

The “Resurrection of the Flesh” according to Saint Augustine

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Abstract

*This paper argues that contrary to some critics, Augustine, the philosopher and pillar of the Catholic faith, did tackle resurrection [of the flesh or body] by examining some of his writings. The author traces the development of Augustine’s interpretation of the resurrection of the body by examining the context and some texts in four of his works, namely, *De fide et symbolo*, *Opus imperfectum contra Julianum*, *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, and the *Enchiridion*. The researcher investigates further on: (a) Augustine’s understanding of the “resurrection of the flesh” in the Creed, (b) the developmental understanding of “resurrection of the flesh” from the different representative texts enumerated above, and (c) the theological conclusion that one could infer from the investigation whether or not it is in consonance with the present understanding of Augustine and the present formulation as theologically accepted in the present time.*

1.0 Introduction

The theology of the resurrection of the body or flesh was not dealt with intensively by Augustine in his illustrious career. But this does not mean that he was least concerned about this topic because he did not publish a specific opus on it; rather Augustine holds this as one of his central polemics against the Manicheans and the Neo-Platonists. Marrou maintains that Augustine placed in some way primary importance on this topic because he went back and spoke about it in many of his writings though in pastoral and apologetic context.¹ Though scantily, in comparison to his treatment of other theological themes, he treated this emphatically, as a young priest, in *De fide et symbolo*² which was delivered in October 393 AD before the council of African Bishops assembled in *Hippo Regius*. He discussed this again in reply to an objection made by Julian of Eclanum in *Opus imperfectum contra Julianum* which he was working on when death overtook him³. In his presentation of Christianity, especially in the *De Catechizandis*

*Rudibus*⁴, a treatise which is intended for pagans of good will, as requested by one of his friends, Deogratias, a deacon in Carthage, for a written counsel that would be useful to him in instructing candidates for catechumenate in 409 AD, Augustine outlined a strict dogmatic discussion of the history of the Church in the context of salvation history as the foundation of catechesis and discussed the resurrection of the body in passim from this context.

A more detailed account was illustrated by a request from Laurentius, a layman, who in 421/422 AD had asked Augustine for a “handbook” (the *Enchiridion*)⁵ explaining some basics of the Catholic faith.⁶ It is a mature Augustine’s treatment formulating a theological synthesis in a systematic way on the three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity in the course of his commentaries on the Lord’s Prayer and the Apostles’ Creed.⁷ Simultaneous with *Enchiridion* was his apologetic treatment directed against the pagans in the *City of God (Civitate Dei)*, which “devotes to this matter

long chapters of Book XIII⁹ (on the subject of death) or Book XX (on judgment), as well as the greater part of the last book, Book XXII” which was insightful and elaborated further the theological position held in *Enchiridion*.

Certainly, the references the author had given were not exhaustive due to his limited knowledge of the Augustinian corpus, but be it to suffice that they were representative of the development of Augustine’s intellectual understanding and doctrinal development. This would make his task easy and feasible.

In taking this task, let us be guided by some questions in order to put Augustine thought in context and our progress would not digress in other related but also important themes as we go on. At present, the orthodoxy of Augustine on this matter has been established. However, the researcher shall investigate further on: (a) Augustine’s understanding of the “resurrection of the flesh” in the Creed, (b) the developmental understanding of “resurrection of the flesh” from the different representative texts enumerated above, and (c) the theological conclusion that one could infer from the investigation whether or not it is in consonance with our present understanding of Augustine’s and the present formulation as theologically accepted in the present time. With some preliminary contexts, we shall proceed with our investigation.

2.0 The Context

What we are concerned is Augustine’s use of the Creed and what type or “version” of the Creed he used to elaborate his theological position. And of course, Augustine’s anthropological understanding is of primary importance. We will deal first with his anthropology.

