

1 Corinthians 15

Introduction

When communicating the reality and meaning of what “became” of Jesus after death, the New Testament uses a variety of expressions and metaphors. Calling them metaphors can be alarming to some believers, who tend to hear “only” a metaphor. It may be worthwhile recalling that *all* religious language, while pointing to the most real reality of all (God), is of necessity metaphorical. For example, regularly in the Psalms, God is addressed as a rock. We know what is meant: *like a rock*, God provides the believer with stability and protection. We know as well that when comparing God to a rock, *the difference is greater than the similarity*. Our experience of stability and protection gives us some inkling of how God offers stability and protection, but God shows these qualities in an utterly superlative and therefore quite different way. But what can we do? All we have is language based on limited human experience to talk about God for whom no language is adequate. The same may be said of even the more elevated metaphors for God, such as parental or relational language. God is father and mother, but in a way which entirely transcends our experience of being a parent or a child. God is love and even there our projection of our limited experience does no justice at all to God as love. And so on.

That reflection on metaphor and God-language may help us to adjust to the idea that the New Testament also uses metaphors when speaking of Jesus after his death. For example, we read that he “sat at the right hand of God” (Acts 2:25, 33-34; 5:31; 7:55-56; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22). Normally, we make no mistake here because we know that God is pure spirit and that speaking of his hands, right or left, is indeed metaphorical. In other parts of the New Testament, we read of glorification, exaltation and even ascension. The first two are not at all physical so there is no risk. But even ascension is a metaphor, this time metaphor of transcendence or of going beyond. It is presented in the New Testament at different times and in different ways.

In the New Testament, the primary image comes from Luke-Acts. In Luke 24:36-53, the departure of Jesus seems to take place on the same day as the resurrection. In Acts 1:1-11, we are told it happened after forty days (always in Jerusalem). In Matthew 28:16-20, it takes place after the disciples had travelled to the Galilee, with the time lapse unspecified. In John’s Gospel, the “lifting up” represents both crucifixion (literally) and resurrection (metaphorically). However, even there, the distinction of a moment of departure / return is captured in 20:17. Again, it is “dated” to the day of resurrection itself. The separation and departure are well prepared for in the Fourth Gospel in the Farewell Discourse (13-17), in which Jesus promises the Holy Spirit as the comforter. In a rather wicked comment, the great Swiss theologian, Karl Barth, dealing with people who think of the ascension as a literal journey up into the clouds, once wondered what did people think would have happened if it had not been a cloudy day!

The most powerful metaphor used by the New Testament writers was that of “resurrection”. As we saw in the previous chapter, this meant a great deal more than personal resuscitation. In the apocalyptic world view of Second Temple Judaism, resurrection was the project of hope that when history was over, God would act justly towards all who had been faithful to him, leading them to an utterly transformed existence. The base metaphor comes from the simple experience of waking up and getting up, implying continuity of identity with transformation of mode of being. This understanding brings into play different and powerful dimensions: God’s justice and faithfulness, the cosmos, the community and the individual. Perhaps this is why this particular language became the dominant one among Christians.

Starting with St Paul

In this chapter we are going to look at Paul’s proclamation of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. The reader may wonder why begin with Paul? There are several reasons for this. First of all, contrary to an initial impression, Paul is the earliest Christian writer to come down to us. The Gospel tell an *earlier* story, of course, but were written *later*, almost certainly after the death of Paul himself. Secondly, in the Gospels, the writers tell us about the encounters others had with the risen Lord. This means that Paul is the only person in the New Testament to tell us in his own words about his own encounters with Jesus risen from the death. This gives his testimony an extraordinary force. Finally, within the New Testament, Paul is the only one to reflect explicitly not only on the meaning of the resurrection but even on the nature of the risen body. This is of great significance to us, especially when we come to read the resurrection appearance narratives. Bearing all this in mind, it seems sensible to begin with Paul.

