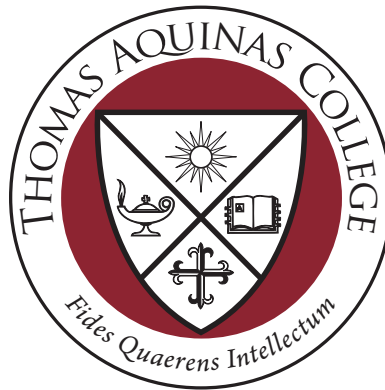


ST. THOMAS AQUINAS ON THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

COMPENDIUM OF THEOLOGY

Part 1, Second Treatise on Faith, the Humanity of Christ, Chapters 236-240



“The Way, the Truth, and the Life”

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CHAPTER 236

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Since the human race was freed by Christ from the evils flowing from the sin of our first parent, it was fitting that, as He bore our ills to free us from them, the first fruits of man's restoration effected by Him should make their appearance in Him. This was done that Christ might be held up to us as a sign of salvation in two ways. First, we learn from His passion what we brought down on ourselves by sin and what suffering had to be undergone for us to free us from sin. Secondly, we see in His exaltation what is proposed to us to hope for through Him.

In triumph over death, which resulted from our first parent's sin, Christ was the first of all men to rise to immortal life. Thus, as life first became mortal through Adam's sin, immortal life made its first appearance in Christ through the atonement for sin He offered. Others, it is true, raised up either by Christ or by the prophets, had returned to life before Him; yet they had to die a second time. But "Christ rising again from the dead, dies now no more" (Rom. 6:9). As He was the first to escape the necessity of dying, He is called "the first begotten of the dead" (Apoc. 1:5) and "the first fruits of those who sleep" (1 Cor. 15:20). Having thrown off the yoke of death, He was the first to rise from the sleep of death.

Christ's resurrection was not to be long delayed, nor, on the other hand, was it to take place immediately after death. If He had returned to life immediately after death, the fact of His death would not have been well established; and if the resurrection had been long delayed, the sign of vanquished death would not have appeared in Him, and men would not have been given the hope that they would be rescued from death by Him. Therefore He put off the resurrection until the third day, for this interval was judged sufficient to establish the truth of His death, and was not too long to wither away the hope of liberation. If it had been delayed for a longer time, the hope of the faithful might have begun to suffer doubt. Indeed, on the third day, as though hope were already running out, some were saying: "We hoped that it was He that should have redeemed Israel" (Luke 24:21).

However, Christ did not remain dead for three full days. He is said to have been in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights, according to that figure of speech whereby a part is often taken for the whole.

For, since one natural day is made up of a day and a night, Christ is said to have been dead during the whole of any part of a day or a night that is counted while He was lying in death.

Moreover, in the usual practice of Scripture, night is figured in with the following day, because the Hebrews reckon time by the course of the moon, which begins to shine in the evening. Christ was in the sepulcher during the latter part of the sixth day, and if this is counted along with the preceding night, it will be more or less one natural day. He reposed in the tomb during the night following the sixth day, together with the whole of the Sabbath day, and so we have two days. He lay dead also during the next night, which preceded the Lord's Day, on which He rose, and this occurred either at midnight, according to Gregory [In Evangelia, II, hom. 21], or at dawn, as others think [Augustine, De Trinitate, IV, 6]. Therefore, if either the whole night, or a part of it together with the Lord's Day following, is taken into our calculation, we shall have the third natural day.

The fact that Christ wished to rise on the third day is not without mysterious significance; for so He was able to show that He rose by the power of the whole Trinity. Sometimes the Father is said to have raised Him up, and sometimes Christ Himself is said to have risen by His own power. These two statements do not contradict each other, for the divine power of the Father is identical with that of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Another purpose was to show that the restoration of life was accomplished, not on the first day of the world, that is, under the natural law, nor on the second day, that is, under the Mosaic law, but on the third day, that is, in the era of grace.

The fact that Christ lay in the sepulcher for one whole day and two whole nights also has its meaning: by the one ancient debt Christ took on Himself, that of punishment, He blotted out our two ancient debts, sin and punishment, which are represented by the two nights.

CHAPTER 237

QUALITIES OF THE RISEN CHRIST

Christ recovered for the human race not merely what Adam had lost through sin, but all that Adam could have attained through merit. For Christ's power to merit was far greater than that of man prior to sin. By sin Adam incurred the necessity of dying, because he lost the power which would have enabled him to avoid death if he had not sinned. Christ not only did away with the necessity of dying, but even gained the power of not being able to die. Therefore His body after the resurrection was rendered impassible and immortal. Thus Christ's body was not like that of the first man, which had the power not to die, but was absolutely unable to die. And this is what we await in the future life for ourselves.

