life after death, but not necessarily a revival of the earthly, mortal body. As Marcus Borg puts it, 'resurrection could involve something happening to a corpse, namely the transformation of a corpse, but it need not'.<sup>39</sup> Along similar lines, Engberg-Pedersen argues that Paul uses the verb ἐγείρω to denote the 'passing-away' of the flesh and bones body, the 'coming-to-be' of a body composed of corporeal *pneuma*, and its ascension to astral immortality.<sup>40</sup> Scholars who take either approach generally interpret the formula's affirmation that Jesus 'has been raised' (ἐγήγερται) to mean that Jesus has been taken up into heaven in a celestial form or body discontinuous with the earthly body of flesh and bones. On this understanding of the verb, the formula's confession that Jesus is 'raised' is entirely consistent with the crucified body of Jesus either (on Borg's view) mouldering in the grave, or (on Engberg-Pedersen's view) ceasing to exist, being replaced by a body of ethereally material substance. Some such understanding of the verb underlies Adela Collins' claim that in this earliest formula, unlike the synoptics and John, 'the resurrection of Jesus did not involve the revival of his corpse'.<sup>41</sup>

Other scholars, however, contend that such approaches reflect a misunderstanding of the function of this language in its ancient Jewish context. On this view, the language of 'resurrection' denotes not a general hope of life after death, but a specific hope of the reversal of death through the mortal body's restoration to life, and its transformation to be imperishable. Wolfhart Pannenberg states this case succinctly: 'Those who want to dispute the empty tomb of Jesus must show that contemporary Jewish witness to belief in the resurrection included some who did not think the resurrection of the dead need have anything at all to do with the body in the tomb.'<sup>42</sup> Given the lack of such evidence, argues Pannenberg, the historian must assume that in the formula of 1 Cor 15.3-5 'the empty tomb was a self-evident implication of what was said about the resurrection of Jesus'.<sup>43</sup>

39 Borg, 'Truth', 131.

40 Engberg-Pedersen, *Material Spirit*, 27-8, 37-8.

41 Collins, 'Empty Tomb', 111.

42 Pannenberg, *Theology*, II.358.

43 Pannenberg, *Theology*, II.359. An argument along the lines of Pannenberg's is taken up and set forth at length, with detailed discussion of the textual evidence, in Hengel, 'Auferstehung',

Of the major arguments advanced on both sides of the debate which we have examined, Pannenberg's inference from the function of resurrection language in the Jewish context is in my judgement the one which can be considered conclusive. Pannenberg's argument is not a claim that there was not a diversity of views within ancient Judaism regarding life after death; rather, it concerns the specific belief denoted by the language of 'resurrection'. To be sure, it is beyond controversy that belief in the restoration to life of the flesh-and-bones body was the general or dominant view held by most first-century Jews.<sup>44</sup> And yet alternative viewpoints also certainly existed (e.g. the Sadducees). Pannenberg's point is that the language of 'resurrection', such as we see in the formula, did not function as general terminology for life after death, embracing all these varied perspectives. Rather, Pannenberg argues, this language was *specific to the mainstream Jewish belief in the revivification of the entombed body*. As Pannenberg observes, the terms which express the resurrection hope within Second Temple Jewish texts, including the verb ἐγείρω, consistently denote the restoration of the mortal body to immortal life (e.g. LXX Dan 12.2–3; Theo Dan 12.2–3; LXX Isa 26.19; LXX Job 19.25–7; 42.17; 2 Macc 7; *Sib. Or.* 4.179–92). The very few counter-examples which have been adduced are in my judgement not convincing.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, no counter-examples whatsoever have been adduced from Jewish literature to date involving ἐγείρω, the verb used for the resurrection event within the formula. Neither Borg's contention that ἐγείρω may be used without reference to the corpse, nor Engberg-Pedersen's assumption that it may be used without reference to the corpse's revival and reconstitution, seems to be consistent with actual first-century usage. Given the function in Jewish antiquity of resurrection language in general, and of ἐγείρω in particular, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the formula's proclamation that Jesus has been 'raised' denotes an event involving the revival of Jesus' entombed body.

However, I am also convinced that an important dimension of the question has yet to receive adequate discussion. In section 5 of this study, I hope to make a fresh contribution to the debate, by offering a more thorough examination

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150–83 and Wright, *Resurrection*, 85–206. See also Schnabel, *Korinther*, 882; Kremer, *Zeugnis*, 38.

