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Robert H. Gundry

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PART I  
FOR AND AGAINST  
A HOLISTIC DEFINITION OF *SŌMA*

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## CHAPTER I

## *Sōma* as the Whole Person: the Rise of a Definition

Because of his saying that God-talk is possible only through man-talk, theologians often charge Rudolf Bultmann with reducing theology to anthropology.<sup>1</sup> Yet some of his most stimulating work appears in his exposition of Biblical anthropology, especially the Pauline view of man. So it is generally agreed. We may take the first volume of the *Theology of the New Testament* by Bultmann as indicative of his interest and major contribution. There he devotes but thirty-two pages to ‘The Message of Jesus’, thirty pages to ‘The Kerygma of the Earliest Church’, and one hundred and twenty-one pages to ‘The Kerygma of the Hellenistic Church Aside from Paul’ – but (not counting three pages on ‘The Historical Position of Paul’) one hundred and sixty-three pages to the Pauline doctrine of man. He even subsumes themes such as the righteousness of God, law, grace, faith, reconciliation, the Word, the Church, and the sacraments under the catch-word ‘Man’.<sup>2</sup>

Bultmann begins his specific remarks on Pauline anthropology

<sup>1</sup> See E. Güttgemanns, *Der leidende Apostel und sein Herr*, FRLANT 90 (Göttingen, 1966) 199–206, and further references there. Güttgemanns agrees with Bultmann in principle, faults him for failure to carry out the obverse that every anthropological statement is also theological, or Christological, and proposes himself to carry out this missing line. In fairness to Bultmann, we should note that according to him the reverse is also true: man-talk is possible only through God-talk. For his denial that he has transformed theology into anthropology, see *The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, ed. C. W. Kegley (New York, 1966) 258. Cf. also S. M. Ogden, *The Reality of God and Other Essays* (New York, 1963) *passim*, and N. J. Young, *History and Existential Theology* (Philadelphia, 1969) 66–72.

<sup>2</sup> To be sure, the title of Chapter V, ‘Man under Faith’, formally subordinates anthropology; but the ensuing discussions show that the motifs listed above exist, not in their own right, but only in their existential relevance to man. H. Conzelmann has redressed his teacher’s anthropological imbalance in his own *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament* (New York, 1968) esp. 159–60. Nevertheless, Conzelmann largely takes over the special understanding of *sōma* questioned in the present study (*ibid.* 176–8).

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with a discussion of *sōma*, usually translated ‘body’.<sup>1</sup> Recognizing that the common (Bultmann says ‘naive’ and ‘popular’) meaning, ‘the physical body’, appears in a large number of instances,<sup>2</sup> he nevertheless regards them as theologically unimportant. He goes on to argue, however, that in a number of passages where the term is theologically significant Paul uses *sōma* in the sense of the human person as a whole: ‘The most comprehensive term which Paul uses to characterize man’s existence is *soma*, body’<sup>3</sup> and ‘*Man, his person as a whole*, can be denoted by *soma*.’<sup>4</sup> We can hardly overestimate the importance of this definition, for Bultmann gives pride of place to Pauline theology, interprets Pauline theology as anthropology, and makes *sōma* the key to that anthropology

For this view of *sōma*’s special meaning, Bultmann apparently has drawn upon his former teacher, J. Weiss. Expounding Paul’s prohibition of immorality in I Corinthians 6, Weiss forsook the German idealistic understanding of *sōma* as bodily form and *sarx* as fleshly substance, noted that in some places *sōma* parallels the first personal pronoun, and concluded that *sōma* can denote the person as such without reference to the physical body.<sup>5</sup> Adopting this view in some of his early writings, Bultmann fully developed it in his *Theology of the New Testament*.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Theology of the New Testament* (New York, 1951) 1: 192–203. Bultmann does not appear to commit the error of supposing a necessary correspondence between linguistics and concepts (against which see J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* [London, 1961] 33–45 *et passim*), but rests his case on word-usage in the light of full statements.

<sup>2</sup> Rom 1: 24; 4: 19; 12: 4–5; I Cor 5: 3; 7: 34; 12: 12–26; II Cor 4: 10; 10: 10; Gal 6: 17; I Thes 5: 23.

<sup>3</sup> *Theology of the New Testament* 1: 192.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 195.

<sup>5</sup> *Der erste Korintherbrief*, Meyer 5, 9th ed. (Göttingen, 1910) 160–1. Actually, a similar understanding of *sōma* in I Corinthians 6 had already been proposed by W. M. L. De Wette, *Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Neuen Testament*, 4th ed. (Leipzig, 1847) 2/1: 51, and T. T. Shore, ‘The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians’, *A Bible Commentary for English Readers*, ed. C. J. Ellicott (London, 1903) 7: 305.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Die Bedeutung der “dialektischen Theologie” für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft’, *Theologische Blätter* 7 (1928) 57–67; ‘Paulus’, *RGK* 4 (2nd ed., 1930) 1032–4. The German original of *Theology of the New Testament* appeared in 1948. Prior to Bultmann’s writing, the view had also appeared in T. Schmidt, *Der Leib Christi* (Leipzig, 1919) 5–6, again in connection with I Corinthians 6.

