

“Strengthened for All that Will Delight Us”

Love and the Metaphysics of Resurrected Bodies In response to Montague Brown

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*né potrà tanta luce affaticarne:
ché li organi del corpo saran forti
a tutto ciò che potrà dilettarne.¹
Dante, Paradiso XIV.58-60*

This paper responds to the essay offered by Montague Brown, bringing Saint Bonaventure and Dante Alighieri into conversation with Brown’s excellent discussion of Saint Thomas Aquinas. In this conversation, I take up the question of the “resurrection to punishment” and ask about its relationship to the “resurrection to life” as Brown discusses it. I then explore the fittingness of the resurrection to life in the communion of saints. Lastly, I inquire into the nature of numerical identity—the conviction that the body that is raised is the same body (in some sense) as the body that died.

Montague Brown’s paper begins by noting that the resurrection of the body is clearly an issue central to Christian understanding of what it means to be saved.² He then goes on to describe the philosophical and theological warrants for belief in the resurrection of the body. In a nutshell, Brown argues that, in Thomistic terms, questions of formal and final causality can point philosophically to the fittingness of the resurrection of the body, but philosophical reasoning alone cannot, in its own terms, account for the efficient and material cause of resurrection. The invitation of Christ into his Body and the free human response together constitute the very personal cause of the resurrection of the blessed; as he says, “the source of grace is personal, and the response to grace is personal.” This conformity between head and members is, he says, the force that draws the resurrected one, body, soul, and spirit, into glory *in patria*. What I would like to do with our time this evening is highlight a few elements of this excellent paper and place them in conversation with two figures connected intimately with Thomas—Bonaventure and Dante. I hope this will be of interest and provide fruitful ground for a rich conversation.

Surnaturel

¹ “Nor will such shining have the power to harm us/ for our body’s organs shall be strengthened/ to deal with all that can delight us.” Dante, *Paradiso* XIV.58-60. Translation by Robert and Jean Hollander.

² I want to thank Kevin McMahon and Saint Anselm College for the invitation to be a part of the Metaphysics Colloquium this year, and I want to thank Montague Brown for offering such a rich paper, difficult to respond to, not for any flaws within it but for the very abundance of insights it offers. I suffered an embarrassment of riches in responding, and, I fear, in a worse predicament Buridan’s Ass, may have found myself stranded between so many delights that this paper may be only a meager gesture of my deep appreciation.

Let me say first of all that Brown's argument gives an exemplary case in the relationship between faith and reason and between "the natural" and the "supernatural." Never in this essay are the battle lines drawn in an explicit way between de Lubac and Garrigou-Lagrange, or between Milbank and Feingold or Long, nor do we see a covert war waged in the footnotes. (And for this I thank him). And yet the treatment of the resurrection of the body reveals the fundamental contours of an argument that, I think, illustrates the very paradoxical stance that de Lubac was trying to articulate in a general way in his *Surnaturel*. That is, formally and finally, the shape of human life is fittingly ordered to the resurrection of the body, and this can be known, or at least argued, through natural reason. It is natural, says Brown, following Aquinas, for us to be what we find ourselves to be, i.e., a unity of soul and body, and so it is unnatural for the soul to live apart from the body. And yet the conditions of death and corruption would seem to prevent this and thus frustrate nature. Similarly, humans are ordered to happiness, and as such "Man naturally desires his own salvation; but the soul, since it is a part of man's body, is not an entire man, and my soul is not I: hence, although the soul obtains salvation in another life, nevertheless, not I or any man does. Furthermore, since man naturally desires salvation even of the body, a natural desire would be frustrated."³ (That's Thomas in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, as cited in Brown's paper.) So a compelling case has been made that nature would be frustrated in several ways if body and soul were not reunited in a personal unity. And yet, as Brown shows with great clarity, Thomas does not see any natural material or efficient cause which can bring this fitting state of affairs into being. So, stepping back and painting with broad strokes that, indeed, risk obscuring the precision with which Brown develops his case, I will hazard to say that, for Thomas, humans, in our very nature as hylomorphic unity of body and soul, are naturally ordered to an end that nature cannot deliver. We are in need of supernatural grace to achieve our natural end. This is so in our present state, as broken by sin, but, Brown points out, it would have been the case even if Adam had not fallen: "Thomas's explanation of the state of humanity before the fall is one of original justice overcoming the tendency of matter to disintegrate. According to Thomas, it is the nature of matter to fall apart, which is why we die. In the state of original justice, God had given us a disposition of grace which kept soul and body together—so that there would be no death."⁴ So even pre-lapsarian humanity was ordered to an end that exceeded its own natural powers and that depended on God's gift of a disposition of grace to overcome the natural powers of corruption. Whether considered before or after the fall, humanity as such is naturally ordered to an end that requires the work of supernatural grace. This is Thomas's case, as presented by Brown, but it seems that Brown may want to present even a stronger case for the primordial grace present in the act of creating itself.