44 Cf. Fredriksen, 'Vile Bodies', 79.

45 *I Enoch* 103.4, which is occasionally cited in this regard, does not employ resurrection language. Similarly in *Jub* 23.30–1, the term 'rise up' does not denote resurrection, but the exaltation of the people of God who 'see great peace' and 'drive out their enemies'. The reinterpretation of the resurrection language of the gospels and throughout the New Testament by so-called 'Gnostic' interpreters such as the Valentinians and Ophites, within the framework of an anti-Jewish and docetic Christology which excluded a literal resurrection of the earthly body (cf. *Gos. Phil.* 56.26–57.22; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.30.13), was a later development.

of the language of this formula than has been previously provided. I will focus on the term that is at the centre of the debate, and yet that has received surprisingly inadequate attention – the verb used in the formula for the resurrection event itself (καὶ ὅτι ἐγήγερται, 15.4).

### 5. The Verb ἐγείρω in the Central Affirmation of the Formula

Surprisingly, given its importance in this early formula and its central place in early Christian language for the resurrection, the verb ἐγείρω has received little detailed study.<sup>46</sup> And yet the semantics of this key term offers important additional evidence regarding the nature of Jesus' resurrection in the confessional formula of 1 Cor 15.3–5. Although space precludes a full discussion here, in what follows I will offer the results of a comprehensive analysis of this verb in summary form. The following analysis offers new evidence not previously considered, which I believe is decisive in its force.

Within the New Testament, ἐγείρω is the predominant verbal form used to refer to the resurrection event (whether of Christ or of the faithful).<sup>47</sup> However, the verb was also a common term of everyday ancient life, and its specialised function as resurrection language grew out of that wider usage. And it is that wider non-resurrection usage, to which inadequate attention has been given previously, which provides the key to understanding the meaning of ἐγείρω when used to denote resurrection. Two basic senses of the word may be distinguished. Perhaps the earliest meaning of the verb (sense 1) is *awaken, raise from sleep* (trans.), or *wake up, rise from sleep* (intrans.). This meaning is widely attested at

46 The most extensive treatments are the analyses of A. Oepke in *TDNT* II.333–7, and J. Kremer in *EDNT* 1.372–6. Kremer also provides a brief but perceptive treatment in *Zeugnis*, 40–7. The scant discussion of ἐγείρω elsewhere in the literature focuses largely on the specific question of the transitivity of the passive form of the verb. On this question, see M. B. O'Donnell, 'Some New Testament Words for Resurrection and the Company They Keep', *Resurrection* (ed. S. Porter, M. A. Hayes, D. Tombs; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999) 136–63; D. Kendall and G. O'Collins, 'Christ's Resurrection and the Aorist Passive of *egeirō*', *Greg* 74 (1993) 725–35; and J. Murray, 'Who Raised Up Jesus?', *WTJ* 3 (1941) 113–23. Individual aspects of the semantics of the verb are discussed in A. H. C. van Eijk, 'Resurrection-Language: Its Various Meanings in Early Christian Literature', *Studia Patristica*, vol. XII.1 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1975) 271–6. The word is also discussed briefly in J. Finkenzeller, 'Die Auferstehung Christi und unsere Hoffnung', *Die Frage nach Jesus* (Graz, Austria: Styria, 1973) 203–5 and B. Spörlein, *Die Leugnung der Auferstehung: Eine historisch-kritische Untersuchung zu 1 Kor 15* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1971) 36–7.

47 The verb ἐγείρω denoting resurrection occurs eighty-four times in the New Testament. Compounds of ἐγείρω are also used in the same sense: ἐξεγείρω (once) and συνεγείρω (three occurrences). Other terms used with reference to resurrection include ἀνίστημι (thirty-three occurrences), ἀνάστασις (thirty-eight occurrences), ἐξανάστασις (once) and ἔγερσις (once).

all periods.<sup>48</sup> A number of related senses grow out of this first basic meaning of the verb.<sup>49</sup>

In a usage (sense 2) which appears first in the fourth century BCE but is very common thereafter, ἐγείρω can be used apart from the concept of previous sleep or quietude, to mean *raise up, set upright* (trans.), or *rise up, stand upright* (intrans.).<sup>50</sup> This second major sense of the verb (i.e. *rising to stand*) is in fact closely connected to the first (i.e. *waking from sleep*). For the verb in this first sense does not mean (as can the English verb *waken*) to rise from sleep merely in the sense of gaining consciousness, but to *rise from the position of sleep*.<sup>51</sup> In other words, ἐγείρω does not make a distinction between *awaken* and *stand up*.<sup>52</sup> The verb means to *rise to a standing position*, with the presence or absence of the additional idea of sleep being determined by contextual factors. Our verbal compound *get up*, in its general denotation of rising to a standing position, with capacity for specific reference to rising from the posture of sleep, is perhaps the nearest English equivalent.

