

Introduction

This book asks a new question of familiar works on a familiar topic. The familiar works are Christian writings from the second and third centuries, and the familiar topic is resurrection. The “old” question on this topic concerns the *nature* of resurrection: *What* did early Christians think resurrection is, especially in its relationship to embodiment? But the new question is this: How did differing understandings of the *purpose* of resurrection, inherited from Second Temple Judaism and the New Testament, shape early Christian accounts of resurrection – not just *what* it is, but *why* it happens, and relatedly *how* and *to whom*?

Why this new question? Put simply, there is clear evidence for two understandings of the purpose of resurrection in Second Temple Judaism and the New Testament, yet the reception of these two understandings in early Christianity has gone unstudied – masked in prior scholarship by attention to the fierce debates over the “old” question, the relationship between resurrection and embodiment. According to the first understanding, resurrection is a prerequisite for judgment. It happens to the righteous and the wicked indiscriminately and is a preliminary step on the way to the reward of the righteous or punishment of the wicked. This view appears in Daniel, 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, and, in the New Testament, most clearly in John and Revelation. According to the second understanding, resurrection *is* God’s reward for the righteous. Correspondingly, resurrection is tightly linked to salvation, and the resurrection of the damned is either denied or not mentioned. This view is found in 2 Maccabees and Josephus’ descriptions of the Pharisees and receives its fullest development in the Pauline epistles.

The thesis of this book is that the juxtaposition of these two views profoundly shaped early Christian understandings of resurrection in two ways. First, the Pauline development of the second view (resurrection as aspect of salvation) connected resurrection to a slew of key theological *loci*, prompting some writers to explore and further develop those connections. But, second, this juxtaposition forced others, whose starting point was the first view (resurrection as first and foremost a prerequisite for judgment), to find ways to redirect or avoid the force of the Pauline connections. Tracing this process opens new windows into early Christian thought on resurrection and complicates the conventional narrative built around “fleshly” versus “spiritual” understandings of resurrection, showing how prior scholarship’s exclusive focus on the *nature* of resurrection has produced an incomplete picture of resurrection in the second and third centuries.

The Pauline epistles fill out the connection between resurrection and righteousness by linking both to Spirit-driven conformity to the resurrected Christ. This connection prompted later writers to embed resurrection not only in the doctrines of creation and divine justice (as a focus on resurrection as a prerequisite for judgment did), but also in Christology, pneumatology, and anthropology. If both resurrection and righteousness come from the indwelling Spirit of the resurrected Christ, what must be true about the resurrected Christ, the life-giving Spirit, and the human being? These Pauline innovations also increased the challenge of integrating the two understandings of resurrection: How can resurrection be Spirit-driven conformity to the resurrected Christ if all, both the righteous and the wicked, will be raised to face judgment? The alternative to grappling with these questions was to ignore or deemphasize these Pauline links. A whole new dimension of the place of resurrection within early Christian theology thus emerges when attention shifts from the *what* question to the *why* question. The task of this book is to reveal that new dimension.

Establishing this thesis will require two steps. The first is to show that there were, in fact, two understandings of the purpose of resurrection in Second Temple Judaism, that both are reflected in the New Testament, and that the Pauline epistles make especially important contributions to the second view by linking resurrection to key *loci* like Christology and pneumatology. The second step is to demonstrate how careful attention to the reception of this Pauline development, including how that view is reconciled with resurrection as a simple prerequisite for judgment (if the two views are reconciled at all), reveals important aspects of early Christian

thought on resurrection that remain otherwise hidden. Establishing the first is relatively easy, and other scholars have already noted much of the key data. I will therefore devote one chapter to surveying this data and highlighting patterns important for the remainder of the study (the most important pattern being the Pauline connections between resurrection, righteousness, and Spirit-driven conformity to the resurrected Christ, which I will label the “Pauline resurrection schema”).¹ The second task requires detailed case studies of key early Christian authors and texts. In each case study, I will endeavor to show how the author or text grapples, whether explicitly or implicitly, with the Pauline resurrection schema and how the two views of the purpose of resurrection might relate to each other – even if appreciating the full effect of the Pauline schema within each author’s theology sometimes requires venturing into areas of their thought seemingly far afield from the concerns of Pauline theology itself. These case studies will comprise the remainder of the book.