Drawing on the Pauline scholarship of Donald Keefe, Brown invites us briefly to consider whether our creation in Christ would shift our attention from a distinct human nature with a natural end that is forever in need of supplemental grace. He claims rather boldly, following Keefe, that "human nature is Christ, not a presupposed natural humanity without the grace of Christ" (8). If this is the case, then unfallen nature, in Christ, does not tend to

³ Aquinas, *Com. 1 Cor.* 15.2.934.

⁴ Montague Brown, "Philosophical and Theological Perspectives on the Resurrection of the Body in Aquinas," *The Saint Anselm Journal*, 12.2 (Spring 2017), 9-10.

disintegrate; in this view, if I have it correctly, what we can see and understand as “nature” with its limits is a postlapsarian phenomenon. But, if I have it right, this is to go well beyond even what de Lubac proposes, offering a deeply Christocentric anthropology that elevates the category of “nature” theologically in such a way that, for traditional Thomists of a certain sort, would seem to endanger the proper gratuity of grace. I hasten to say that I am not troubled by this, since such attention to the intimacy of Christ to all creation calls attention to the sheer gratuity of creation itself and sets the brokenness of the fall and the gratuity of our restoration in the broader context of the complete gratuity of creation itself. But I wonder how others might respond. That is, I take this to be a very strong intervention in the often-wearisome *Surnaturel* debates, fanned into flame once again in the last decade or so, an intervention that aims to outflank even Thomas’s own view in the service of a deeper Pauline and Irenaeian vision. If that’s a fair reading of Brown’s work, let me suggest that it has the great advantage of sidestepping some of the usual pitfalls in these conversations, and the particular focus on the dilemma of resurrection brings needed clarity to a muddled argument in Catholic theology.

So that’s a first contextual comment—an appreciation of the work from 30,000 feet, as it were. For the rest of my comments, I’d like to offer three brief meditations on the resurrection of the body as I find them Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, and to use these glimpses as a way to engage with some of the fundamental questions raised by Brown’s paper.

Resurrection to Punishment

Brown’s paper begins with the clear statement that the resurrection of the body is “a key doctrine of Christianity...intimately tied up with the mission of Jesus to redeem humanity.” He continues, “As Jesus is fully human and fully divine, our redemption must also be fully human, that is personal; and that would seem to include the redemption of our bodily life as well as our souls” (1). He then draws out of Aquinas this positive case for the resurrection of the body through a consideration of the proper and fitting end of the soul as it finds happiness and completion in God in a fully personal way, body and soul. And he makes a very strong case as such. “Thus,” he says, “although the resurrection is in some way a universal fact of human nature, the efficient cause of the resurrection to Life is both the personal gracious act of Jesus the Christ, and one’s personal grateful assent. This is personal to the depths, given in the name by which we are to be saved and in the name given us by Jesus” (14).