Another consideration: Christ's soul before His death was capable of suffering in company with the suffering of His body. Consequently, when His body became incapable of suffering, His soul also became incapable of suffering.

Furthermore, the mystery of man's redemption was now accomplished. To enable Christ to achieve that end, the glory of fruition had, in God's dispensation, been restricted to the higher regions of His soul, so that no overflowing to the lower parts and to the body itself would occur, but each faculty would be allowed to do or suffer what was proper to it. But now the body and the lower powers were wholly glorified by an overflow of glory from the higher regions of the soul. Accordingly Christ, who before the passion had been a comprehensor because of the fruition enjoyed by His soul and a wayfarer because of the passibility of His body, was now, after the resurrection, no longer a wayfarer, but exclusively a comprehensor.

CHAPTER 238

ARGUMENTS DEMONSTRATING CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

As we stated above, Christ anticipated the general resurrection in order that His resurrection might bolster up our hope of our own resurrection. To foster our hope of resurrection, Christ's resurrection and the qualities of His risen nature had to be made known by suitable proofs. He manifested His resurrection, not to all alike, in the way that He manifested His human nature and His passion, but only "to witnesses preordained by God" (Acts 10:41), namely, the disciples whom He had selected to bring about man's salvation. For the state of resurrection, as was mentioned above, belongs to the glory of the comprehensor, and knowledge of this is not due to all, but only to such as make themselves worthy. To the witnesses He had chosen Christ revealed both the fact of His resurrection and the glory of His risen nature.

He made known the fact of His resurrection by showing that He, the very one who had died, rose again both in His nature and in His suppositum. As regards nature, He showed that He had a true human body when He offered Himself to be touched and seen by the disciples, to whom He said: "Handle and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as you see Me to have" (Luke 24:39). He gave further evidence of the same by performing actions that belong to human nature, eating and drinking with His disciples, and often conversing with them and walking about. These are the actions of a living man. Of course such eating was not dictated by necessity. The incorruptible bodies of the risen will have no further need of food, for there occurs in them no deterioration that has to be repaired by nourishment. Hence the food consumed by Christ did not become nourishment for His body but was dissolved into pre-existing matter. Yet He proved that He was a true man by the very fact that He ate and drank.

As regards His suppositum, Christ showed that He was the same person who had died, by displaying to His disciples the marks of His death on His body, namely, the scars of His wounds. In John 20:27 He says to Thomas: "Put your finger here and see My hands; and bring your hand here and put it into My side." And in Luke 24:39 He says: "See My hands and feet, that it is I Myself." It was by divine dispensation that He kept the scars of His wounds in His body, so that the truth of the resurrection might be demonstrated by them; for complete integrity is the proper condition of the incorruptible risen body, although we may say that in the case of the martyrs some indications of the wounds they bore will appear with a certain splendor, in testimony of their virtue. Christ further showed that He was the same suppositum by His manner of speech and by other familiar actions whereby men are recognized. Thus the disciples knew Him "in the breaking of bread" (Luke 24:35). Also, He openly showed Himself to them in Galilee, where He was accustomed to converse with them.

Christ manifested the glory of His risen nature when He came among them, "the doors being shut" (John 20:26), and when "He vanished out of their sight" (Luke 24:31). For the glory of risen man gives him the power to be seen in glorious vision when he wishes, or not to be seen when he so wishes. The reason why Christ demonstrated the truth of His resurrection and the glory of His risen body by so many proofs, was the difficulty that faith in the resurrection presents. If He had displayed the extraordinary condition of His glorified body in its full splendor, He would have engendered prejudice against faith in the resurrection: the very immensity of its glory would have excluded belief that it was the same nature. Further, He manifested the truth not only by visible signs, but also by proofs appealing to the intellect, as when "He opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45), and showed that according to the writings of the prophets He was to rise again.

CHAPTER 239

THE TWOFOLD LIFE RESTORED IN MAN BY CHRIST

As Christ destroyed our death by His death, so He restored our life by His resurrection. Man has a twofold death and a twofold life. The first death is the death of the body, brought about by separation from the soul; the second death is brought about by separation from God. Christ, in whom the second death had no place, destroyed both of these deaths in us, that is, the bodily and the spiritual, by the first death He underwent, namely, that of the body.

Similarly, opposed to this twofold death, we are to understand that there is a twofold life. One is a life of the body, imparted by the soul, and this is called the life of nature. The other comes from God, and is called the life of justice or the life of grace. This life is given to us through faith, by which God dwells in us, according to Habakkuk 2:4: “The just shall live in his faith.”

Accordingly, resurrection is also twofold: one is a bodily resurrection, in which the soul is united to the body for the second time; the other is a spiritual resurrection, in which the soul is again united to God. This second resurrection had no place in Christ, because His soul was never separated from God by sin. By His bodily resurrection, therefore, Christ is the cause of both the bodily and the spiritual resurrection in us.