One of the most important results that emerges from these case studies is a redrawn map of resurrection in early Christianity. The conventional map, drawn according to views on resurrection and embodiment, shows Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Methodius as a pro-flesh bloc arrayed against Origen and the Valentinians. But Irenaeus and Tertullian turn out to have based their fundamental understandings of resurrection on different views of its purpose, with correspondingly different pneumatologies, anthropologies, and exegeses of key Pauline texts. Two Valentinian texts, however, join Irenaeus in making the Pauline connection between resurrection and salvation their starting point (over against Tertullian) – despite disagreeing strongly with both Irenaeus and Tertullian on resurrection and embodiment! Origen formulated a brilliant but perhaps unstable synthesis of both views by embedding the resurrection of *all* into God’s pedagogical engagement with free rational creatures aimed at salvation, and Methodius of Olympus formulated an ingenious synthesis

¹ As I will discuss in Chapter 1, Paul’s speech before Festus recorded in Acts 24 does appear to imply the first view – resurrection of all as a prerequisite for judgment (Acts 24:15). This statement lacks parallels in the epistles, however, and is not linked to any theological *loci* other than judgment (unlike the discussions of resurrection in the epistles). Thus, while this view would have been viewed as “Pauline” by early Christians who accepted the authority of Acts, it was not integrated into the pattern of connections I am calling the “Pauline resurrection schema.” Interestingly, though, Acts 24:15 is cited by none of the authors or texts treated in this study. In the eyes of early Christian authors, the case for understanding resurrection as a prerequisite for judgment rested not on the authority of Paul but on other texts.

of his own. Not only is this map far more complex than the conventional one, but it also reveals surprising neighbors.

PRIOR SCHOLARSHIP ON RESURRECTION IN EARLY
 CHRISTIANITY

Resurrection in early Christianity is already a well-studied field, as it should be. From Paul onwards, numerous early Christian authors engaged in sharp polemics over the resurrection. Often, these debates focused on the relationship between resurrection and embodiment. Does “resurrection” imply renewed embodiment? If so, what kind of continuity exists between the body of this life and the body of the resurrection? And how, if at all, is the latter a transformed version of the former? Scholars have worked to track, sort, and explain the various positions on these questions in early Christianity. Reflecting the ancient debates themselves, then, much scholarship on resurrection in early Christianity focuses on the relationship between resurrection and embodiment.²

Such studies often proceed by establishing “what the New Testament really says about resurrection” (in practice, often “what Paul really meant by ‘spiritual body’ in 1 Corinthians 15:44”) and then using that as a yardstick for all later positions, seeking explanations for deviations from the true Pauline teaching along the way.³ This approach to resurrection in early Christianity is valuable insofar as it takes seriously what many of the protagonists in the debates said they were doing: contending for the right interpretation of Paul’s teaching on resurrection. I do not label it the “old question” in any pejorative sense; it is simply the well-trod path

² Brian Daley treats early Christian understandings of resurrection within the broader framework of early Christian eschatology, recognizing that even the latter is always a “secondary aspect” of theology insofar as “it reflects other, more fundamental convictions about God, the world and human experience.” *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 2. His treatments of each author, however, are relatively brief and descriptive. The same is true of the discussions of resurrection in the second century in PHEME PERKINS, *Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984). The present study will show in greater detail precisely how understandings of resurrection could be secondary to broader theological concerns.

³ Influential examples of this kind of study include Robert M. Grant, “The Resurrection of the Body,” *JR* 28 (1948); James M. Robinson, “Jesus from Easter to Valentinus (Or to the Apostles’ Creed),” *JBL* 101 (1982); and, on a much larger scale and with opposite conclusions (based on an opposite assessment of “what Paul really meant in 1 Corinthians 15”), N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 3 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003).

through the material. It can suffer from a myopic focus on the ambiguous discussion of bodily continuity and transformation in 1 Corinthians 15:35–49,⁴ and the resulting assessments of later authors' views on these same questions are often overly dependent on the scholar's initial judgment of Paul's teaching. But these pitfalls do not negate the validity or importance of the overall endeavor. Careful attention to what early Christian authors thought about the relationship between resurrection and embodiment, along with how they positioned themselves vis-à-vis the contested Pauline texts, remains necessary.