But he does note in passing, near the end of his paper (17), that Thomas, like many of his contemporaries, gives *three different* kinds of reason for the resurrection of the body: “the completion of human nature,” “the necessity of divine justice, so that those who have done good or evil in the body are likewise rewarded or punished in the same bodies”; and third, “the conformity of head to members,” whereby the souls of the blessed, as members of the Body of Christ, are drawn into conformity with Christ, ‘the firstborn of the dead.’ Brown spends a fair amount of time on the first and the third, but it is the second reason, the necessity of divine justice, that I want to consider briefly. That is, if the supernatural efficient and material causes of

resurrection to life are due to the personal gracious act of Christ, what is the efficient and material cause of the resurrection to punishment?

In Dante's *Inferno*, there are two particularly striking discussions of the resurrection of the body that may merit some reflection. The first, in the circle of heresy in *Inferno* X, Dante encounters Farinata and Cavalcante, both "Epicureans" who "hold the soul dies with the body." Farinata and Cavalcante stand waist-deep in an open tomb. Farinata's solemnity in this tomb is a kind of unintentional mirroring of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Virgil tells Dante that "all will be shut and sealed when the souls return from Jehosaphat with the bodies they have left above."⁵ Those who believe that the soul goes to the tomb with the body will perversely get exactly what they wished for and expected—the soul will go with the body into the tomb, but now not to death or annihilation but to eternally living in death's tomb, buried alive, body and soul.

Deeper into Hell, Dante encounters the souls of those who committed suicide. These souls dwell within thick gnarled thornbushes, like sap. Indeed, these souls, like invasive weeds, caught upon the ground and sprung up into these brambles. The soul of a suicide, in Dante's imagining, is, in a sense, incarnate in these thorns. "It spreads into a shoot, then a wild thicket." At the resurrection, one of these souls says, "we will come to claim our cast-off bodies like the others. But it would not be just if we again put on the flesh we robbed from our own souls. Here we shall drag it, and in this dismal wood our bodies will be hung, each one upon the thorn-bush of its painful shade."⁶ Here, the resurrected body is "reclaimed," as it were, but divine justice precisely prevents a full reunion of body and soul—the torment of hell, in this case, is the very continuation of the sin—the body and soul that the suicide has unjustly separated will be reunited and yet remain still separate, for all eternity.

These two rather vivid accounts are not the only discussions of the resurrection of the body in the *Inferno*, but they invite speculation about the "resurrection to punishment" of the damned. How does this resurrection fit with Brown's claim that "the efficient cause of the resurrection to Life is both the personal gracious act of Jesus the Christ, and one's personal grateful assent? This is personal to the depths, given in the name by which we are to be saved and in the name given us by Jesus" (14). What, then, is the efficient cause of the resurrection to judgment or the resurrection to damnation? Is it something like "the personal just act of Jesus Christ? Or...? Are the efficient causes different, here? Or are they the same, differently expressed, due to the lack of "personal grateful assent"? Bonaventure, for sure, spends an awful lot of time reflecting on the nature of the resurrected flesh of the damned, "perfected" in such a way that it can endure eternal punishment. But he is quite clear that the resurrection of the just and the unjust is one simultaneous act: "The bodies of all human beings will arise in a general resurrection, with no interval of time existing between them, but with a great difference in the order of their dignity. For evil persons will arise with the deformities and punishments, the

⁵ Dante, *Inferno*, trans. Robert and Jean Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), X.10-12.

⁶ Dante, *Inf.* XIII.100-108.

miseries and defects, they incurred during this present life. But in the good, ‘blemishes will be taken away from their bodies, but their nature will be preserved.’”⁷ For Bonaventure, this single act of resurrection is due to the act of God who is “all powerful, all merciful, and all just.” Bonaventure proceeds to examine how the “work of retribution” can be brought about “in a way that respects the rectitude of justice, the restoration of grace, and the completion of nature.”⁸ As Brown’s paper notes, Thomas has a similar set of arguments in his commentary on 1 Corinthians. But Brown’s paper has so enriched the understanding of the “restoration of grace” and the “completion of nature,” bringing Thomas’s insights together with Donald Keefe’s Pauline theological anthropology. I wonder how, in this enriched sense, we would characterize the efficient, supernatural cause of the resurrection to punishment and damnation, and what is its relationship to the efficient cause of the “resurrection to life”? They have to be one, of course, but how would we describe their unity?