In a retrospective analysis, in dialoguing with his reason, Augustine emphasized in *Cassiciacum* (386 AD) that his main philosophical concern is “to know God and the soul” and his understanding of *corpus* to be Neo-platonic or that extent minimal.¹⁰ Although his early topical search concerns the corporeal, it is inevitable afterwards not to think about the body in relation to the soul, that is, in ways that were not merely corporeal.¹¹

The body refers to a corporeal entity which has measure (*mensura*), numbers (*numerum*), and weight (*pondus*).¹² He uses the terms *corpus* (body) and *caro* (flesh) to speak of the human body, although they are not interchangeable.¹³ Augustine maintains the integral value of the soul with the body even in his early dialogues¹⁴ which he would continue to maintain even in his later works in the light of the Scriptures.¹⁵ Augustine’s anthropological understanding about “corruptibility of the body” should be seen from the light of his understanding of human beings after the *Fall* as an effect of original sin.¹⁶ It is rather the body’s perishability rather than the carnal tendency which is the focus of his concern.¹⁷ The carnal tendencies, then, are of the body’s corruptive inclinations after sin and to its habits.¹⁸ In some passages of the dialogues, Augustine may have seemed to accept Platonic anthropology.¹⁹ For him, the good of the body is integral to the good of the soul. Through the senses, the body is an image of truth.²⁰ The union and substantial difference of the body and soul are maintained.

Augustine needed a clear concept to argue against Manichean dualism. Among the seven layers of the soul,²¹ he affirmed that ratio (reason) governs the lower parts of the soul and the body.²² “The lower part of the soul is the part that can be tempted and can fall under the spell of carnal joys,

but it is also that part which is basis of our good works.²³ Even with this, the natural tendency of the soul, in its very nature, is oriented towards the body.²⁴

Augustine's earlier view on the resurrection was already a part of his understanding of the human body, "awakening souls and longing for their homeland."²⁵ He was certain about this and mentioned in *passim* in *De quantitate animae* (33.76), but he was at this time uncertain of the continuity of our earthly body with the risen body. He accepted the authority of the Church on this while little by little grappling his way towards knowledge of the scripture. A more detailed eschatological explanation was to be expounded in his later writings.

3.0 The Texts

The effect of Augustine's ordination to the priesthood in 391 AD might be a plausible explanation of his broad and positive appreciation of the body. Furthermore, his study of St. Paul gave an expansive account and understanding of the resurrection of the body.²⁶ It was first recorded, to our knowledge, in *De fide et symbolo*. It is from this

text that we will start our investigation.

Recently, it is known that Augustine was using different creedal forms from that of Nicaea.²⁷ His sermons delivered at Hippo for newly baptized were combinations of creeds that were used in Milan and Hippo.²⁸ This is maybe due to the fact that Augustine was baptized in Milan by St. Ambrose and to believe of the tradition (in *redditio symboli*) that the creedal form used in his baptism was the one he used in Hippo in conjunction with the local creeds. What are concealed beneath his commentary is difficult to ascertain. Take for example the case of DFS; Augustine delivered this to the Council of African bishops at Hippo in 393 AD, the Council that supposedly was to confirm the Creed of Nicaea. Instead, in that presentation, Augustine's *disputatio* was an amalgam of Nicene and Romano-Milanese creeds.²⁹

Following a cue from Kelly, Lienhard enumerated the creedal forms used by Augustine and all of them have the entry of "*resurrectionem carnis*." We deemed it necessary to present the extracted creeds by Lienhard.³⁰ In order for us to have a comparison and perspective of the creeds Augustine used in his writings.

Creed of Milan (Sermons 212-14)	Creed of Milan	Creed of Hippo (Sermon 215)	Creed from De symbolo ad catechumenos
Credo in Deum Patrem omnipotentem,	I believe in God the Father almighty,	Credimus in Deum Patrem omnipotentem, universorum creatorem, regem saeculorum, immortalem et invisibilem.	Credimus in deum Patrem omnipotentem,
Et in Jesum Christum, Filium eius unicum,	And in Jesus Christ, his only Son,	credimus et in Filium eius (unicum),	Et in Iesum Christum Filium eius unicum,
Dominum nostrum,	Our Lord	Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum,	Dominus nostrum,
Qui natus est de Spiritu Sancto et virgine Maria,	Who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,	Natum de Spiritu Sancto ex virgine Maria,	Natus de Spiritu Sancto et virgine Maria,