The encounter with Christ was the turning point in the life of Paul. He referred to it only rarely in his writings. Partly, this is because the writings were “occasional”, that is, responses to specific situations. Partly, it is also because, as we shall see, Paul was reluctant to boast of his spiritual experiences.

The fullest mention of his turning to Christ is found in Galatians.

For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus. (Gal 1:11-17)

The context in Galatia was a crisis occasioned by people coming from Jerusalem, who claimed apostolic authority and who subverted Paul's Gospel. They maintained that to be Christian one had to practise the Torah, the Jewish Law, fully and in every detail. Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians to oppose this view very strongly, even fiercely. Part of his argument was that his own proclamation did not depend on any apostolic authority other than his own. Thus he underlined, it was the gift of God directly to him and he needed no confirmation from Jerusalem, as his delayed journey and limited visit there make clear. Nevertheless, he did recount his own story. A reader familiar with the Bible will notice immediately the echo of the call of the prophet Jeremiah:

Now the word of the LORD came to me [Jeremiah] saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." (Jer 1:4-5)

Writing after many years reflection, Paul's used the *genre* of prophetic call to communicate what had happened to him. Reading in English, the reader may miss the other literary reference behind the word "reveal". To reveal, in Greek, is *apokalyptó*. This means that Paul, who had been an apocalyptic Jew, come to see his own turning as part of that apocalyptic world view. This was not based on an exaggerated view of his own role but rather on the conviction that Jesus was risen from the dead, itself an apocalyptic conviction and part of the apocalyptic worldview. Finally, we notice that at this later stage in his life, Paul made a direct connection between his encounter with Christ and his mission. It may not be apparent to the modern reader, but the inclusion of the Gentiles was also part of the end-time vision of apocalypticism. It is significant that Paul placed the revelation in a relative clause (*when* God...) and put his mission into a purpose clause (*so that* I...).

We would like to ask many more questions, of course, about the nature of the encounter. The nature of the text in Galatians impedes speculation. This is partly because Paul presented it later using important prophetic and apocalyptic language, thereby reflecting his later appropriation of the experience. It is also because such experiences are, of their nature, incommunicable. This becomes apparent when Paul describes another momentous spiritual experience in 2 Corinthians 12.

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus (blessed be he forever!) knows that I do not lie. In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

It is necessary to boast; nothing is to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows— was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. On

behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. (2 Cor 11:30-12:7)

The context is again important. Paul was pressed by the Corinthians to restore himself in their estimation by showing that he too had had his extraordinary experiences. He is extremely reluctant to do so, as the text makes clear. At the same time, he desires very much to restore his position as “father” to the Corinthians Christians (1 Cor 4:15). He was in a bind and so he gave into their wish but he gave in reluctantly and at the same time he was careful to withdraw any undue importance to this event. The last few verses from chapter 11 help us to date this event. Mostly like, Paul’s humbling escape from Damascus took place three years after his turning to Christ. The story he tells happened fourteen years before the letter was written. The conversion can be dated to AD 33-37 approximately. Paul’s first visit to Corinth was in late 51 and early 52. Presuming that 2 Corinthians as written sometime after that first visit, it becomes clear that in 2 Corinthians 12 he was *not* talking about his first encounter with Christ but about another transcendent experience, which took place perhaps around AD 40 or later. Our concern here is with his manner of telling what happened.

The repeated “I do not know” points to an experience strictly beyond what can be told. Such incommunicability is a mark of spiritual authenticity. The literary form of the telling is also profoundly cultural. It belongs to a category of apocalyptic writing known as the heavenly journey. In such accounts, the subject goes on or is taken on a spiritual journey; a good example would be the Book of Enoch. So once, more the experience was read and presented in the culturally and religiously available category of apocalyptic. Naturally, the reader is not invited to take the words literally. There is no point in asking how did Paul know he was precisely in the *third* heaven. Rather the text in front of us tells us that when Paul appropriated the experience and when wish to communicate something of it to others, he used a known form of metaphor, because nothing else will do (“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” [1 Cor 2:9]). This intimation of incommunicability is confirmed in the text itself, when Paul wrote, speaking of himself,

[Such a person] heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat (2 Cor 12:4)

“Things not to be told” is very striking in Greek: *arreōta rheōmata*, literally, inexpressible expressions or “unwordable” words. We know from 12:1-2, that this event was also an encounter with the Lord.