Resurrection into Life in the Body of Christ

As Dante the Pilgrim sojourns in the sphere of the Sun, his long conversation with Thomas Aquinas draws to a close with two questions still on the tip of his tongue. Ever the gracious guide and hostess, Beatrice intuits his questions and casts them before Thomas and the other wise souls before them: (1) Will the luminous quality of their souls abide even after the resurrection of the body? And, if so, (2) won’t that light hurt their physical eyes? These questions elicit an answer from none other than Solomon, the wisest king. He answers thus: “When we put on again our flesh, glorified and holy, then our persons (*la nostra persona*) will be more pleasing for being all complete, so that the light, granted to us freely by the Highest Good, shall increase the light that makes us fit to see Him. From that light, vision must increase, and love increase what vision kindles, and radiance increase which comes from love... Nor will such shining have the power to harm us, for our body’s organs shall be strengthened to deal with all that can delight us.”⁹ Dante continues to narrate, “So quick and eager seemed to me both choirs to say their *Amen* that they clearly showed their desire for their mortal bodies, not perhaps for themselves alone, but for their mothers, for their fathers, and for others whom they loved before they all became eternal flames.”¹⁰ This brief portion of Dante’s poem contains multitudes. Solomon suggests that the souls in heaven, although they currently enjoy beatitude, will be much better off when they are resurrected in their bodies, and his affirmation is quickly picked up and restated by the glorified souls around him. One of the vexing questions about the “beatific vision” in Dante’s lifetime was whether souls in glory fell short of the fullness of glory before the resurrection of the body—in what sense could the beatific vision be experienced if the souls of the just still experienced the absence of the body as a deficiency or loss? But in the context of the narrative thrust of the whole *Commedia*, these questions seem rather moot. When Dante meets Piccarda, who had been dragged out of the convent and married off against her will, whether she laments

⁷ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, ed. & trans. Dominic F. Monti (St. Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute Press, 2005) VII.5.1.

⁸ Bonaventure, *Brev.* VII.5.2.

⁹ Dante, *Par.* XIV.43-51, 58-60.

¹⁰ Dante, *Par.* XIV.61-66.

her placement in the lowest sphere of heaven. She responds, “Brother, the power of love subdues our will so that we long for only what we have and thirst for nothing else.”¹¹ So the desire for the resurrected body is not exactly a sense of loss or lack. At each stage of the *Paradiso*, Dante encounters souls who are eager to speak with him, as “here is one who can increase our love.”¹² We might imagine the “desire without lack” to be something of this sort. The just desire the promised return of their bodies so as to become “complete.” Completion, here, is not static repose, but the increase of light which leads to increased vision, which leads to increased love, which leads to an expanded radiance.

One might think that this expanded radiance refers simply to the exchange between the soul and God. But the echoing “Amen” of the other souls suggests that this radiance will be social, shared among all the blessed: “their mothers, their fathers, others whom they loved before they all became eternal flames.”¹³ The syntax is ambiguous here, both in the Italian and in the English translation: are the blessed hoping that our loved ones also share in the good of the resurrection? Or, with a slightly stronger reading, the blessed desire the restoration of their own bodies, and this they desire for their own delight and for the delight of those they love. That is, the restoration of our own bodies allows us to make of our selves a radiant gift to those with whom we share heavenly bliss. The blessed may hope to enjoy the full, embodied, personal presence of their loved ones in heavenly glory, and for this they desire their mortal bodies. It seems that Dante is commenting on, and expanding, Augustine’s speculation that the glory of God will be seen with our own eyes as it is reflected in the faces of those we love. Brown’s paper brings Aquinas together with Ratzinger to sketch how the supernatural material and efficient cause of the resurrection of the body is entailed to our membership in the Body of Christ; here, Dante notes the social dimension of our salvation in a particularly intimate way—we long for the resurrection not only of our own bodies, but of those intimates we can no longer see. For Dante, our resurrected bodies will be strengthened to sustain the delights that come from the radiance of the communion of saints, reflecting the radiant love of God himself. We will be “strengthened for all that will delight us,”¹⁴ as he says. In this light, the resurrection and glorification of the body becomes not an end in itself, and not the mere continuation of life into eternity, but a necessary concomitant to the fully human (and therefore embodied) enjoyment of the “love that moves the sun and other stars.”¹⁵