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The year after *Theology of the New Testament* appeared in English dress, J. A. T. Robinson's monograph *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology*<sup>1</sup> made its appearance. Widely regarded as a paradigm in the upsurge of Biblical theological studies after World War II, the book has had a profound effect – along with Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament* – on current understanding of Paul's use of *sōma*. Indeed, Robinson's work has been translated into French<sup>2</sup> and Italian.<sup>3</sup> Although he proceeds into Paul's ecclesiastical concept of the Body of Christ, Robinson begins by adopting and elaborating (with certain revisions to be noted later) Bultmann's holistic definition of *sōma*.

So influential has been the authority of Bultmann and so persuasive his and Robinson's discussions that it has become orthodoxy among NT theologians to say that in Pauline literature, and perhaps elsewhere as well, *sōma* frequently and characteristically refers to the whole person rather than especially, or exclusively, to the body. Sometimes the definition carries the qualification that *sōma* refers to the whole man by metonymy or under the aspect of his physical body. To what extent these qualifications may or may not undermine the purported distinctiveness of the usage remains to be seen. At other times the definition remains unqualified. The meaning of *sōma* may even be dematerialized completely.<sup>4</sup> The holistic definition has become so widely accepted that virtually all recent handbooks, dictionaries, and studies of Pauline theology take it for granted with little or no felt need for argumentative justification. W. D. Stacey writes of 'Bultmann's conclusive treatment of this point'.<sup>5</sup>

Typical of the more qualified statements is that of Bultmann's translator, K. Grobel, who explains that Paul does not materialistically equate man with his physical body but uses *sōma* by metonymy for the whole self.<sup>6</sup> 'Metonymy' may lead

<sup>1</sup> SBT 1/5 (London, 1952).

<sup>2</sup> *Le corps: Etude sur la théologie de S. Paul*, Parole et Tradition (Paris, 1966).

<sup>3</sup> *Il corpo: Studio sulla teologia di S. Paolo*, La Parola di Dio 3 (Turin, 1966).

<sup>4</sup> Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, 160–1. Weiss speaks of the 'Immaterialität' of an 'übermaterielle' *sōma*.

<sup>5</sup> *The Pauline View of Man* (London, 1956) 182.

<sup>6</sup> 'Σῶμα as "Self, Person" in the LXX', *Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann*, BZNW 21 (1954) 52–9.

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to confusion, however. Normally it has to do with the representation of one thing by another which is distinct though related. But Grobel does not appear to exclude the body from the whole man; at least the examples he draws from the LXX would not so indicate. ‘Synecdoche’, representation of the whole by a part, might more properly designate a usage of *sōma* for the entire person (unless the physical body is meant to be *excluded*).

But whichever term, metonymy or synecdoche, correctly designates the view of *sōma* here under discussion, the term presents a problem to the view it is meant to represent. For if by denying that Paul materialistically equates man with his physical body we mean that Paul does not limit man to his physical body, even a dualist would agree and, further, assent to a synecdochic use of *sōma*. And synecdoche would indicate that the comprehensive sense of *sōma* is only representative – i.e., figurative. But a figurative usage in which the body not only is itself but also represents the rest of a person – viz., his soul, or spirit – fails to satisfy the requirements of a holistic definition of *sōma*. Such a definition requires that *sōma* refer directly to the whole person rather than indirectly through one of his parts.

The same deficiency appears if we say that *sōma* refers to the whole man under the *aspect* of his physical body.<sup>1</sup> If we mean that *sōma* can actually *comprise* the whole man with the result that all that is man is *sōma* – not just represented by or contained in or projected through – but is in fact *sōma*, then we do indeed have a technical use of the term. We gain the impression, however, that in using the phrase ‘under the aspect of the body’ some writers (perhaps unconsciously) shy away from an absolute equation between *sōma* and the totality of the human person.

Other writers do not exhibit such caution. Under the slogan that man does not have *sōma* but is *sōma*, J. Schmid echoes Bultmann’s statement that the term is Paul’s most comprehensive for a human person.<sup>2</sup> In greater detail W. D. Stacey

<sup>1</sup> ‘In Paul, σῶμα designates not only a part of a man, but the whole man in so far as he is seen under a particular aspect’ (Conzelmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 176).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Anthropologie, Biblische A’, *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, ed. J. Höfer and K. Rahner, 2nd ed. (Freiburg, 1957) 1: 611.