The only other time that Paul gave a hint of what such experiences might have meant is found also in Galatians. Describing his present life in Christ, he wrote:

So the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal 2:20 NET version)

Here we become aware that for Paul such revelations were not merely “facts”, but real encounters, which included an overwhelming experience of being loved by the one who gave himself for him.

Given the reassuring caution shown by Paul, we know now turn to his major discussion of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15.

Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 15

Reading this chapter of 1 Corinthians requires a certain familiarity with the categories of speech making or rhetoric at the time. Aristotle wrote the first book on rhetoric and in it he said helpfully that a speech should be in two parts. In the first part, the speaker should tell people what he is going to say and in the second part, he should do. That simple structure, based on experience, underwent a development, also based on experiences, so that by the time of Paul, a speech could show the following steps.

1. Introduction
2. Statement of facts
3. Topic
4. Proof(s)
5. Conclusion

With this in mind, the argument of 1 Corinthians 15 may be mapped as follows:

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|-----------------------|----------|
| 1. Introduction | 15:1-2 |
| 2. Statement of facts | 15:3-11 |
| 3. Topic | 15:12 |
| 4. Proof | 15:12-34 |
| 5. Topic | 15:35 |
| 6. Proof | 15:35-56 |
| 7. Conclusion | 15:57 |

Paul did not feel himself constrained to the school outline above and adjusted it for the purpose at hand. As a result, there are two topics or proposition and correspondingly two sets of proofs. There is actually more to this as we shall see below. For the moment, it may help to say something about the context of writing. The presenting issue was not faith in the resurrection of *Jesus* but rather faith in the resurrection of *those who believe in him*. In the first proof (15:12-24), Paul's purpose was to show the illogicality of holding that Jesus is raised and at the same time not believing that the dead too will be raised. He does this by a variety of means, which again we will see in a moment. Paul's purpose in the second proof (15:35-56) was to counter the Corinthians innate inability to imagine a resurrected body. Paul was not trying to prove that Jesus was risen. On the contrary, he assumed a shared faith in Christ. The second step in a speech, the statement of facts,

helps us to see this. The statement of facts was designed to set out the shared understanding *before* going on to interpret or draw consequences. Thus, even though he quotes creeds and appearances, Paul was reminding the Corinthians of what they already held. He thus laid a solid shared foundation before going on to explore the consequences of that conviction.

His first argument is really a logical one. To say there is no resurrection *at all* would undermine your own faith and practice, because you would thereby exclude also the resurrection of Jesus himself. In any case, resurrection is, by its nature, communitarian, as we saw in the previous chapter, and Christ is the first fruits. His second argument is really an expansion of imagination. It is not necessary to think that body can mean only this collection of cells (to use modern language); or more simply, body is not a univocal term. Paul then expands the imagination of the Corinthians to open their minds to another meaning of body, well beyond the mere resuscitation of the corpse. How he goes about this is really intriguing.

In ancient documents, the writers sometimes patterned their presentation in a subtle way. The most basic pattern was ABA¹. In some way or other, the second A¹ resumes or builds on the first A. At the same time, B represents the centre focus of the whole presentation. Paul uses this pattern in 1 Corinthians 15 not once but twice. In order to keep the presentation clear and easy to follow, the second use will be called CDC¹. Each time, the block of text at the centre (B and D) is a significant motor of meaning. We begin by looking at the first proof.

The First Proof: 1 Cor 15:12-34.

The reader is invited to cast his or her eye over these two texts for a moment. The emphasis is designed to show the link we would expect between A and A¹.