On perhaps a bit of a tangent, but I hope a fruitful one, I think this particular dimension of a kind of material continuity—that, in glory, we will have our own body, but strengthened to sustain the perception of that glory—invites some connection between this consideration *in patria* and the transformation of perception that we encounter here *in via*. Bonaventure is one of the great medieval exponents of “the spiritual senses,” but scholars since Rahner’s early work on the subject have wrestled with exactly what these “spiritual senses” are. Some have thought them

¹¹ Dante, *Par.* III.70-72

¹² E.g., *Par.* V.105.

¹³ Dante, *Par.* XIV.65-66.

¹⁴ Dante, *Par.* XIV.60.

¹⁵ Dante, *Par.* XXXIII.145.

a special, separate sensorium. But recent work I have done, along with the rather striking collaborative work of Paul Gavrilyuk, Sarah Coakley, Boyd Taylor Coolman, and Mark McNroy, among others, have begun to see the “spiritual senses” as we find them in Bonaventure, in Gregory of Nyssa, in Origen, and others, not as separate “spiritual sensorium,” but as a kind of intensification of perception of the one sensorium we possess. That is, under the influence of grace, here, *in via*, the soul can begin to perceive in a kind of sensible way the presence of God within our sense knowledge. Boyd Coolman, in particular, has highlighted the orientation of the spiritual senses toward a consummating eschatological transformation of perception. In what ways can we begin to see not only material continuity of the matter of bodies, but a kind of continuity of transformation across the boundaries of *via* and *patria*. As Catherine of Siena is supposed to have said, “All the way to heaven is heaven, because Jesus is the way.” Can we begin to think of this “heavenly strengthening,” as Dante describes it, as a process of transformation that we can begin, in a very partial and participatory way, to share in in this present life? And so here we might consider the intuitive insight of popular pious interest in the “sensible ecstasy” of Saint Teresa, preserved perhaps infamously by Bernini, and in things like the incorruptibility of certain saintly bodies, already beginning to share, in a partial and limited way, in the resurrection, precisely because of the holiness that follows from the saint’s free response to the offer of Christ’s love. I don’t know; I think this bears investigation.

How Essential is Numeric Identity to Thomas? And How Essential is it to us?

Brown’s paper rightly notes that Thomas argues for the numeric identity of the body that dies and the body that rises, and he very clearly shows why the soul needs the body to rise. But it is not clear (to me, at least) why, for Thomas, that numeric identity is required. I think Thomas does cite that passage from St. John of Damascus wherein the very term “re-surrection” would seem to require numerical identity, lest it be only “surrection.” For thinkers like Bonaventure, the belief in the multiplicity of form in the human being allowed him to imagine the body on its own, with its own sort of ‘agency.’ For Bonaventure, the material parts of the dead body, however far flung they may be, have coded within them the *rationes seminales*, the “seminal reasons” that bind this body, as its own quasi-integral substance, to this proper soul. For Bonaventure, body and soul can be said to “desire” each other, and he will use bridal images to describe this passionate and even erotic desire of body for soul and vice versa.¹⁶ “Body must rise, that it may be blessed through co-participation in and the overflowing of blessedness.”¹⁷ And the soul is “a complete substance composed of its own form and matter,” and yet it “nonetheless needs a body for completion”; the longing for its body, in Bynum’s words, “is thus lodged in its very being.”¹⁸ So, curiously, the multiplicity of forms in Bonaventure’s anthropology gives the soul and the body a kind of a separability, but it also makes the numerical identity of the risen body all the more important.