Here we must highlight a feature of the verb's semantic range that has emerged from our study and that is crucial for its use as resurrection language. Although often translated by the English verbs *raise* or *rise*, the semantic range of ἐγείρω is quite different. Like ἐγείρω, these English verbs can be used of *rising to stand*

48 See, for example, Homer, *Il.* 5.413; 24.344; *Od.* 5.48; 15.46; Aristophanes, *Nub.* 9; *Lys.* 18; Plato, *Apol.* 31a; *Tim.* 46a; Herodotus, *Hist.* 4.9.1; Aristotle, *Oec.* 1345a; Epictetus, *Disc.* 1.5.6; 4.1.47; Diodorus Siculus 10.29.1; Philo, *Somn.* 1.174; *Jos.* 126; LXX Gen 41.4; LXX Prov 6.9; Matt 1.24; 8.25–6; Acts 12.7; Rom 13.11. Cf. Kremer, *EDNT*, 1.372; van Eijk, 'Resurrection-Language', 273–4; Frankenzeller, 'Auferstehung', 203. On the roots of this meaning within the verb's etymology, see H. Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1973<sup>2</sup>) 1.437–8.

49 A related sense which appears from the earliest period is to *rouse up, stir up* (trans.) or *be roused up* (intrans.) from quietude or inactivity (cf. Homer, *Il.* 5.208; *Od.* 24.164; Hesiod, *Theog.* 666; Aristophanes, *Lys.* 306; *Eccl.* 71; Plato, *Apol.* 30a; *Resp.* 440c; Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.49.6; Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1116b; *Sib. Or.* 4.137; LXX Prov 10.12; 15.1; LXX Dan 11.25; Matt 24.7; Justin, *Dial.* 52.2). Perhaps connected with this sense is the use of the verb with reference to figures or persons *rising up, coming into prominence* or *coming into existence* (cf. Matt 11.11; 24.11; John 7.52). This usage also occurs in the LXX, other Jewish literature and the New Testament in the active, transitive sense, of God *arousing* or *raising up* prophets, deliverers or kings (cf. LXX Judg 2.16; 3.9; *Test. Lev.* 18.2; Luke 1.69; Acts 13.22). The verb is also used in this sense frequently of armies or nations *stirring up* or *being roused up* to battle or war (cf. Homer, *Il.* 2.440; 4.352; 1 Esd 1.23; Matt 24.7).

50 Of persons being *raised upright*: LXX 2 Kings 12.17; LXX Eccles 4.10; LXX Jer 28.12; Acts 3.7; 10.26; James 5.15. Of persons *standing up*: LXX Exod 5.8; LXX Ps 126.2; Tob 6.18; Matt 26.46; Luke 11.8; Rev 11.1. Related to this meaning is the use of the verb to mean *erect* various types of physical structures: cf. 1 Es 5.44 (temple); Sir 49.13 (walls); *Sib. Or.* 3.290 (temple); Philo, *Conf.* 133 (tower); *Post.* 54 (cities); John 2.19–20 (temple).

51 Evident in such passages as Aristotle, *Oec.* 1345a; Xenophon, *Oec.* 5.4; Plutarch, *Pompey* 36.4; Matt 2.13–14; 2.20–1; 8.26; 26.46; Mark 14.42.