A: Contradictions in logic

1Cor. 15:12 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 **If there is no resurrection of the dead**, then Christ has not been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. 15 We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16 For **if the dead are not raised**, then Christ has not been raised. 17 If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. 19 **If for this life only we have hoped in Christ**, we are of all people most to be pitied.

A¹: Contradictions in practice

1Cor. 15:29 Otherwise, what will those people do who receive baptism on behalf of the dead? **If the dead are not raised** at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? 30 And why are we putting ourselves in danger every hour? 31 I die every day! That is as certain, brothers and sisters, as my boasting of you—a boast that I make in Christ Jesus our Lord. 32 **If with merely human hopes** I fought with wild animals at Ephesus, what would I have gained by it? **If the dead are not raised**, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." 33 Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." 34 Come to a sober and right mind, and sin no more; for some people have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

Paul began by pretending to take the Corinthians at their word: there is no resurrection of the dead. The subsequent chain of ideas is meant to trigger the question: are you sure you want to go along with this, because the consequences both for you and me (Paul) are considerable! If there is no resurrection *whatsoever*, then Christ has not been raised, Paul has been misrepresenting God, faith was waste time and believers were worse off than non-believers. Given that the Corinthians really did hold that Christ was risen, they would naturally reject all this and be obliged to admit there had been *at least one* resurrection.

In the reprise of the argument (A¹), Paul argued not from logic but from actual practice, theirs and his. The practise of baptism "on behalf of the dead" is difficult for us but perhaps it meant something like this. Imagine you have come to believe in Christ and it comes to mean a very great deal to you. Imagine at the same time that someone very dear to you had just died. You might wish that somehow they too could be part of your new life. It would be a natural anxiety and perhaps they actually had some kind of baptismal service for the dead or it might be that they included them in their own baptism by name. Whatever was going on, Paul did not approve this strange-sounding practice but used it to his own end. His argument was practical: why do this if the dead are not actually raised? He then applied the same argument to himself. Why spend your

life in service and at considerable personal risk, is this world the only one? If there is no resurrection of the dead, both the Corinthians and Paul were deluding themselves and just wasting their time. The contradictions in logic and in practice mirror each other not only in vocabulary but also in persuasive function. Paul reminded them of their very own faith that there has been at least *one* resurrection from the dead. The problem of imagining *how* applied equally to Christ and to the fellow Christian who dies the next day.

The central part of the argument expands on the conviction that Christ is raised, using carefully chosen images and ideas. Here is the passage:

1Cor. 15:20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also came through a man. 22 For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; then when Christ comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when he has brought to an end all rule and all authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be eliminated is death. 27 For **he has put everything in subjection under his feet**. But when it says "everything" has been put in subjection, it is clear that this does not include the one who put everything in subjection to him. 28 And when all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all. (NET version)

A brief comment may help. Firstly, the image of first fruits is taken from harvesting traditions. The first cut of the grain or fruit was offered to God, as a token that all the harvest comes from God and should be offered to God. Just as the firstfruits stand for the whole harvest, the resurrection of Christ is the first "instalment" of the resurrection of all who have fallen asleep. Secondly, the apocalyptic world view saw a pattern in which the end and the beginning resemble each other. Thus Adam at the start (death) mirrors Christ at the end (life). Finally, apocalyptic thought explored the sequence of the endz, noting the order in which things were to occur. As presented here, the final victory over death will be part of the end time. Paul thus reminded the Corinthians that they should not be surprised that death still had apparent power (and some die) and that it would be finally vanquished at the end (and all will be made alive).