Some scholars have come to suspect that more was at stake in these debates than the explicit points of disagreement might suggest. But even when these scholars have sought to read "behind" the ancient polemics to uncover the deeper issues at play, they have focused on analyzing polemics concerning the nature of resurrection – the *what* question. Noting the insistence in many quarters on the connection between ecclesial authority and witnessing the risen but pre-ascension Christ, Elaine Pagels has argued that the doctrine of the bodily resurrection (at least of Jesus) served to legitimate the developing ecclesial hierarchy.⁵ John Gager, drawing heavily on Mary Douglas' theory of "natural symbols," has suggested that "disputes about resurrection ... involve more than just doctrinal matters in a narrow sense. They are also condensed statements about perceived difficulties in the body social and about proposed solutions for those difficulties."⁶ Since the "spirit" represents the individual and the "body" represents society, he argues, eschatologies in which the two are reunited emphasize the subordination of the individual to broader social structures, such as the ecclesiastical hierarchy or, eventually, the Christian empire.⁷ Paying careful attention to the images deployed to describe resurrection, Caroline Walker Bynum has argued that the concerns driving most post-Pauline discussions of resurrection differed from the apostle's own: images of growth and transformation, such as Paul's seed analogy, came to be replaced by images of reassembly and stasis, revealing a deep fear of bodily processes and the hope that

⁴ For an important treatment of the complexities of Paul's various discussions of bodies, including resurrected bodies, see Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).

⁵ Elaine Pagels, "The Controversy over Christ's Resurrection: Historical Event or Symbol?," in *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979).

⁶ John Gager, "Body Symbols and Social Reality: Resurrection, Incarnation, and Asceticism in Early Christianity," *Religion* 12 (1982): 348.

⁷ Gager, "Body Symbols and Social Reality," 348–49.

resurrection will still them.⁸ Claudia Setzer has focused on the ways in which arguments about bodily resurrection helped Jewish and Christian communities to distinguish themselves from outsiders and construct their communities.⁹

Most recently, Ouhti Lehtipuu has looked to debates over the nature of the resurrection body and the timing of the resurrection to explain why resurrection was so controversial in the second and third centuries.¹⁰ She concludes that these issues were so controversial because they were ambiguous enough to be useful for drawing boundaries to exclude theological enemies, which many second- and third-century Christian authors were seeking to do. But since questions of *who* will be resurrected and *to what end* were points of diversity but not of controversy, she chooses not to treat them in her study. Instead, she focuses on explicating the ways in which various authors argued that their own understanding of the nature and timing of resurrection was clearly correct and then used that understanding as a (tendentious) litmus test for orthodoxy. What Lehtipuu does not offer is an account of why this particular ambiguous issue, resurrection, was used as a litmus test during this particular time, the second and third centuries. Other equally ambiguous issues, such as the nature of the Eucharist or the relationship between divine sovereignty and creaturely free will, have played similar boundary-defining roles at various points in Christian history and could have done so during the second and third centuries. What is needed is more than the claim that resurrection was controversial because it was debatable. Why was resurrection debated so fiercely when it was, and other issues when they were? By studying the very questions Lehtipuu sets aside, focusing on a critical issue that has been occluded by the obvious controversies that swirled around other questions, I seek to bring a fresh analysis that helps explain both why and how resurrection was controversial in this period.

Even though this study asks a different question of the ancient material, it can be read as a combination of these two approaches to resurrection in early Christianity. It shares with the first approach a focus on what the theological texts under discussion actually claim to be

⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336*, ACLS Lectures on the History of Religions, n.s., 15 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

⁹ Claudia Setzer, *Resurrection of the Body in Early Judaism and Early Christianity: Doctrine, Community, and Self-Definition* (Boston: Brill Academic, 2004).

¹⁰ Outi Lehtipuu, *Debates over the Resurrection of the Dead: Constructing Early Christian Identity*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

doing: drawing on received authoritative texts to articulate coherent theologies. No doubt much more was going on under the surface, and studies that attempt to get behind the theological arguments are valuable for the hidden tensions and seams they can reveal. This book, however, will focus on early Christian theological exegesis as such. But by focusing on understandings of the *purpose* of resurrection, I will read “behind” or at least “around” the flashpoints surrounding the nature of the resurrected body. In the process, tensions and seams will emerge, but so will ingenious developments.

The Pauline link between resurrection and Spirit-driven conformity to Christ makes the early Christian reception of Paul particularly important for this study. According to the “Pauline Captivity” narrative that dominated studies of the second-century reception of Paul from F. C. Baur in the nineteenth century through the 1970s, Paul was embraced (“held captive”) by Marcion and Valentinus but ignored by writers like Papias, Ignatius, and Justin.¹¹ The “real Paul,” according to Baur and his German Lutheran colleagues, was the Paul of justification by faith and emancipation from legalistic Judaism. These emphases conflicted with attempts to preserve Christianity’s link to its Jewish heritage. More recently, Markus Vinzent has offered a bold renarration of this time period, with special attention to the resurrection of Christ.¹² Vinzent argues that the resurrection of Christ was a distinctively Pauline emphasis and was therefore all but forgotten until Marcion revived Paulinism, forcing authors like Irenaeus to respond. In his view, the resurrection narratives in the canonical gospels do not count as evidence against the Pauline distinctiveness of the resurrection of Christ because he sees those gospels as written *after* and *in dependence upon* Marcion’s gospel, in the middle of the second century. He also dates other texts that mention Christ’s resurrection, such as the letters of Ignatius, after Marcion. Vinzent’s thesis is provocative on many levels and has elicited varied responses, sometimes critical, even as it is acknowledged that the state of the evidence makes it all but impossible to conclusively *disprove* his thesis.¹³ Even if all of Vinzent’s