52 Kremer, *EDNT*, 1.372.

from a reclining position or from the posture of sleep. However, the English verbs also frequently express the wider concept of *ascension* or *elevation*. We speak, for instance, of a spark that *rises* from the flames, of the moon *rising* into the night sky, or of a balloon that *rises* into the air. The Greek verb ἐγείρω, however, has a more restricted semantic range, and cannot mean *raise* or *rise* in this wider sense of elevation or ascension. Rather, ἐγείρω means to *get up* or *stand up*, that is, to *rise from a supine to a standing position*. Thus the verb is regularly used to denote the *raising* or *rising up* of one who has *fallen* (LXX Exod 23.5; LXX 1 Kings 5.3; LXX Eccles 4.10; Jdt 10.23; Philo, *Agr.* 122; *Mut.* 56; *Migr.* 122; Matt 12.11; Mark 9.27; Acts 9.8; 1 Clem 59.4). It is also used of one *kneeling* or *prostrate* being *raised back to a standing position* (LXX 1 Kings 2.8; LXX 2 Kings 12.17; LXX Ps 112.7; LXX Dan 10.10; Philo, *Ebr.* 156; *Post.* 149; Matt 17.7; Luke 11.8; Acts 10.26; Hermas, *Vis.* 2.1.3; 3.2.4). The verb is used of one *lying down*, very frequently of one *lying sick*, who is *restored to a standing posture* (Matt 8.15; 9.5, 6, 7; Mark 1.31; 2.9, 11, 12; Luke 5.23–4; John 5.8; Acts 3.6–7; James 5.15). The verb is also frequently used of one *sitting* who *rises to stand* (LXX Ps 126.2; LXX Isa 14.9; Matt 26.46; Mark 3.3; 10.49; 14.42; Luke 6.8; John 11.29; 13.4; 14.31; Hermas, *Vis.* 1.4.1). In no instance within ancient Greek literature does ἐγείρω denote the concept of ascension, elevation or assumption. Rather, it denotes the action whereby one who is prone, sitting, prostrate or lying down is *restored to a standing position*.

The analogical use of ἐγείρω as resurrection language grows out of the semantic map of the verb sketched above. Whether when denoting resurrection the sensory metaphor involves simply the arising of one *supine* or fallen (sense 2), or involves the additional idea of the arising of one supine in *sleep* (sense 1), may be debated.<sup>53</sup> But in either case, the verb's basic semantic meaning of *getting up* or *arising to stand* is present. As we have seen, ἐγείρω does not mean to *rise* in the sense that a balloon rises into the air, but in the sense of *arising to stand*. In resurrection contexts the verb does not therefore denote that the dead *ascend* or are *assumed* somewhere; rather, the verb signifies that the corpse, lying supine in the grave, *gets up* or *arises to stand* from the tomb. When used with reference to the dead, therefore, the term refers unambiguously to the reanimation or revivification of the corpse.

An inscription from Rome provides striking additional evidence.<sup>54</sup> The final line of this burial inscription reads ἐντεῦθεν οὐθις ἀποθανὼν ἐγ[ε]ίρει[ται] ('no one who has died arises from here'). In this inscription, the use of the adverb ἐντεῦθεν ('from here') together with ἐγείρω unambiguously indicates the concept of getting up or arising *from the tomb*.<sup>55</sup> The very frequent addition

53 On the question see Kremer, *Zeugnis*, 45; Oepke, *TDNT*, II.333–4.

54 *IGUR* III.1406 (date uncertain).

55 A tomb inscription from Thessaly of uncertain date (*IG* IX.2 640) appears to reflect the same conception: θανόντα γὰρ οὐδὲν ἐγείρει ('for nothing raises up one who has died').

to the verb of the prepositional phrase ἐκ νεκρῶν likewise suggests an implicit notion in the verb of arising *from among the dead* or *from the grave*.<sup>56</sup> So in 1 Cor 15, where the simple Χριστὸς ... ἐγήγερται ('Christ ... has been raised') within the confessional formula in 15.3–4 is more fully expressed in 15.12 as Χριστὸς ... ἐκ νεκρῶν ἐγήγερται ('Christ ... has been raised from the dead').

The semantic range of the verb ἐγείρω, which prior to the present study has not been explored fully, is of crucial significance for the debate regarding the meaning of this verb within the confessional formula of 1 Cor 15.3–5. As we have seen, those scholars who argue that this formula describes an event which did not involve the revival of Jesus' corpse commonly interpret the formula's affirmation that Jesus 'has been raised' (ἐγήγερται) to mean that Jesus has been *assumed* or *taken up* into heaven in a celestial or ethereally material form or body discontinuous with his earthly, mortal body.<sup>57</sup> So for Joost Holleman, the formula's use of ἐγείρω for the Easter event indicates that 'Jesus was believed to have been *raised into heaven*'.<sup>58</sup> The claim of this early confession is thus that 'God vindicated Jesus by *lifting* him out of the realm of death and into his heavenly realm; there Jesus received a new and immortal body'.<sup>59</sup> Einar Thomassen similarly argues that for the very earliest Christ-followers Jesus' resurrection involved 'a spiritual body that *rises* from the present one as a new and transformed being'.<sup>60</sup> Gerd Lüdemann likewise maintains that, for Paul, the confession that Jesus has been 'raised' means that 'Jesus was *exalted* from the cross directly to God'.<sup>61</sup> Andreas Lindemann puts this view succinctly: in this pre-Pauline formula 'ἐγήγερται denotes not restoration to life, but exaltation to heaven'.<sup>62</sup>