Passus est sub Pontio Pilato,	Suffered under Pontius Pilate,	Qui crucifixus sub Pontio Pilato	Passus sub Pontio Pilato,
Crucifixus et sepultus;	Was crucified and was buried,	Et sepultus est	crucifixus et sepultus,
Tertia die resurrexit a mortuis,	On the third day, he rose from the dead,	Tertia die resurrexit a mortuis.	
Ascendit in caelum,	Ascended into heaven	Ascendit ad caelos	Ascendit in caelum,
Sedet ad dexteram Patris;	Sits at the right hand of the Father	Sed et dexteram Dei Patris;	Sedet ad dexteram Patris;
Inde venturus est iudicare vivos et mortuos;	Whence he will come to judge the living and the dead;	Inde venturus est iudicare vivos et mortuos.	Inde venturus iudicare vivos et mortuos;
Et in Spiritum Sanctum,	And in the Holy Spirit,	Credimus et in Spiritum Sanctum,	Et in Spiritum Sanctum,
Sanctam ecclesiam,	The Holy Church,		Sanctam ecclesiam,
Remissionem peccatorum,	The forgiveness of sins,	Remissionem peccatorum,	Remissionem peccatorum,
Carnis resurrectionem.	The resurrection of the flesh.	Resurrectionem carnis,	Resurrectionem carnis,
		In vitam aeternam per sanctam ecclesiam.	In vitam aeternam.

It is clear from the different versions of the creed Augustine was using that the recurrence of “resurrection of the flesh” is consistent. It is not surprising that the creed he will use in his *disputatio* in the council is not that of Nicaea but we could not just presume that Augustine is not familiar with the Nicene Creed. The reasons why he did not use it in his *disputatio* or later when he had the opportunity to publish the treatise is subject to many conjectures.

1. In “De fide et symbolo liber unus [DFS] (ca. 393 AD).”

Augustine was very clear that this text was made possible by a request from persons close to him to put his disputations at the Plenary Council of Africa into writing.³¹ Upon reviewing this in his twilight years, he spoke well of the text as it “was clear with no doctrinal errors” from the lens of a Bishop in 427 AD. Augustine was consistently clear and faithful to what he had discussed in DFS.

Nothing had been changed in the theological positions he held in the resurrection of the flesh and the whole work as well. He, rather, as pointed out, some further elucidations of the text in some of his later works. He commented in *Retractations*:

In this book, I was treating of the resurrection of the flesh, I said: ‘According to Christian faith which cannot err, the body will rise again. This seems incredible to anyone who thinks of the flesh as it is now, but does not consider it as it will be; for, at the time of angelic transformation, there will no longer be flesh and blood, but only body,’ (DFS 10.24) and I discussed other things there about the change of earthly bodies into celestial bodies, since, when he was speaking about this, the Apostle said: “flesh and blood will not possess the kingdom of God.” (1 Cor. 15:50).³²

Let us try to make some clarifications on DFS on

what Augustine was summarizing and describing in the *Retractations*. As we have said, Augustine tries to make sense of his exegesis on 1 Corinthians 15:50 under the lens of “some Neoplatonic philosophy.” The *Fall* of the first man made our nature defective; hence, it became subject to death. The incarnation of Christ and his passion and death brought hope for the restoration of that pristine nature. The consequence of sin is great but greater is the hope given to us and the faith in the restoring power of Christ. The resurrection of the flesh becomes the rallying point of hope. The dead shall rise uncorrupted, and we shall be transformed.

In as much as this same soul is also made pure, and receives the stability of its own nature, under the dominance of the spirit, which is the head for it, which head of the said soul has again its own head in Christ, we ought not to despair of the restoration of the body also to its own proper nature. But this certainly will not be effected so speedily as is the case with the soul; just as the soul too, is not restored so speedily as the spirit. Yet it will take place in the appropriate season, at the last trump, when “the dead shall rise uncorrupted, and we shall be changed.”³³

This “last trump or the proper season” is the foundation of hope and the “appropriate season” could be the “resurrection of the dead” in the final judgment. Augustine was not yet clear in what state or form of the body will that be in the resurrection of the flesh. Except that he pointed out in his exegesis, the flesh is identified with the body. But it is not the “visible flesh according to nature” alone but the whole body “will rise again.”

