

CHAPTER FOUR.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.

At the day of the appearance of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, all the dead will rise¹. This doctrine is purely Christian and for the pagans is considered foolishness and for the Jews unconceivable. It is purely taught by our Lord in the New Testament and afterwards by His holy Apostles and His holy Orthodox Church. It is considered to be one of the most basic doctrines and is found in all the ancient decrees.

1. The Orthodox Christian Doctrine about the Resurrection according to Holy Scriptures.

The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is purely Christian. The ancient world of idolatry, although we find some philosophic opinions expressing the belief in the immortality of the soul, yet, the idea of giving life to the bodies in the graves was completely alien. This we see in the case of St. Paul, when he addressed the Greeks on the hill of Areopagus preached about the unknown God to the Athenians². *“And they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter’³. From a Christian view the belief is expressed in the Epistle to the Hebrews, according to which “the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment”⁴ had to be taught in order to familiarize those who believed in Christ. For St. Paul it is unacceptable and completely irresponsible for a Christian who believes in Christ to renounce the universal resurrection of the dead. *“Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up – if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”⁵.**

In the Old Testament we find some belief in the resurrection stressing specifically the descent of the souls into Hades and only in Job⁶ we find the belief in the resurrection. The prophets Isaiah⁷, Ezekiel⁸ and Hosea⁹ use the image of the

¹ Cf. Plato of Moscow, *Orthodox Teaching*, pp. 160-162. St. Irenaeus, *Heresies*, book V, ch. 1- ch. 14, in Hadjephraimides, pp. 362-385. Frangopoulos, *Christian Faith*, pp.232-235. Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, pp. 383-388.

² Acts 17:16-34.

³ Act. 17:32.

⁴ Heb. 6:2.

⁵ 1 Corinth. 15:12-20.

⁶ Job 19:25-26.

⁷ Is. 26:19. Cf. St. Irenaeus, *Heresies*, book V, ch. 34, § 1-4, in Hadjephraimides, pp. 418-420.

resurrection of the bodies to express the ethnic restoration from the death of slavery to the resurrection of freedom of Israel. The use of this image proves that it was not alien to them to hope that the dead will rise from the dead. Daniel speaks literally about “*many who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to reproach and everlasting shame*”¹⁰. In the book of Maccabees, the seven brothers who were martyred believed in the resurrection only of the just¹¹.

During the times of the Lord the belief in the resurrection appears to be generally spread. Christ assured St. Martha, the sister of St. Lazarus, “*your brother will rise again*”, and she replied saying, “*I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day*”¹². In the book of Acts we find the information that the Pharisees believed in the resurrection, and the Sadducees did not¹³. Also we can conclude that the Pharisees had very materialistic hopes about the resurrection as we can conclude this from the tricky question which they addressed to Christ concerning the seven brothers who took the same wife. Answering them the Lord assured: “*For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven*”¹⁴.

Our Lord assuring the immortality of the soul, implies the receiving of its body and urges the disciples to be attentive and “*not to fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell*”¹⁵. Christ also speaks about the reward of those who show hospitality to “*the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind*”, because they “*will be blessed*” and “*shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just*”¹⁶. In the Gospel of St. John, our Lord explicitly warns, “*the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation*”¹⁷. In addition He assures, “*that of all*” that the Father “*has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day*”¹⁸. Hence, “*who ever eats*” Christ’s “*flesh and drinks*” His “*blood has eternal life*”, and He “*will raise him up at the last day*”¹⁹.

After Christ, the holy Apostles contained in their sermons the teaching about the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees accused the holy Apostles, that through their teachings about Christ, they were proclaiming the belief in “*the resurrection of the dead*”²⁰.

⁸ Ez. 27:1-14.

⁹ Hos. 13:14.

¹⁰ Daniel 12:2.

¹¹ II Maccabees 7:9, 14, 23; 12:43, 44.

¹² John 11:23, 24.

¹³ Acts 23:8.

¹⁴ Matth. 22:30.

¹⁵ Matth. 10:28.

¹⁶ Luke 14:13, 14.

¹⁷ John 5:28-29.

¹⁸ John 6:39-40.

¹⁹ John 6:54.