¹⁶ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* VII.7.7.

¹⁷ Bonaventure, *Opera Theologica Selecta* (Quarrachi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1949) vol. 4. *Comm in Libro IV Sententiarum*. Dist. 49, pt. 1, art. 1, q. 3, p. 989.

¹⁸ C.W. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 248.

Bonaventure struggles so mightily, as does Thomas, to ensure the numerical identity of the resurrected body with the mortal one, down to the last hair, because only then will it be, properly speaking, a true “resurrection.”¹⁹ The vehemence with which Bonaventure and Thomas assert this, I think, may follow from Aristotle’s principle, in *de Anima* 2.2, that “the actuality of any given thing can only be realized in what is already potentially that thing, i.e., in a matter of its own appropriate to it.”²⁰ For Bonaventure, each human body is itself particularly attuned to the soul that gives it life. “The nature of the rational and immortal soul demands that, as it has perpetual existence, it also have a body to which it may forever give life.”²¹ This means that the body itself has “a disposition to perpetual incorruption.”²² Bonaventure is careful to distinguish this disposition in its various aspects: The whole form and life of the body is disposed *necessarily* to incorruption, but the particular parts, the flesh as materiality, and “whatever pertains in general to physical well-being,” is disposed “in terms of *fittingness* only.”²³ In this way, Bonaventure can distinguish what the resurrected bodies of the damned and the saved have in common—the overall wholeness of the individual as such; and what they do not—the state and character of the flesh, perfected in the just and retaining affliction in the damned.

Caroline Walker Bynum has pointed to the fact that, in the wake of Aristotle, scholastic theologians effectively ignored, sidelined, or explained away the metaphors of transformation such as the seed “sown a mortal body, raised a spiritual body” in 1 Corinthians 15.²⁴ The hylomorphic imagination, and the 13th-century understanding of the nature of matter, seemed to require a rather narrow and, well, frankly very terrestrial understanding of the resurrected body, much like we see depicted visually in Luca Signorelli’s fresco of the resurrection of the dead in the Orvieto cathedral. Not that these bodies will simply be resuscitated corpses; to the contrary, Bonaventure and his peers held to the notion that the “*dotes*,” the dowry gifts of the glorified soul, overflow into the body, giving new or perfected qualities of “luminosity, subtlety, agility, and impassibility.”²⁵ So perhaps we might imagine the resurrected body to be something more like Matthias Grünewald’s image, which is rather rare in my experience of depictions of resurrection. In any event, it’s quite clear for Bonaventure that the body resurrected is first of all the same numerical body, and only then considered in its perfection and glorification.

But Thomas’s anthropology is quite different from Bonaventure’s, and, as I say, it’s not clear internally to his argument why numerical identity should be so important. This was driven home to me by another example from Dante, this time in the *Purgatorio* in his portrayal of souls in the “intermediate state,” prior to the general resurrection. As Dante journeys through Hell and Purgatory, those he encounters are called “shades,” and their materiality is deeply ambiguous—

¹⁹ This appears in the *Glossa Ordinaria* on 1 Cor 15, attributed to John of Damascus.

²⁰ Aristotle, *De Anima: On the Soul*, ed. and trans. Mark Shiffman (New York: Focus Philosophical Library, 2010) 2.2 (414a 25-28).

²¹ Bonaventure, *Brev.* VII.5.5

²² Bonaventure, *ibid.*

²³ Bonaventure, *ibid.*

²⁴ Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity*, 224ff.