However, I would propose that, in view of the evidence provided above regarding the verb's semantic range, the assumption that ἐγείρω can mean 'raise' in this sense is excluded. Indeed, such an interpretation is profoundly unhistorical, for it is founded upon associations arising from English or other

56 See especially John 12.17, ὅτε τὸν Λάζαρον ἐφώνησεν ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου καὶ ἤγειρεν αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν ('when he called Lazarus *from the tomb* and raised him *from the dead*'), where the two clauses appear to function epexegetically. Cf. Matt 17.9; Mark 6.14; Luke 9.7; John 2.22; 12.1, 9, 17; 21.14; Acts 3.15; 4.10; 13.31; Rom 4.24; 6.4, 9; 7.4; 8.11; 10.9; 1 Cor 15.20; Gal 1.1; Eph 1.20; Phil 3.11; Col 2.12; 1 Thess 1.10; 2 Tim 2.8; Heb 11.19; 1 Pet 1.21. Cf. also ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, Eph 5.14; 1 Thess 1.10 (v.l.); and ἀπὸ τῶν νεκρῶν, Matt 14.2; 27.64; 28.7.

57 So Grass, *Ostergeschehen*, 146–7; Smith, *Empty Tomb*, 27–45.

58 Holleman, *Resurrection*, 143 (emphasis added).

59 Holleman, *Resurrection*, 144 (emphasis added).

60 E. Thomassen, 'Valentinian Ideas about Salvation as Transformation', *Metamorphoses: Resurrection, Body and Transformative Practices in Early Christianity* (ed. T. K. Seim and J. Okland; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2009) 169 (emphasis added).

61 Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Christ*, 71 (emphasis added).

62 Lindemann, *Korintherbrief*, 332 ('das ἐγήγερται nicht Wiederbelebung, sondern Erhöhung meint').

modern language translations, not the actual language of the formula itself. The verb ἐγείρω, when applied to the dead, does not denote ascension or elevation, but restoration from a recumbent to a standing posture. The very semantics of this ancient Greek verb involves the concept of the mortal body's restoration to life. Of course, within early Christian proclamation of Jesus' resurrection, the verb denoted much more than the mere reanimation of Jesus' corpse, including also the idea of transformation, from weakness and mortality to glory, power and imperishability (cf. Rom 6.9–10; 2 Cor 13.4; Phil 3.21). 'Christ, having been raised from the dead, never dies again; death no longer has power over him' (Rom 6.9). But, as our study of the semantics of ἐγείρω has shown, the subject of this glorious transformation is understood within the formula as Jesus' crucified body, which in being 'raised' does not *ascend* to heaven, but *gets up* from the tomb.

The findings here also have significant implications for Paul's treatment of the resurrection in the latter part of the chapter (15.36–58), where he employs the verb ἐγείρω five times (15.42–4, 52; cf. 15.12–17, 20, 29, 32, 35). We saw persuasive evidence in section 3 above that Paul's treatment is not consistent with a conception of resurrection involving a celestial or ethereally material body, but reflects the mainstream ancient Jewish belief in the revivification (and transformation to imperishability) of the mortal body laid in the tomb. Paul's specific use within this passage of the verb ἐγείρω to denote the resurrection event, in light of our findings here regarding this key verb, confirms our earlier analysis. Moreover, these findings reveal that the interpretation of resurrection in this passage as the ascension and astral immortality of a body composed of material *pneuma*, which is central to the analyses of Engberg-Pedersen, Martin and Asher, is founded upon a misapprehension. For this interpretation depends upon the assumption that Paul in 1 Cor 15.36–58 uses the verb ἐγείρω to denote *elevation* or *ascension* to the celestial sphere. Martin, for example, assumes that ἐγείρω in Paul denotes an event in which the faithful '*rise from the earth to a new luminous home in the heavens*'.<sup>63</sup> Asher takes for granted that 'the act of raising (which is the verb typically used by Paul to describe the resurrection) alludes to *the act of lifting the body upward from the earth*'.<sup>64</sup> Engberg-Pedersen similarly assumes that Paul uses ἐγείρω to denote an event in which believers '*will be raised to obtain the status of – precisely – stars in heaven*'.<sup>65</sup> But this study has shown that this understanding of ἐγείρω, on which the interpretation of resurrection in 1 Cor 15 as the ascension of an ethereally material body into heaven is premised, is mistaken. In light of the evidence provided