It is noticeable that Paul began and ended with arguments from logic that anyone would have understood. The central argument is one from faith, expressed and explored in the language of apocalyptic. Paul had to change "tack" from logic-based to faith-based proof because it was only in the vision of faith that the Corinthians might have moved to thinking any of this was real and had actually happened. Luckily for Paul, he did not need to argue the basics of the faith—the Corinthians were already believers. Instead, he had to explore the consequences of such conviction. The overt consequence is clear: if the Corinthians could accept that there had been one resurrection and that resurrection

meant God would be finally just to all at the end, then in principle the resurrection of all was implied and included. The covert consequence is more subtle: the real issue for the Corinthians was their inability to imagine the dead rising "bodily." But this problem would have applied equally to the dead in general and also to Christ in particular. Paul moved naturally to the question of how the dead (and Christ, by implication) are raised.

The Second Proof: 1 Cor 15:35-56

Once more, the reader is invited to cast his or her eye over these two texts for a moment. The emphasis is designed to show the link we would expect between C and C¹.

C: Expanding imagination

1Cor. 15:35 But someone will ask, "How are the **dead** raised? With what kind of **body** do they come?" 36 Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it **dies**. 37 And as for what you sow, you do not sow the **body** that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. 38 But God gives it a **body** as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own **body**. 39 Not all **flesh** is alike, but there is one **flesh** for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. 40 There are both heavenly **bodies** and earthly **bodies**, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. 41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; indeed, star differs from star in glory. 42 So it is with the **resurrection** of the dead. What is sown is **perishable**, what is **raised** is **imperishable**. 43 It is sown in dishonour, it is **raised** in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is **raised** in power. 44 It is sown a physical **body**, it is **raised** a spiritual **body**. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual **body**.

This time, Paul presented the topic in the form of a question, perhaps even citing a typical expression of some Corinthians themselves. His first reaction was harsh but at the time insulting people was one of the ways of raising people's attention levels. When you are being insulted, you are definitely listening! The real business of the argument then begins. Paul's overall purpose is destabilise their conviction that body meant and could mean only one thing.

Paul started with observations from nature. The new "body" of a plant comes from a seed and in a figurative sense the seed must "die", that is, cease to exist as seed so that the new body may appear. In v.37 Paul reversed the argument for the sake of clarity. The

C1: Applying the expansion

1Cor. 15:50 What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: **flesh** and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the **perishable** inherit the **imperishable**. 51 Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all **die**, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the **dead** will be **raised imperishable**, and we will be changed. 53 For this perishable **body** must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 54 **When** this **perishable** body puts on **imperishability**, and this mortal **body** puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." 55 "Where, O **death**, is your victory? Where, O **death**, is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

point is clear. The image of the seed and of the subsequent plant suggests both continuity and transformation. The same applies to humans in death: in the life to come, each of us will truly be ourselves, but in an utterly different way, hard to imagine now. Paul grounds this conviction in faith in the creator, who *gives it a body as he has chosen*. In this, Paul resembles the mother of the seven sons in 2 Maccabees 7, that the mystery of life, both now and in the future, is in the hands of the creator. He then observes that there are different kinds of flesh, so that even the word “flesh” means more than one things. The same may be said of body. Then, as now, the sun and moon, stars and planets, were referred to as heavenly bodies. Of course, this is a very different kind of body, but the point is being made that body means many more than one things. “Heavenly” takes the reader/hearer to the transcendent realm, because heaven means both the sky and our transcendent home in God. Thus by a very deft move, Paul helps the reader explore some of these other meanings. The application begins in v.42 with “so it is”. A rapid series of comparisons leads to a surprising neologism in v.44: spiritual body. To a Greek philosopher and even to the ordinary Greek in the street, this would have seemed madness, because body and spirit are so different. But not to Paul. Body means that future, very different, mode of being, a heavenly and therefore spiritual mode of being, a gift from the creator. The steps are clear: plant life, animal flesh, heavenly bodies. As a result, he does not hesitate to invent the expression “spiritual body”. In the corresponding argument in C¹, Paul pushes the imagination even further.