It is a transformation from corruptible flesh to incorruptible flesh. It is the same “whole body” for it is “I who will rise not only my flesh neither my soul alone”. It is the whole person but what kind of flesh? Augustine speaks of a ‘transformed’ flesh. The “corruptions” he speaks of are vices and sins. The possibilities of carnal desires are negated in the resurrection of the flesh. Quoting Paul, the Apostle, he continues:

For the Apostle Paul appears to point to this, as it were, with his finger, when he says, “This corruptible must put on incorruption.” For when he says this, he, as it were, directs his finger toward it. Now it is that which is visible that admits of being pointed out with the finger; since the soul might also have been called corruptible, for it is itself corrupted by vices of manners. And when it is read, “and this mortal [must] put on immortality,” the same visible flesh is signified, inasmuch as at it ever and as on the finger is thus as it were pointed. For the soul also may thus in like manner be called mortal, even as it is designated corruptible in reference to vices of manners. For assuredly it is “the death of the soul to apostatize from God;” which is its first sin in Paradise, as it is contained in the sacred writings.³⁴

The passage seems to speak of two deaths: death of the mortal body as corruption and death of the soul through sin which would distance ourselves to God, a form of reduction to impossible nothingness. Augustine referred to both in the life to come after the resurrection of the flesh, our body will transform from corruptible to incorruptible. It would be an angelic change, “for at that time of angelic change it will be no more flesh and blood,

but only body." Quoting again the scripture through Paul, he continues of "flesh and bodies." He adds:

For when the apostle speaks of the flesh, he says, "There is one flesh of cattle, another of birds, another of fishes, another of creeping things: there are also both celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies." Now what he has said here is not "celestial flesh," but "both celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies." For all flesh is also body; but everybody is not also flesh. In the first instance, [for example, this holds good] in the case of those terrestrial bodies, inasmuch as wood is body, but not flesh. In the case of man, again, or in that of cattle, we have both body and flesh. In the case of celestial bodies, on the other hand, there is no flesh, but only those simple and lucent bodies which the apostle designates spiritual, while some call them ethereal. And consequently, when he says, "Flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God," that does not contradict the resurrection of the flesh; but the sentence predicates what will be the nature of that hereafter which at present is flesh and blood.³⁵

Augustine in *Retractations* admonished philosophers for not believing on the center of this belief in the "resurrection of Christ Himself." Christ "identified" himself "with the same members." He was not only "visible to the eyes, but touchable by the hands." "Furthermore, He confirmed, also by word, the fact that he had flesh saying: 'Feel me and see, for a spirit does not have bones and flesh as you see I have.' (Luke 24:39)"³⁶ It is clear, then, that Paul did not deny "that there would be the substance of the flesh in the kingdom of God," but, by the terms "flesh and blood, he meant either

those who live according to the flesh or the actual corruption of the flesh, of which, assuredly, at that time will be none."³⁷

Augustine was very clear in his exegesis of 1 Cor. 15:50 (and Rom. 8:12-31) that "flesh and blood will not possess the kingdom of God," and "Neither shall corruption have any part of incorruption." By juxtaposing the two key passages, Augustine made sense the preaching of Paul that the resurrection of the flesh will be like the resurrection of Christ, in complete form but it is no longer subject to corruption but a transformed flesh or body as that of the angelic body. It is a body sans its defects and carnal desires. He continues his commentary that, at that point (393 AD), it is difficult to convincingly persuade unbelievers. He then referred the reader of *Retractations* to his latest and recently finished work, the "City of God," where he discussed elaborately this theme.³⁸

2. In "De Catechizandis Rudibus [DCR]" (ca. 399/400 AD)

Augustine described this work briefly and told us the occasion that prompted the writing of the treatise. Deogratias requested him to do a kind of summary of faith by which a catechist could use handily the different techniques or strategies on handling as such with catechumens.³⁹ Augustine outlined the treatise along historical lines even going beyond biblical history to salvation history.⁴⁰ Not much has been written on the resurrection of the flesh that was not elucidated in DFS. Augustine was concerned on the pedagogy and theory of catechesis though he mentioned the doctrinal aspects in summary. Relevant texts that could elucidate further the point of DFS are DCR 23.43; 24.44-45; 25.46-47. Augustine summarized the position of DFS to suit the need of the style he was expounding in the DCR.

The doctrinal elements were practically the same. The most significant clarificatory progress was Augustine's introducing the idea of the "final judgment and the omnipotence of God" in the discussion which, though implicitly, was not elucidated that much in DFS. For example, in DCR 25.46:

Consequently, believe with a manful and unshaken spirit that all those things which seem to be withdrawn from the eyes of men as if to perish, are safe and exempt from loss in relation to the omnipotence of God, who will restore them, without any delay or difficulty, when He is so minded,—those of them at least, I should say, that are judged by His justice to merit restoration; in order that men may give account of their deeds in their very bodies in which they have done them; and that in these they may be deemed worthy to receive either the exchange of heavenly incorruption in accordance with the deserts of their piety, or the corruptible condition of body in accordance with the deserts of their wickedness,—and that, too, not a condition such as may be done away with by death, but such as shall furnish material for everlasting pains.