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treats *sōma* as the center of personal life both now and hereafter. Thus *sōma* is more completely identifiable with the personality than *sarx*, *pneuma*, or *psychē*, which also can alternate with personal pronouns but refer to the whole person only in a limited number of spheres. Man is *psychē* and *sarx* in his bondage to sin and in his service to Christ, but not in the resurrection. Man is *pneuma* in service to Christ and in resurrection, but only in a narrow way in his bondage to sin. Man is *sōma*, however, in all these spheres. Hence *sōma* becomes for Stacey the comprehensive term for the human personality.<sup>1</sup>

M. E. Dahl defines *sōma* as ‘the totality of man from every aspect’. Only when modifiers are added does the term refer to the human totality under a single aspect or in a particular state. Like Stacey, he contrasts the wide coverage of *sōma* with the restricted meanings of *pneuma* – man as divinely endowed with life, *sarx* – man as subject to weakness and hostile powers, and *psychē* – man as elementally alive but capable of slipping back into the Void.<sup>2</sup>

X. Léon-Dufour decries an understanding of *sōma* as an assemblage of physical organs.<sup>3</sup> Since it means the whole person, *sōma* can be either spirit or flesh, according to L. Cerfaux.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps A. M. Hunter goes farthest in his statement: ‘For Paul the body is the principle of identity which persists through all changes of substance – “organism” or “person” would perhaps give his meaning. Now the body has a material means of expression suited to this earthly sphere; hereafter God will give it a new embodiment befitting the heavenly world – . . . a spirit-body.’<sup>5</sup> Notably, for Hunter the body *has* rather than *is* a material means of expression, and in the resurrection the body will be *given* rather than will *be* a mode of ‘self-expression and power to communicate with others’ (phrases used in Hunter’s following paragraph).

<sup>1</sup> *The Pauline View of Man*, 190.

<sup>2</sup> *The Resurrection of the Body*, SBT 1/36 (London, 1962) 121–6.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Corps’, *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique*, ed. X. Léon-Dufour et al. (Paris, 1962) 162.

<sup>4</sup> *Christ in the Theology of Saint Paul* (New York, 1959) 280.

<sup>5</sup> *The Gospel According to St Paul* (London, 1966) 55, cf. 57, and the earlier form of this book, *Interpreting Paul’s Gospel* (Philadelphia, 1954) 54–5, 133.

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A list of other scholars who subscribe to a holistic definition of *sōma* might go on and on. Indeed, the definition is so widely assumed that such a list would not merit the space necessary for it. We need, however, to examine the evidence for treating *sōma* as the entire person.

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## CHAPTER 2

*Sōma* in Extra-Biblical Literature

In passages from extra-Biblical literature *sōma* often receives the translation ‘person’. R. Hirzel cites a multitude of passages from the classics for such a meaning.<sup>1</sup> The translations in the Loeb editions of ancient Greek writings frequently have ‘person’ for *sōma*. The same is true of other translations. Liddell, Scott, and Jones devote a whole paragraph to references under the meaning ‘a person, a human being’.<sup>2</sup> F. Preisigke and Moulton and Milligan concur with examples of the general sense ‘person’.<sup>3</sup> So also do Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich in their lexicon<sup>4</sup> and E. Schweizer in *TDNT*.<sup>5</sup> Do these references demonstrate an accepted usage which Paul may have borrowed and developed? The references demand examination. The wideness of the range of ancient Greek literature prevents exhaustive treatment, but representative examples will afford adequate ground for judgement. And that judgement should not be predetermined by the weighty authority of those who have assigned the definition ‘person’ to these references. Passages in the following discussion come from the lexicographers just mentioned.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ‘Die Person: Begriff und Name derselben im Altertum’, *Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften der philosophisch-philologischen und historischen Klasse* (1914) 10: 1–54. Hirzel is concerned to establish the early use of *sōma* for living persons as opposed to corpses. With that we have no quarrel except when it is added that *sōma* comprehends the *whole* of the living person.

<sup>2</sup> *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford, 1940) s.v. σῶμα (also in ‘Addenda et Corrigenda’).

<sup>3</sup> F. Preisigke, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Papyrusurkunden* (Berlin, 1927) s.v. σῶμα; J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1949) s.v. σῶμα.

<sup>4</sup> W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, translated, revised, and augmented by W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich (Chicago, 1952) s.v. σῶμα 1b.

<sup>5</sup> ‘σῶμα κτλ.’, *TDNT* 7 (1971) 1026, 1028, 1030, 1032; but see 1048.