The application in C¹ starts with “What I am saying...”. Without going into all the detail, Paul was teaching that we need to be changed in order to inherit the future that God has in store for us. The series of implacable contrasts (flesh and kingdom; perishable and imperishable) is bridged by the simply expression, “we will all be changed.” This is based on the previous argument really that body means more than one thing and that it all depends on the creator, who can give to each a “body” he has chosen. The follow-through on this argument from mystery is then presented in pure apocalyptic language.

The middle section D teaches that this possible future has already begun in the Christ event, thus moving it from potential to reality.

1Cor 15:45 Thus it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. 47 The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. 48 As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. 49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

The series of contrasts is again based on an apocalyptic conviction that the end should resemble and surpass the beginning. The cosmic aspects of resurrection are implied and our future transformation, now completely unthinkable, will resemble the transformation that Christ himself underwent in resurrection.

Finally, the two middle arguments are very important and really constitute the “motor” behind each of the proofs, transforming the logical and imaginative arguments from possibility to reality. They also resemble each other closely:

Middle section B	Middle section D
<p>1Cor. 15:20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also came through a man. 22 For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; then when Christ comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when he has brought to an end all rule and all authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be eliminated is death. 27 For he has put everything in subjection under his feet. But when it says “everything” has been put in subjection, it is clear that this does not include the one who put everything in subjection to him. 28 And when all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all. (NET Version)</p>	<p>45 So also it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living person”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 However, the spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and then the spiritual. 47 The first man is from the earth, made of dust; the second man is from heaven. 48 Like the one made of dust, so too are those made of dust, and like the one from heaven, so too those who are heavenly. 49 And just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, let us also bear the image of the man of heaven. (NET Version)</p>

It may help to notice the different qualities of the arguments presented in ABA¹ and CDC¹. In brief, the “outer” arguments (A, A¹, and C – C¹ is different) are logical and one could follow them simply as an intelligent listener. One could appreciate the illogicalities of thought and practice, and indeed, one could appreciate the expansion of imagination. However, whether any of this is true in actual fact is really a matter of faith. That is why, in the inner argument (B and D), Paul moves to faith affirmations and apocalyptic language. Those inner arguments would not be persuasive to the general

intelligent hearer and the apocalyptic language in which they are couched would be simply incomprehensible to the ordinary Corinthian on the street. But of course for believers in Corinth the faith arguments would have been persuasive. They already had faith in Christ and Paul was presuming that faith, building on it and even expanding their understanding and awareness of the consequences. It is, therefore, perfectly appropriate to switch from “open” logical argument to “closed” faith arguments.

The Introduction

To complete the comment on this important presentation, we now turn to the opening verses, which are in two moments (1Cor 15:1-2 and 15:3-11).

1Cor. 15:1 Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, 2 through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

As noted in the handbooks for speeches, the introduction serves to get the good will, attention and receptivity of the hearers. In this case, good will is generated by taking up a topic of interest to the Corinthians and by flattering them a little. The flattery is moderated by the threat in the last phrase (“unless you have come to believe in vain”), a threat echoed in different vocabulary at the very end of the chapter (you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain; see also 1 Cor 15:10, 14). Receptivity towards the writer / speaker is built on a reminder of their indebtedness to him. The repetition of “I proclaimed to you” (lit. I “gospelled” you) says it all. The benefits of such faith are clear in the words which follow: received, stand, being saved.

1Cor. 15:3 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, 4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. 11 Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

In order to lay the foundation for his exploration of consequences of Easter faith, Paul then rolls out the grounds for believing, which are threefold. First of all, there is the early creedal formula embedded in vv.3-4. This is followed by an expanded list of witnesses, beginning with Cephas and the twelve (vv. 4-7). Finally, Paul appends his own turning to Christ and in the telling he underlines the wholly unexpected nature of his encounter.

He gingerly alludes to his own efforts on behalf of the Gospel, a reminder which will be resumed in vv. 30-32.

Because this section fulfils the rhetorical role of the statement of facts, Paul is not trying to persuade them that Christ is risen but laying out convictions shared by him and the Corinthians, before the taking the teaching further.