3. In "De Enchiridion" or ["De fide, spe, caritate liber unus"] (ca. 421/422 AD).

Another treatise of Augustine that is more definitive of the position held by the mature Augustine is the *Enchiridion*.⁴¹ It was written by a request from a layman Laurentius who in 421 AD asked Augustine for a handbook (*Enchiridion*)⁴² explaining some basics of Catholic Faith.⁴³ The result was a handbook of Christian wisdom. Christian wisdom is not simply knowledge of the "basics of what Christians believe but a way of life

and worship." It is a "sort of corpus in what presented for Christian belief" and "the ordering of hopes and loves to reflect this faith."⁴⁴ Augustine discussed the summary of faith within the setting of the creed. As we have known, Augustine used the creeds of Hippo and Milan for his commentaries. Boniface Ramsey, OP, has done an excellent commentary and introduction of the latest translation of *Enchiridion* for the series of translations of Augustine's works under the editorship of John Rotelle, OSA.⁴⁵ We will follow the points and summary of Father Ramsey in the article "the Resurrection of the Flesh"⁴⁶ which were more or less the position held since then by the "later Augustine." Another important observation is that Augustine used the nuances of the "body" and was no longer using the "flesh" as in the previous treatises.

The first important point that we could get from Augustine's reflection is that "In the resurrection to eternal life God will form glorious bodies from the elements of the bodies of the dead."⁴⁷

Now, as to the resurrection of the body, —not a resurrection such as some have had, who came back to life for a time and died again, but a resurrection to eternal life, as the body of Christ Himself rose again,—I do not see how I can discuss the matter briefly, and at the same time give a satisfactory answer to all the questions that are ordinarily raised about it. Yet that the bodies of all men—both those who have been born and those who shall be born, both those who have died and those who shall die—shall be raised again, no Christian ought to have the shadow of a doubt.⁴⁸

The questions of physical deformity and of that state of fetuses (aborted or not) are not

an issue. Perfection will be granted them in the resurrection of the body; whatever is lacking will be supplied and whatever is defiled is made perfect through the power of God. The main point of the discourse is to give credence to the omnipotence of God rather than the state of the corporeal body and the discussion of the status or form of the bodies in the resurrection. He also raises questions with regards to fetuses and physical deformities.

Hence in the first place arises a question about abortive conceptions, which have indeed been born in the mother's womb, but not so born that they could be born again. For if we shall decide that these are to rise again, we cannot object to any conclusion that may be drawn in regard to those which are fully formed. Now who is there that is not rather disposed to think that unformed abortions perish, like seeds that have never fructified? But who will dare to deny, though he may not dare to affirm, that at the resurrection every defect in the form shall be supplied, and that thus the perfection which time would have brought shall not be wanting, any more than the blemishes which time did bring shall be present: so that the nature shall neither want anything suitable and in harmony with it that length of days would have added, nor be debased by the presence of anything of an opposite kind that length of days has added; but that what is not yet complete shall be completed, just as what has been injured shall be renewed.⁴⁹

Aside from these discussions, Augustine did not delve more on the discussion of the definite period of "the beginning of life in the womb" but hypothesized that "when a human being begins to live in the womb," and a "person begins to live, from

that moment he is already capable to die;" there is no reason for Augustine that he "should be excluded from the resurrection of the dead."⁵⁰ He is not that much concerned about the "bodily condition of the damned" (23.92). Neither the bodily death nor damnation would have befallen human beings had there been no sin. He is much concerned "Why some are saved and others damned belong to the mystery of God's mercy and judgment." (24.94-28.108). It echoes an interpretation of Augustine on the text of 1Timothy 2:4 (God desires everyone to be saved.). Ramsey opines that this is clearly an Augustinian passage where the saint "ponders the mystery of God's will in relation to human affairs; the fundamental idea here is that the divine will is utterly righteous and never thwarted by human resistance to it."⁵¹

Secondly, between the person's death and the final resurrection the soul abides in an appropriate place (29.109-110). This is a difficult question and Augustine "does not touch on this question of the nature of the intermediate state between death and final resurrection."⁵²