²⁰ Acts 4:2; 17:32; 24:15, 21; 26:23.

St. Paul in his Epistles exalts the inseparable communion of Christ with the faithful who compose His mystical body, and assures that “*if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you*”²¹, “*knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus*”²². Thus our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, “*will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body*”²³. St. Paul mocks the Corinthians who doubted the resurrection of the dead and assured that “*if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up – if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*”²⁴. “*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with a voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord*”²⁵.

In the book of Revelation it is written: “*Then I (John) saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire*”²⁶.

2. The Orthodox Doctrine of the Resurrection according to Holy Tradition.

In accordance to the teachings of Holy Scriptures were the teachings of Tradition of the Orthodox Church formed.

Didache proclaims that after “*the sign of the sound of a trumpet*” “*the resurrection of the dead*” will take place²⁷.

²¹ Rom. 8:11.

²² 2 Corinth. 4:14.

²³ Phil. 3:21.

²⁴ 1 Corinth. 15:12-20.

²⁵ 1 Thess. 4:16-17.

²⁶ Rev. 20:11-15.

²⁷ *Didache*, 16, 6, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 158.

St. Clement uses examples from nature to point out the resurrection of the dead: “Let us consider, dear friends how the Master continually points out to us the coming resurrection of which He made the Lord Jesus Christ the firstfruit when He raised Him from the dead”²⁸. He also urges saying: “Let none of you say that this flesh is not judged and does not rise again”, for “we will receive our reward in this flesh”²⁹.

In the *Epistle of Barnabas* it is stressed that “the one who does” “the Lord’s commandments” “will be glorified in the kingdom of God; the one who chooses their opposites will perish together with his works. This is why there is a resurrection; this is why there is recompense”³⁰.

St. Ignatius of Antioch, the Theophorus, assures that Christ “really was raised from the dead when His Father raised Him up, who – His Father, that is – in the same way will likewise also raise us up in Christ Jesus who believe in Him, apart from whom we have no true life”³¹.

St. Polycarp of Smyrna characterizes as “the first-born of Satan” “everyone ‘who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is antichrist’³²; and whoever does not acknowledge the testimony of the cross ‘is of the devil’³³; and whoever twists the saying of the Lord to suit his own sinful desires and claims that there is neither resurrection nor judgment – well, that person is the first-born of Satan”³⁴. In the prayer which he expressed to God, he stresses: “I bless You because You have considered me worthy of this day and hour, that I might receive a place among the number of the martyrs in the cup of Your Christ, to the resurrection to eternal life, both of soul and of body, in the incorruptibility of the Holy Spirit”³⁵.

St. Justin, the philosopher and martyr, assures us saying, that we the Christians “hope that those which are dead and placed in the ground will receive again their own bodies”. “In death and in the burial” “the human bodies, as seeds are spread in the earth, and unless God commands it are impossible to rise and vest with immortality”³⁶.

Tatianus strongly expresses the faith in the resurrection and stresses that after death the body is no more and again will be as it was. Even, if fire consumes the flesh; even, if in the rivers or in the seas it will be; even, if it is eaten by beasts, it remains in the treasures of the rich Master. For, when God wills, the visible nature (the body) will be restored as from the beginning³⁷.

²⁸ St. Clement of Rome, *1st Corinthians*, 24, 1, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 42.

²⁹ *Ibid*, *2nd Corinthians*, 9, 1 and 5, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 72.

³⁰ *Barnabas*, 21, 1, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 187.

³¹ St. Ignatius, *To Trallians*, 9, 2, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 100.

³² Cf. 1 John 4:2-3.

³³ Cf. 1 John 3:8.

³⁴ St. Polycarp of Smyrna, *To Philippians*, 7, 1, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 126-127.

³⁵ *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 14, 2, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 141.

³⁶ St. Justin, the philosopher and martyr, *1 Apology*, 18, 6 and 19, 4, in *B*, v. 3, p. 171.

³⁷ Tatianus, *Homily to Greeks*, 6, in Migne, *P.G.*, 6, 820.

The belief in the resurrection of the dead was incorporated in the Nicene Creed, “*I look for the Resurrection of the dead and the Life of the world to come*”.