¹¹ On the Pauline Captivity narrative and its underlying theological and historiographical commitments, see Benjamin L. White, *Remembering Paul: Ancient and Modern Contests over the Image of the Apostle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), ch. 2.

¹² Markus Vinzent, *Christ’s Resurrection in Early Christianity and the Making of the New Testament* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

¹³ See, e.g., James Carleton Paget, “Marcion and the Resurrection: Some Thoughts on a Recent Book,” *JSNT* 35 (2012): 74–102, and Peter Lampe and Adolf Martin Ritter, “Review of Markus Vinzent, *Christ’s Resurrection in Early Christianity and the Making of the New Testament*,” *ZAC* 17 (2013): 580–88.

reconstructions of the time between Paul and Marcion are correct, however, they actually have no effect on the present study. Paul remains the clear force to be reckoned with on the theme of resurrection (including Christ's resurrection), and the task of integrating Pauline views with ideas found in other texts (including the canonical gospels) remains no matter the historical reality of when or why those texts were written.

The present study begins with Irenaeus, who was supposed to have ended the Pauline Captivity with a tendentious reading of Paul through the lens of the Pastorals (i.e., an interpretation of Paul not centered on justification by faith). Recent critics of this narrative, however, have pointed out that Paul was more important for earlier second-century authors than acknowledged by the Pauline Captivity narrative (an observation that loses some of its force if they are all dated after Marcion, per Vinzent); furthermore, the so-called *Hauptbriefe*, the Pauline letters accepted as authentic by scholars in the tradition of Baur,¹⁴ actually play a far more important role in Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* than the Pauline Captivity narrative would lead one to expect.¹⁵ This study will confirm this point. Irenaeus' rejection of his opponents' interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15 was grounded in a broader theology based upon and extending the Pauline links outlined above: the resurrection of Christ as

¹⁴ For Baur, the *Hauptbriefe* were Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, and Galatians. Later scholars added 1 Thessalonians, Philippians, and Philemon to this list. See White, *Remembering Paul*, 22, 24.

¹⁵ On the overturning of the Pauline Captivity narrative, see White, *Remembering Paul*, ch. 3. The most important works are: Andreas Lindemann, *Paulus im ältesten Christentum: Das Bild des Apostels und die Rezeption der paulinischen Theologie in der frühchristlichen Literatur bis Marcion*, BHT 58 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1979); Ernst Dassmann, *Der Stachel im Fleisch: Paulus in der frühchristlichen Literatur bis Irenäus* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1979); and David K. Rensberger, "As the Apostle Teaches: The Development of the Use of Paul's Letters in Second-Century Christianity" (Ph.D. thesis, Yale University, 1981). Irenaeus did draw heavily on the Pastorals to depict Paul as a heresy hunter, but he drew the shape of that heresy-hunter's actual theology from the other letters. Thus, White concludes, "Romans 5:12–21, Galatians 4:4–7 and Ephesians 1:10 appear to have had the greatest constructive influence on his own theology, particularly his views on the economy of salvation and the recapitulation of all things in Christ, the Second Adam. From among the Pauline materials, however, the Pastorals were Irenaeus' favored sites for borrowing stigmatizing language" (*Remembering Paul*, 156). For a recent study of the function of the four most-cited Pauline passages in early Christianity (from both undisputed and disputed letters), see Jennifer R. Strawbridge, *The Pauline Effect: The Use of the Pauline Epistles by Early Christian Writers*, Studies of the Bible and Its Reception 5 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015). Strawbridge concludes that a concern with Christian formation as moving from one stage of wisdom to another ties together the diverse ways in which pre-Nicene authors drew on Paul for their own purposes.