63 Martin, *Body*, 135 (emphasis added).

64 Asher, *Polarity*, 98 (emphasis added); cf. 91–117, 153–68, 176–7.

65 Engberg-Pedersen, *Material Spirit*, 28 (emphasis added); cf. 27, 37–8, 221 n. 85.



here, Engberg-Pedersen's reading of Paul's treatment of the resurrection in this chapter (as well as that of Asher and Martin) is no longer tenable.

Our findings here also serve to illumine the phenomenon observed by Pannenberg and others, that ἐγείρω in Second Temple Jewish texts consistently functions to denote the revivification of the once-dead body laid in the tomb. As has been shown, this uniform *function* of ἐγείρω in resurrection contexts is a necessary outgrowth of the verb's *semantic range* sketched above. In light of the evidence presented, it is clear that the early formula in 1 Cor 15.3–5 affirms that Jesus arose on the third day in his crucified body, leaving behind an empty tomb.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has sought to make an original contribution to the debate regarding the nature of the resurrection of Jesus within the pre-Pauline formula of 1 Cor 15.3–5. I have attempted to provide an analysis of the current state of the discussion, offering fresh evidence and observations to suggest that a number of standard arguments within the debate are lacking or at least inconclusive. The argument that the empty tomb is conspicuous by its absence and thus implies a resurrection event unrelated to the corpse of Jesus is without historical foundation. The argument that the sequence of *death-burial-resurrection-appearances* necessarily entails a resurrection involving Christ's entombed body, although more weighty, is not absolutely decisive. Paul's treatment of the resurrection in 1 Cor 15.36–58, although revealing that Paul himself understood Jesus' resurrection as involving the revivification of his crucified body, does not provide conclusive evidence regarding the conception of Jesus' resurrection within this more ancient, pre-Pauline formula. It is the meaning of the formula's central affirmation that Jesus 'has been raised' (καὶ ὅτι ἐγήγερται, 15.4), I have argued, that is ultimately decisive

I have therefore focused attention on this key term, offering a new proposal regarding the verb used within this ancient formula for the resurrection event. The linguistic meaning of the verb ἐγείρω, which prior to the present study has not received due consideration, is of decisive significance for the debate regarding the nature of Jesus' resurrection within the formula. I have shown that, consistent with previous scholarly findings regarding the uniform function of ἐγείρω in texts of the Second Temple period, the semantics of this verb, when used to denote resurrection, necessarily entails the restoration to life of the body of flesh and bones within the tomb. This verb within the pre-Pauline formula thus denotes the revivification of the crucified and entombed body of Jesus. The assumption that the formula's affirmation that Jesus' has been 'raised' denoted a post mortem ascension to heaven which did not involve the revival of the corpse in the grave may be an

inference possible from English or other modern language translations, but it is not a possible inference from the Greek wording of this ancient formula. Our findings thus triangulate with the evidence from the fourfold sequence of verbs within the formula, and from Paul's treatment of the resurrection body later in the same chapter, which we found weighty but inconclusive by themselves, to provide a coherent picture. In affirming that Jesus has been 'raised', this pre-Pauline confession affirmed the resurrection of Jesus' crucified body from the tomb.

As individuals, we may come to the text of this formula with varying philosophical and religious convictions regarding the possibility or impossibility of the resurrection of a once-dead body from the grave. But we must recognise that, according to this ancient confession, that is exactly what happened to the body of Jesus. As historians, therefore, we must count 1 Cor 15.3-5 as evidence for belief in the resurrection of Jesus' crucified body among the earliest Christ-followers. Birger Gerhardsson has argued persuasively that the brief formulaic statement in 1 Cor 15.3-5 of Jesus' death, burial, resurrection and resurrection appearances presupposes a narrative of these events.<sup>66</sup> If so, the language of this remarkably early formula presupposes a narrative or narratives of the kind we see in the synoptics and John, involving an empty tomb, and encounters with a Jesus risen in flesh and bones. Any historical reconstruction of ancient Christianity or of the earliest kerygma, if it is to be of critical value, must consider the evidence presented here regarding the meaning, within its original linguistic context, of this formula's affirmation that Jesus 'has been raised on the third day'.

66 Gerhardsson, 'Evidence', 89-91.