3. The resurrection as a natural consequence of our union with Christ.

The resurrection of the dead is an inseparable part of the summing up of all in Christ³⁸. St. Paul stressed that in baptism “*we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord*”³⁹. Since we become one body with Christ, it is natural that the resurrection of Christ will be the starting point of the resurrection of all those who believe in Him and are united with Him. There cannot be a resurrection of the Head without the resurrection of the whole body. The bodies of all Orthodox Christians are the members of Christ’s “*body, of His flesh and His bones*”⁴⁰ and the temple of the Holy Spirit⁴¹. As the consequence of this exaltation of our bodies follows the resurrection from the dead⁴². And “*if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you*”⁴³.

St. Ignatius of Antioch, the Theophorus, assures that Christ “*really was raised from the dead when His Father raised Him up, who – His Father, that is – in the same way will likewise also raise us up in Christ Jesus who believe in Him, apart from whom we have no true life*”⁴⁴.

St. Irenaeus, as direct goal of Christ’s glorious Second Coming, places the resurrection of all the flesh of all mankind, as the result in order to judge justly in all and to send to the eternal fire the ungodly and unjust, and to take care of those who are just and holy⁴⁵.

According to the above, the resurrection of the dead is a natural result of our union with Christ and the inhabitation of the Holy Spirit within us. The renouncement of this belief shakes directly the faith in this truth that we have been united with Christ as one.

³⁸ Cf. Frangopoulos, *Christian Faith*, p. 235. Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, pp. 386-388.

³⁹ Rom. 6:4-11.

⁴⁰ Ephes. 5:30. 1 Corinth. 6:15.

⁴¹ 1 Corinth. 6:19.

⁴² 1 Corinth. 6:14.

⁴³ Rom. 8:11.

⁴⁴ St. Ignatius, *To Trallians*, 9, 2, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 100.

⁴⁵ St. Irenaeus, *Heresies*, book I, ch. 10, § 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 7, 549. Cf. *Ibid*, in Hadjephraimides, pp. 64-65.

4. The nature of the human body after the resurrection.

Concerning the nature which the body will have after the general resurrection of the dead, the Orthodox Church believes that the risen body will be “*the same and not the same*”⁴⁶ to that which was placed in the tomb⁴⁷. And Theodorus of Mopsuestias adds saying that “*as the glass is from sand, but it is not anymore sand, but something else; and the wheat likewise is not anymore seed, but wheat; likewise and in the resurrection a better body is made into*”⁴⁸.

The new body which will result from the resurrection of the dead is not a new creation, neither has any organic relation to the previous one. But between the two there is something common and difference. The common and difference is as that between the seed and the wheat; between the sperm and the infant⁴⁹.

The different elements which composed the body and were scattered in the tomb will gather together once again and will reconstruct the body as new. And man ignores where these elements are scattered, but God does not ignore, He knows everything. God having with this knowledge and the power, “*to rise up with equal opulence*” the bodies uniting “*again to their own parts and particles*” the different elements, even if they have been scattered here and there⁵⁰.

Although the risen body will be “*the same*” to that which the soul had when it departed from this life, simultaneously because of the new attributes which it will receive, it will “*not be the same*” according to the expression of the divine Chrysostom⁵¹. But, that this is neither impossible for the divine almightiness, nor is contradictory. The human body is raised by God in a mysterious way, “*the body is sown in corruption, and it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body*”⁵² Since the new environment and the condition, in which men shall enter after the resurrection, will be alien to the mortality and the thickness of this present world, it is thus necessary that the risen bodies be such, so that they may adjust to this new environment and condition. For, it is impossible for human nature to participate in the heavenly things, unless it is changed and the natural

⁴⁶ St. John Chrysostom, *To 1 Corinthians*, Homily 41, § 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 61, 356, 357. Cf. St. Basil the Great, *To Psalm 41(42)*, § 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 29, 388. Ibid, *To Psalm 114(115)*, § 5, in Migne, *P.G.*, 29, 492. Origen, *To Psalm I*, § 5, in Migne, *P.G.*, 12, 1093-1096. Ibid, *Against Celsus*, V, 23, in *B*, v. 10, p. 27. Ibid, *About Principals*, II, 10, 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 11, 236. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *About the creation of man*, ch. XXVII, in Migne, *P.G.*, 44, 225-228. Bryennios, *Paralipomena*, ch. VII, v. III, p. 77.