<sup>6</sup> In passing, we should note that an extra-Biblical use of *sōma* for the whole person would erode a supposed Hebraic base for the holistic definition



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We may first of all dispose of those many instances where *sōma* refers to slaves. As in Rev 18: 13 and Septuagintal passages yet to be examined, this use of *sōma* emphasizes the thingness of slaves as property and working tools.<sup>1</sup> Wholeness of personality lies quite outside the scope of vision, in fact, runs contrary to it. By the same token, we should probably put *PSI* iv.359 and 366 (252–251 B.C.) into the same category, for there *to sōma* denotes a hired servant (*misthōtos*) who is delivered from hand to hand as an item of merchandise (in association with beasts of burden, cattle, and sacks of goods).

Closely related is Demosthenes' statement that *tois doulois to sōma tōn adikēmatōn hapantōn hypēuthynon esti*; i.e., slaves must suffer in their own bodies for all their misdeeds. By contrast freemen are usually able to satisfy the law by payment of fines (*eis chrēmata*). Androtion on the other hand has treacherously done vengeance *eis ta sōmata* ('against the bodies') of freemen (Demosthenes 22.55). The connotation of slavery, the parallel with *chrēmata*,<sup>2</sup> and the clear reference to physical punishment confirm the normal meaning of *sōma*.

Also closely related is a usage for prisoners. *P Petr.* II.13 (3)<sup>5</sup> (258–253 B.C.) contains a warning that the wall of a prison may fall and kill some of the inmates (*diaphanēsai ti tōn sōmatōn*). Plato writes of a public prison close to the marketplace for the securing of the 'bodies' of the majority of criminals (i.e., average criminals; *Leg.* 908a). Physical confinement is in view; and, being prisoners, the criminals are looked upon – like slaves – as objects of manipulation. That, rather than personality, constitutes the stress in *sōma* when it stands for by showing that Greeks, too, thought in this way. Consideration of Hebraic thinking follows below.

<sup>1</sup> Antithetically, Aeschines 2.5 speaks of a 'free body' with reference to a well-born Olynthian girl whom, according to Demosthenes' charge, Aeschines and others had abused by whipping at a drunken banquet. On the thingness of slaves under Roman law see Gaius *Institutes* I, cited and discussed by F. Lyall, 'Roman Law in the Writings of Paul – the Slave and the Freedman', *NTS* 17 (1970) 75. N.B.: standard translations of ancient texts have been followed in some measure; but because of frequent divergences for the sake of scholarly discussion in terms of more literal renderings, the present writer takes responsibility for the translations.

<sup>2</sup> To be sure, *sōma* and *chrēmata* contrast as *different* agencies of payment for wrongdoing, but both *are* such agencies with the result that in the larger picture they react on each other as parallels.

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prisoners. Also, in the Petrie papyrus *sōma* is doubly suitable because of the threat of death (cf. II Mac 12: 26). As we shall repeatedly see, *sōma* appears not only for corpses but also for living bodies immediately threatened with death – i.e., corpses in the making. The emphasis again lies on thingness.

The same holds true for the use of *sōma* in the plural for troops. In Aeneas Tacticus 32.1 we read that enemies in battle are to be withstood *mēchanēmasin ē sōmasin* ('with engines or bodies [i.e. infantry]'). And the same writer gives instructions concerning the placement of troops (*sōmatōn*) in defense of a city (1.1). Sophocles writes about *ta polla sōmata* of an army in battle whose discipline through obedience to commanding officers keeps them from rout, defeat, and death (*Antigone* 676). Demosthenes speaks of the bodies that man the war-galleys (9.40) and refers to the expenditure of bodies and materials in battle (18.66). The same usage appears in Demosthenes 14.16–20; 18.20; Thucydides 1.85, 121, VI.12, VIII.65; and Chrysostom *De sacerdotio* 1.8. As before, the stress lies upon *sōmata* as objects of manipulation and tools of action. Along this line the parallels with 'engines (of warfare)' in a compound expression (Aeneas Tacticus 32.1) and with 'materials (*chrēmata*)' in very many passages are instructive. Furthermore, since the troops are spoken of as bodies *en masse*, personality is hardly the point. In Demosthenes 18.66 there is the added connotation of corpses, dead bodies on a battlefield – things. And in Sophocles *Antigone* 676 death at least threatens.

*Sōma* as used by Euripides in *Troades* 201 stands simply for 'corpse'. In Euripides *Andromache* 315, Menelaus threatens to kill the son of Andromache instead of Andromache's own body. Here again physical death is in view. Isocrates 4.156 speaks of physical conflict and the danger of war, and Aeschines 2.141 of the sparing of bodies from death. In Euripides *Hecuba* 301, Odysseus tells Hecuba he is ready to save her body, i.e., to save her from physical death. And in *Orestes* 1075, also by Euripides, Orestes says to Pylades, 'Give back your body to your father; do not die with me.' Dionysius Halicarnassensis writes of many bodies dying (*Antiquitates Romanae* 4.69), and Chrysostom speaks of Phinehas' killing two bodies with one stroke (*De sacerdotio* 1.9). So Thucydides speaks of men who are more willing to war with their bodies than with their