It may help at this point to have a synthesis of 1 Corinthians 15.

Speech	Verses	Sequence	Content
Introduction	1-2		Paul wish to inform them lest in vain they have believed.
Statement of Facts	3-11		Shared faith: creed, appearances, Paul's own turning and ministry
Proof 1	12	<i>Topic as a question</i>	How can some say there is <i>no</i> resurrection (at all)?
	13-19	A	No resurrection <i>at all</i> means Christ is not raised.
	20-28	B	Adam and Christ compared.
	29-34	A ¹	If there dead are not raised, what is the point?
Proof 2	35	<i>Topic as a question</i>	In what kind of body are the dead raised?
	36-44	C	Body had many meanings; there is even a spiritual body.
	45-49	D	Adam and Christ compared.
	50-57	C ¹	The mystery of the changed, resurrected body.
Conclusion	58		Be steadfast, your labour is not in vain.

The arrows show the parts, which belong together.

Conclusion

As is well known, the first generation of Christians used a range of metaphors to express and to hold their faith in Jesus. Expressions such as “he sat at the right hand of God” are clearly metaphorical. Even less physical expressions such as exalted and gloried are also metaphorical, reflecting a particular social context. Expressions which run the risk of a literal reading such as ascended and raised are also metaphors taken from a particular religious worldview and language. To say these expressions are metaphorical is not to deny the reality to which they point. We may summarise thus: religious language serves to orient the believer towards the mystery, even though it is always inadequate. Why did resurrection language become the dominant one? Because it holds most richly the range of meanings intended: God’s justice and faithfulness; personal continuity in the after life; utter change in the mode of being; a sense, conveyed in apocalyptic terms, that God’s *ultimate purpose* towards humanity and creation unfolded in Jesus death and resurrection. No other available language at the time could encapsulate this extraordinary depth of faith.

The contribution of Paul to understanding resurrection cannot be underestimated. He uses the language in light of Jewish conviction at the time (as we saw). He also expands it so that the understanding of the risen body must no longer be confined to resuscitation of the body we know now. Nothing in our present experience helps us to understand the “change” of the spiritual body. Paul has to break the rules of language in order to convey the double sense of continuity and change contained in resurrection. When I am asleep and when I am awake, I am one and the same person. Nevertheless, when I am awake, I am in a completely different mode of being. The same applies to resurrected body, ours and Christ’s. There is continuity of identity within a change in mode of being which simply cannot be imagined. For all his brilliance, Paul too surrenders to the unknown with the words, “Listen, I will tell you a mystery!” (1 Cor 15:51)!

The nuances that Paul brings to the discussion may be noted. If we may generalise what was said about Jewish faith in the resurrection, then Paul shares the following elements:

- His world view is apocalyptic
- He believes in the resurrection of the dead
- The beginning of time and the end of time resemble each other
- There will be an order or sequence to the end
- The theological basis for this hope is belief in the creator God

This much we can learn from 1 Corinthians 15. From elsewhere in his writings, we know that he things of the Christ event as the revelation of God faithful justice.

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For *no one is declared righteous before him* by the works of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the law the righteousness of God (which is attested by the law and the prophets) has been disclosed- namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. God publicly displayed him at his death as the mercy seat accessible through faith. This was to demonstrate his righteousness, because God in his forbearance had passed over the sins previously committed. This was also to demonstrate his righteousness in the present time, so that he would be just and the justifier of the one who lives because of Jesus' faithfulness. (Rom 3:19-26 NET)

Paul differs from Jewish apocalyptic hope in the following elements:

- Resurrection is not resuscitation but utter transformation
- Against the general view of apocalyptic, God has anticipated this transformation in Jesus' resurrection first
- Paul shows no interest, at least here, in the resurrection of those destined for eternal punishment.

Finally, the list of appearances Paul provides will be of immediate interest as we turn our attention to the first witnesses.