⁴⁷ St. John Chrysostom, *To 1 Corinthians*, Homily 41, § 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 61, 356, 357. Plato of Moscow, *Orthodox Teaching*, pp. 162-163.

⁴⁸ Theodorus of Mopsuestias, in Trempelas, *Dogmatique*, v. III, p. 468.

⁴⁹ Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, pp. 388-389.

⁵⁰ Cf. Athenagoras, *About resurrection*, ch. 2, 3, in *B*, v. 1, pp. 312-313. Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, in Migne, *P.L.*, 1, 525. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, 18, §§ 1-2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 1020-1021.

⁵¹ St. John Chrysostom, *To 1 Corinthians*, Homily 41, § 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 61, 356, 357.

⁵² 1 Corinth. 15:42-44.

body is vested with immortality. How this will take place remains a mystery, which only God knows.

About this change our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has first informed us by assuring us that “*for in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven*”⁵³, “*nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels*”⁵⁴. Then St. Paul assures that “*God will destroy both*” “*foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods*”⁵⁵.

Thus St. Hippolytus says that “*men in the resurrection will be as the angels of God, in immortality and eternal and unchangeable. For immortal nature does not give birth, nor is being born, it does not grow, nor sleeps, nor hungers, nor thirsts, nor suffers, nor dies*”⁵⁶. But, Christ after His glorious resurrection “*ate in the presence*” of His Disciples, but this He did to assure them “*that it is*” He⁵⁷. For the body of Christ “*did not have need of such foods to live*”⁵⁸.

But the resurrected body will be spiritual. “*It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body*”⁵⁹. It will be spiritual according to St. John Chrysostom either because the Holy Spirit will remain for ever in the bodies of the just or it will be its power of the soul, being governed continuously by the Holy Spirit; or because it shall become lighter, and rather both together⁶⁰.

Origen considers that the body will be “*airy*” which will not have the weaknesses of the flesh. He supports the opinion that at the time of the change the bodies will become as the bodies of the angels airy and as light⁶¹.

Finally the resurrected body is characterized as “*glorious*”⁶². Our Lord assured, “*the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*”⁶³. The Lord’s Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, as well as the heavenly light which surrounded St. Paul, when the Lord appeared to him after His resurrection, give us some idea of this “*glorious*” change, which awaits the righteous as St. Paul assured⁶⁴. And although the nature of those who will be glorified is one, there will be many levels and differences of offices, as well for those who will be condemned. And all the bodies of the righteous will shine as stars greater than the sun, the sinners will be in darkness⁶⁵. For, everyone will rise from the dead for eternity, having their own bodies, but they will not have the same. “*If someone is a sinner, he will receive an*

⁵³ Matth. 22:30.

⁵⁴ Luke 20:36.

⁵⁵ 1 Corinth. 6:13.

⁵⁶ St. Hippolytus, *About resurrection*, in Anastasius the Sinaite, *Guide*, ch. 43, in Migne, *P.G.*, 89, 301.

⁵⁷ Luke 24:43, 39.

⁵⁸ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, 18, § 18, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 1040.

⁵⁹ 1 Corinth. 15:42-44.

⁶⁰ St. John Chrysostom, *To 1 Corinthians*, Homily 41, § 3, in Montfaucon, v. 10, p. 454.

⁶¹ Origen, *To Matthew*, v. 17, §§ 29 and 30, in *B*, v. 14, pp. 193 and 197. *Ibid*, *Against Celsus*, III, 41, 42, in *B*, v. 9, pp. 206 and 207.

⁶² Scheeben, *Les Mystères*, p. 657.

⁶³ Matth. 13 :43.

⁶⁴ 1 Corinth. 15:38-53.

⁶⁵ Zigabinos, *To Matthew*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 129, 416. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *To Hexaemeros*, § 24, in Migne, *P.G.*, 44, 116. Theodoretus of Cyrus, *To 1 Corinthians 15:41*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 81, 365.

*eternal body, which will suffer the punishments of sins, not being consumed by the eternal fire*⁶⁶.

⁶⁶ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, 18, § 19, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 1040.