“Paulinism,” “Resurrection,” “Moral Transformation” 9

paradigm, through the indwelling Spirit, of both the morally renewed life and a future resurrection. In fact, it is Irenaeus’ faithfulness to and extension of this view that generates unresolved systematic tensions in his thought with respect to the resurrection of the wicked. But this study will also complicate this narrative by going beyond Irenaeus to the reception of Paul in Tertullian, Origen, and Methodius (alongside Valentinian texts). While Paul was certainly important for each of these authors, he was important in very different ways.

TERMINOLOGY: “PAULINISM,” “RESURRECTION,”
 “MORAL TRANSFORMATION”

The Pauline resurrection schema was so important for early Christian understandings of resurrection because so many theologians were engaged in what I am calling “Paulinism.” “Paulinism” has meant many things in scholarship, from the theology immanent within the historical Paul’s own mind, to early attempts to do theology under the mantle of Paul by invoking his name, to later theological developments that focus on Paul to the exclusion of others; but I employ the term to denote the project, undertaken by later authors, of articulating and developing the theological emphases of Paul “the Apostle,” usually in conversation with insights drawn from other authoritative authors.¹⁶ A comparison with “Origenism” might be helpful: Origenists, writing decades or even centuries after Origen, sought to do justice to what they perceived to be Origen’s deepest insights, but they neither slavishly reproduced his thought nor ignored other theological guides. (It should go without saying that whatever negative connotations have grown up around the term “Origenism” due to negative assessments of Origen’s theology should not be transferred to “Paulinism.”) Just as “Origenism” embodied a special but not exclusive focus on the theology of Origen, so “Paulinism” points to a special but not necessarily exclusive focus on Paul. And although not all early Christian theologians can be characterized as engaged in

¹⁶ For various uses of “Paulinism,” see Robert Morgan, “The Significance of ‘Paulinism,’” in *Paul and Paulinism: Essays in Honor of C. K. Barrett*, ed. M. D. Hooker and S. G. Wilson (London: SPCK, 1982); Francis Watson, “Resurrection and the Limits of Paulinism,” in *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays*, ed. J. Ross Wagner, C. Kavin Rowe, and A. Katherine Grieb (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); and Mark W. Elliott, “The Triumph of Paulinism by the Mid-Third Century,” in *Paul and the Second Century*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Joseph Dodson (New York: Continuum, 2011). My usage of the term comes closest to Elliott’s.

“Paulinism,” many of the most influential, and all of those treated in this study, were. The rifts that developed within this shared project are the “conflict” in the Paulinism of this period – whether the obvious and highly public conflict over the nature of the resurrected body (the subject of many other studies) or the hidden yet no less important conflict over the purpose of resurrection itself (the subject of this study).

For this study as a whole, I do not take a particular kind of event – for example, a revivification of corpses – as paradigmatic for “resurrection” and treat all other uses of resurrection terminology or motifs as “metaphorical” or even somehow defective.¹⁷ Rather, I seek to allow each source to define “resurrection” for itself by tracing its deployment of the language of resurrection. I take this language to be constituted primarily by terms like ἀνίστημι and ἐγείρω, along with their cognates and corresponding Latin translations. In practice, identifying discussions of resurrection in the texts examined in this study is only difficult if one comes to the texts with a predefined understanding of what actually counts as “resurrection.” The texts themselves are quite clear about when they are discussing rising up from the dead, even if they are sometimes less clear about what this looks like.¹⁸ I use the term “general resurrection” as a shorthand for a resurrection that encompasses all people. One sometimes finds scholars talking about a “general resurrection” that is actually restricted to a subset of humans, usually the righteous. By “*general* resurrection,” they appear to mean “multiple people resurrecting at once.” I find this usage needlessly confusing and therefore avoid it. I prefer to call the eschatological resurrection of a subset of humans “the eschatological resurrection of the [subset].”

A final term requires discussion: moral transformation. I will use this term frequently as a shorthand for the freedom from enslavement to sin that Paul connects to conformity to the resurrection of Christ. “Moral transformation” is not, of course, Paul’s own language. Rather, to take

¹⁷ In other words, I do not start from the conclusions of Wright in *Resurrection of the Son of God*.

¹⁸ Frederick S. Tappenden, *Resurrection in Paul: Cognition, Metaphor, and Transformation*, Early Christianity and its Literature 19 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016), has recently used theories of cognitive linguistics and embodied cognition to identify broader patterns of resurrection thinking, emphasizing the continuities and connections between seemingly distinct discussions of resurrection. My approach is similar to his in that I look for patterns of continuities between all discussions of resurrection in particular authors and see no need to identify one understanding of resurrection as “real” and all others as somehow “metaphorical” (a common distinction that Tappenden finds especially problematic, since he argues that all human thought is metaphorical).