²⁵ Bonaventure, *Brev.* VII.7.1.

e.g., on the one hand, Virgil has no weight and so does not weigh down Charon's boat, but later, his body seem to be substantial enough to cover Dante's eyes from Medusa's stare and to protect him from Geryon's stinging tail. In the *Purgatorio*, Dante is shocked and terrified when Virgil casts no shadow, and he fails to embrace the shade of his friend Casella three times, with his arms comically passing right through. Similarly, when the poet Statius realizes that his idol Virgil stands before him, he tries to stoop and embrace Virgil's feet. Virgil cautions him, "Brother, do not do so, for you are a shade and you behold a shade." Statius, perhaps a bit chagrined, replies, "Now you can understand the measure of the love for you that warms me, when I forget our emptiness and treat our shades as bodied things."²⁶

To some degree, we may say that these "aerial bodies" are Dante Poet's literary device, a way to make his characters visible to Dante Pilgrim and to us. But the poem constantly calls attention to the strange in-between state of shades before the resurrection, and so it provides a sort of photographic negative meditation on the resurrected body. In *Purg.* XXV, when Dante is perplexed by the fact that the penitent gluttons appear emaciated and drawn. "How can it be," he asks, "that one grows thin here where there is no need for nourishment?" Statius finally offers Dante Pilgrim an explanation. At the point of death, the human soul, both rational and animal, "unfastens from the flesh, carrying with it potential faculties, both human and divine. . . . As soon as space surrounds it . . . the formative force radiates upon it, giving shape and measure as though to living members . . . the neighboring air is shaped into that form of the soul, which stays with it, imprints upon it by its powers. And like the flame that imitates its fire, wherever that may shift and flicker, its new form imitates the spirit."²⁷ Here, the soul, as form, in a sense cannot help but inform whatever matter it finds. In the presence of air, it informs air, making an aerial body. "Through this we speak and through this we smile," says Statius. "Thus we shed tears and make the sighs you may have heard here on the mountain. And as we feel affections or desires, the shade will change its form"²⁸ In this meditation on aerial bodies, Dante has drawn the Thomistic doctrine of the soul to a natural conclusion. The soul informs matter, whether substantial or insubstantial, and it does so as a mode of relation and communication. Bodies are communicative expressions of soul, but it seems that they can be constituted in various ways out of various material.

Caroline Walker Bynum, in a fascinating essay on material continuity and the resurrection, has wondered at Thomas's reluctance to follow this insight all the way through in the way that Dante begins to. This "philosophically elegant new identity theory" implied by Thomas and Giles of Rome and later articulated explicitly by Dante's contemporaries, Peter of Auvergne and John of Paris, "never caught on."²⁹ Bynum argues that it never caught on because it arose in a context much broader than the university schoolroom, in the midst of a religious

²⁶ Dante, *Purgatorio*, trans. Robert & Jean Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), XXI.130-136.

²⁷ Dante, *Purg.* XXV.20-21.

²⁸ Dante, *Purg.* XXV.103-108.

²⁹ Caroline Walker Bynum, "Material Continuity, Personal Survival, and the Resurrection of the Body: A Scholastic Discussion in its Medieval and Modern Contexts," in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 239-98; this quote, 258.

world heavily invested in the material continuity of bodies. That is, medieval religious culture was deeply invested in relics. Relics were material connections to the blessed in heaven. The matter of a saint's body *remained the saint's body* in some fashion, well after the soul of the saint had taken its place in the heavenly communion of the blessed. The material cult and culture of medieval Catholicism framed what Charles Taylor calls a "social imaginary,"³⁰ a set of shared images and boundaries that set the terms of what was thinkable in a holistic way. In a religious imaginary framed by the cult of the saints, the numerical and material continuity of bodies from death into resurrection, from womb to tomb to glory, was an unshakeable assumption. This informs the sometimes-obsessive concern of medieval authors with hair, fingernails, foreskins, and various other material, bodily "pieces" that to us seem macabre.

