

THE WOUNDS OF CHRIST IN HIS GLORIFIED BODY*

HYACINTH CONWAY, O.P.



UNBELIEVERS have brought various reasons to ridicule the resurrection of the body. Will all the hair that the barber has cut off be restored? Will the nails which have been pared off the body with a regard to its appearance be replaced? With horror and derision they cite monstrous births and ask if every deformity will be preserved in the resurrection.¹

As though to overcome these objections, heretics have modified the notion of the resurrection, beginning with Eutyches: "Our body in the glory of the resurrection will be impalpable and more subtle than the winds and the air. After the Lord had strengthened the hearts of the disciples by allowing them to touch Him, He returned all that had been palpable in himself to a certain subtilty."

Far from admitting such theories, we believe that Our Lord, the first of those to rise again, rose in His true human body, bearing the wounds of his Passion. Objections are brought against Our Lord's retention of His wounds. If the body shall rise, it should rise incorruptible; but wounds and scars pertain to corruption. It should rise whole; but the openings of the wounds would destroy that wholeness. It should suffice for signs only of the wounds to remain. When, by these signs, the risen Savior has shown to His disciples that it is He indeed, it would be fitting for the signs to disappear. That there should even be such signs at all, to be assumed as proofs and then deposited, ill accords with the immutability of glory, which requires that Christ assume only that which shall perpetually remain in Him.

Yet, contrary to all such objections, we know with certainty, thanks to the doubt of St. Thomas the Apostle, that Our Lord did rise again in His human body with all the wounds of his Passion. Our Lord said to St. Thomas: "Put in thy finger hither and see My hands, and bring hither thy hand and put it into My side; and be not faithless but believing."² Thomas put his hands not into signs, but into open wounds. Cajetan, commenting upon St. Thomas Aquinas, who in turn quotes St. Augustine, brings out that these are real bodily

* cf. *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 54, a. 4.

¹ St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, Bk. 22, Ch. 19.

² John 20: 27.

defects. "The openings of the wounds are compensated by a greater beauty, which shows that on the part of the body they need compensation." Sylvius also remarks that the wounds are not to be understood as mere signs and vestiges, but as open wounds, although they do not give pain as wounds ordinarily do.³

The impassibility of these wounds results from the incorruptibility of the risen body. Since there is no doubting either the reality of the wounds of Christ or the incorruptibility of His body, we must conclude that the Lord's body remains unchanged in heaven as it was on earth after His resurrection. "I believe the body of the Lord to be in heaven as it was when it ascended into heaven."⁴ We know that the glorified body of Our Lord is in heaven bearing in it the true wounds of his Passion. But wounds are a sign of infamy, weakness and defeat. Why then does Our Lord choose to associate such traces of sorrow with His glory? Why does He not rid Himself of them once they have been used to prove His resurrection? The answer is summed up in Cajetan's commentary, already mentioned, which notes that St. Thomas, following St. Augustine, assigns the reason for the wounds of Christ appearing in heaven, not on the part of the body, but on the part of the soul. "They will not be a deformity, but a mark of honor, and there shall shine in the body not the beauty of the body, but the beauty of virtue."⁵

Christ's infinite love for us culminated in His death on the Cross, and it is this supreme act of virtue which His wounds perpetually recall. "The scars which will appear in His body, will not pertain to any infirmity, but they will be the signs of very great power, by which Christ, through the infirmity of His passion, triumphed over His enemies. He will show His most cruel death, not by bringing it sensibly before the eyes, but by those things which appear; that is, by the signs of his former Passion, he will bring men to the recognition of His former death."⁶ With these wounds Christ pleads for us before the Father. "He preferred to bring into heaven the wounds borne for us. He did not wish to abolish them, that He might show to God the Father the price of our liberty."⁷ "The wounds retained forever in the body of Christ demand the price of human salvation."⁸

³ Sylvius F. *Comm. in III am P. Summae Theol.*, (Venice, 1726), q. 54, a. 4.

⁴ S. Aug. ad Consentium: *De Resurrectione Carnis*.

⁵ St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, loc. cit.

⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, 4 Sent., d. 48, q. 1, a. 2 ad 2.

⁷ S. Ambrosius in *Luc. cap. ult.*

⁸ *Serm. de bapt. Christi apud Cyprianum*.

The blessed in heaven, seeing these wounds, will know Our Lord's great love for them. The wicked, seeing them, will be confounded for the greatness of the hard-heartedness that could despise such love. "Behold the Man Whom you have crucified, you see the wounds which you have made, the side which you have pierced, since it was opened through you and for you. Yet you did not wish to enter in."⁹ Some day we too shall see these wounds suffered for us. Let us think of them now when we do not love Christ enough.

*For thine own sake think all this was wrought,
Nor be that lost which He so dearly bought.*
(St. Thomas More)

⁹ S. Aug. de Symbolo, lib. 2, cap. 8.