However, as Augustine says in his commentary on St. John [In Joannis Evangelium, XIX, 15], we are to understand that the Word of God raises up souls, but that the Word as incarnate raises up bodies. To give life to the soul belongs to God alone. Yet, since the flesh is the instrument of His divinity, and since an instrument operates in virtue of the principal cause, our double resurrection, bodily and spiritual, is referred to Christ’s bodily resurrection as cause. For everything done in Christ’s flesh was salutary for us by reason of the divinity united to that flesh. Hence the Apostle, indicating the resurrection of Christ as the cause of our spiritual resurrection, says, in Romans 4:25, that Christ “was delivered up for our sins and rose again for our justification.” And in 1 Corinthians 15:12 he shows that Christ’s resurrection is the cause of our bodily resurrection: “Now if Christ be preached, that He rose again from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?”

Most aptly does the Apostle attribute remission of sins to Christ’s death and our justification to His resurrection, thus tracing out conformity and likeness of effect to cause. As sin is discarded when it is remitted, so Christ by dying laid aside His passible life, in which the likeness of sin was discernible. But when a person is justified, he receives new life; in like manner Christ, by rising, obtained newness of glory. Therefore Christ’s death is the cause of the remission of our sin: the efficient cause instrumentally, the exemplary cause sacramentally, and the meritorious cause. In like manner Christ’s resurrection was the cause of our resurrection: the efficient cause instrumentally and the exemplary cause sacramentally. But it was not a meritorious cause, for Christ was no longer a wayfarer, and so was not in a position to merit; and also because the glory of the resurrection was the reward of His passion, as the Apostle declares in Philippians 2:9 ff.

Thus we see clearly that Christ can be called the first-born of those who rise from the dead. This is true not only in the order of time, inasmuch as Christ was the first to rise, as was said above, 85 but also in the order of causality, because His resurrection is the cause of the resurrection of other men, and in the order of dignity, because He rose more gloriously than all others.

This belief in Christ’s resurrection is expressed in the words of the Creed: “The third day He arose again from the dead.”

CHAPTER 240

THE TWOFOLD REWARD OF CHRIST'S HUMILIATION: RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION

According to the Apostle, the exaltation of Christ was the reward of His humiliation. Therefore a twofold exaltation had to correspond to His twofold humiliation.

Christ had humbled Himself, first, by suffering death in the passible flesh He had assumed; secondly, He had undergone humiliation with reference to place, when His body was laid in the sepulcher and His soul descended into hell. The exaltation of the resurrection, in which He returned from death to immortal life, corresponds to the first humiliation. And the exaltation of the ascension corresponds to the second humiliation. Hence the Apostle says, in Ephesians 4:10: "He who descended is the same also that ascended above all the heavens."

However, as it is narrated of the Son of God that He was born, suffered and was buried, and rose again, not in His divine nature but in His human nature, so also, we are told, He ascended into heaven, not in His divine nature but in His human nature. In His divine nature He had never left heaven, as He is always present everywhere. He indicates this Himself when He says: "No man has ascended into heaven but He who descended from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven" (John 3:13). By this we are given to understand that He came down from heaven by assuming an earthly nature, yet in such a way that He continued to remain in heaven. The same consideration leads us to conclude that Christ alone has gone up to heaven by His own power. By reason of His origin, that abode belonged by right to Him who had come down from heaven. Other men cannot ascend of themselves, but are taken up by the power of Christ, whose members they have been made.

As ascent into heaven befits the Son of God according to His human nature, so something else is added that becomes Him according to His divine nature, namely, that He should sit at the right hand of His Father. In this connection we are not to think of a literal right hand or a bodily sitting. Since the right side of an animal is the stronger, this expression gives us to understand that the Son is seated with the Father as being in no way inferior to Him according to the divine nature, but on a par with Him in all things. Yet this same prerogative may be ascribed to the Son of God in His human nature, thus enabling us to perceive that in His divine nature the Son is in the Father Himself according to unity of essence, and that together with the Father He possesses a single kingly throne, that is, an identical power. Since other persons ordinarily sit near kings, namely, ministers to whom kings assign a share in governing power, and since the one whom the king places at his right hand is judged to be the most powerful man in the kingdom, the Son of God is rightly said to sit at the Father's right hand even according to His human nature, as being exalted in rank above every creature of the heavenly kingdom.

In both senses, therefore, Christ properly sits at the right hand of God. And so the Apostle asks, in Hebrew 1: 13: "To which of the angels said He at any time: Sit on My right hand?"

We profess our faith in this ascension of Christ when we say in the Creed: "He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father."



California

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New England

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