Bynum helpfully sets these very medieval concerns for material continuity alongside some of our own particular perplexities in an age of organ transplants—a situation made all the more perplexing by the more recent progress in limb, face, and even head and brain transplants. At a less dramatic level, we now know that the material content of our bodies is constantly renewed, and carbon-14 dating allows us even to determine the age of individual cells or cell types within our bodies.³¹ In the wake of such change, the question of material continuity (or the lack thereof) comes upon us with even greater force. We find ourselves in the midst of a neuroscientific imaginary that, at one and the same time, is tempted to a complete materialist determinism *and* a dawning knowledge of a lack of material continuity. In what limited sense can we say that there is "numerical identity" in the body even before death, and how might that affect our thinking about it in the resurrection? Might we return to Thomas's own hylomorphic principles to think past material continuity as a principle for bodily resurrection? What would the consequences of this decision be? What would be lost, if anything?

On the other hand, the Bonaventurian in me wonders whether there is something to be explored anew in thinking about material continuity and a kind of shared "desire" between body and soul. If some in the scientific community are tempted to a materialist reductionism, others have critiqued the sufficiency of such an account to explain the phenomenon of consciousness, among other phenomena.³² As we learn more about the relationship of, say, memory, to a kind of holistic and embodied experience, not limited to specific neurons that "store" memories like data, a new portrait of a kind of mutuality between matter and spirit seems to open up, and Bonaventure's consideration of the mutual desire of body and soul has a certain resonance.³³ Indeed, considered negatively, in terms of what we seem to be worried about in our own age, it seems to me that our current cultural obsession with zombies—now not Voodoo's magically-

³⁰ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

³¹ Skin cells typically last 14 days; gut cells typically live 5 days. Fat cells last 10 years. The brain cortex neurons are likely original. The hippocampus, which houses the memory, is totally renewed in a span of about 30 years. See <http://www.radiolab.org/story/carbon/>.

³² See Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³³ See Robert Epstein, "The Empty Brain: Your brain does not process information, retrieve knowledge or store memories. In short: your brain is not a computer," *Aeon* (<https://aeon.co/essays/your-brain-does-not-process-information-and-it-is-not-a-computer>), accessed June 7, 2016.

resuscitated bodies from the grave but infected bodies evacuated of personality and transformed into mindless consumers of flesh, betrays a deep anxiety about the relationship between bodies and persons. If a virus can erase the personal character of the soul but still leave the body animate and sensate, if only a vessel of appetite, then what is the nature of the person, considered as an integral whole of body and soul? Some of the most troubling moments in the first season of *The Walking Dead* involve encounters between the living and their now-undead family and friends, with the difficulty in killing so familiar a body, so familiar a face, even in the full knowledge that the person to whom that face and body belonged has ceased to be. Here we have a sustained level of reflection on the possibility of biological and numerical continuity in the absence of an intellectually compelling doctrine of the soul. In this light, however quaint medieval discussions of relics and the resurrected body “even down to the last hair” may seem, we cannot seem to shake some deep concern with the question of material continuity and identity, and we are not as far from their concerns as we may imagine. Thomas and Bonaventure (and even Dante) remain resources for us to return to, precisely because they have engaged these questions with such rigor and creativity. In fact, as we continue to awaken in our own scientific imagination from the temporary insanity of a kind of brute mechanistic materialism to consider anew the nature of consciousness and embodiment, medieval grapplings with the resurrection of the body may become more and more relevant and helpful. And for this, we’re in Montague Brown’s debt, for bringing fresh eyes to Thomas on this question.

What I hope I have offered here in this paper is a series of responsive evocations to Brown’s excellent paper and the questions it raises. I agree with him that the question of the resurrection of the body is central to Christian faith, as it is wrapped up with the question of the salvation of persons and life in the Body of Christ. As Saint Paul said, “if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.” (1 Cor 15.16-17). It is striking that the Christian imagination has faltered in its capacity to consider the resurrection. As we come to terms with new quantum paradigms in our material sciences, I think the kind of *ressourcement* represented in Brown’s paper is all the more vital. Let us wait in joyful hope that we may indeed be strengthened for all that can delight us.