Thirdly, Augustine shows that "after the final resurrection there will be two cities, one of the Church and the other of the devil" (29.11-113). The theme of the two cities appears many times in his writings not only in the "City of God." He spends more time here on the sufferings of the damned than on the beatitude of the redeemed.⁵³

Augustine believes that complete human bodies at the resurrection will be restored⁵⁴ and that the material of the body never perishes⁵⁵ "for they will return to the same part of the body as they were in before."⁵⁶ It is no longer the same body but a "restored body, so God, the wonderful and indescribable craftsman, will remake our flesh with wonderful and indescribable speed

from all the material that had constituted it" and we should not be concerned about what kind or what appropriate hair or matter or other parts of the body, "for the providence of the craftsman will ensure that nothing is done that is not suitable."⁵⁷

We will "retain our distinctive and discernible appearance" while all are equal in the other qualities of the body; the matter belonging to each one will be modified so that none of it perishes and any deficiency will be supplied by the one who was able to make what he willed even out of nothing. Our corrupted bodies "will be transformed and fitted to the company of angels."⁵⁸

For Augustine, those who will rise again will have "no defect, no deformity, no corruption, burden, or difficulty and their facility in living will be equal to their felicity." There is only joy and they live in harmony. The incorruption experienced by the flesh no longer exists. However, the body is not just soul but a "transformed ensouled body" which is something "spiritual."⁵⁹ Augustine continued with a detailed exegesis of 1Cor. 15:50 which he started to elucidate in DFS.

4. In "De Civitate Dei" [DCD] (413-427 AD).

In 427 AD, the last four books of DCD were finished. Simultaneously, Augustine was writing a review of all his works which he was not able to finish until his death in 430 AD. So, when Augustine was commenting on DFS, DCR, Enchiridion, the comments given were almost congruent to the reviews he gave in Retractations; "that he had treated the subject carefully and to the best of his ability."⁶⁰

Augustine could not yet imagine, despite the testimonies of the Apostles, and witnessed the incredulity of people with regards to the resurrection of the flesh, which has garnered a reputable acceptance among faithful. This was

based on the narrative account of the resurrection of Christ. For our resurrection was prefigured in the resurrection of Christ. He summed up:

Here then we have two incredibles - to wit, the resurrection of our body to eternity, and that the world should believe so incredible a thing; and both these incredibles the same God predicted should come to pass before either had as yet occurred. We see that already one of the two has come to pass, for the world has believed what was incredible; why should we despair that the remaining one shall also come to pass, and that this which the world believed, though it was incredible, shall itself occur? For already that which was equally incredible has come to pass, in the world's believing an incredible thing. Both were incredible: the one we see accomplished, the other we believe shall be; for both were predicted in those same Scriptures by means of which the world believed⁶¹

Augustine was very strong with his polemics against those who do not believe in Christ and the resurrection of the body. As we have said, the belief in the resurrection of the body is nil without the resurrection of Christ. As he summarizes,

It is indubitable that the resurrection of Christ, and His ascension into heaven with the flesh in which He rose, is already preached and believed in the whole world. If it is not credible, how is it that it has already received credence in the whole world? If a number of noble, exalted, and learned men had said that they had witnessed it, and had been at pains to publish what they had witnessed, it were not

wonderful that the world should have believed it, but it were very stubborn to refuse credence; but if, as is true, the world has believed a few obscure, inconsiderable, uneducated persons, who state and write that they witnessed it, is it not unreasonable that a handful of wrong-headed men should oppose themselves to the creed of the whole world, and refuse their belief? And if the world has put faith in a small number of men, of mean birth and the lowest rank, and no education, it is because the divinity of the thing itself appeared all the more manifestly in such contemptible witnesses. The eloquence, indeed, which lent persuasion to their message, consisted of wonderful works, not words. For they who had not seen Christ risen in the flesh, nor ascending into heaven with His risen body, believed those who related how they had seen these things, and who testified not only with words but wonderful signs. For men whom they knew to be acquainted with only one, or at most two languages, they marveled to hear speaking in the tongues of all nations.⁶²

Augustine's polemics are tuned toward the pagans and philosophers who are still incredulous about the resurrection of the dead. He continues his exegesis on the given text of Paul. However, Augustine is doctrinally assured that what he has discussed and reviewed in *Retractations* is enough to expound the resurrection of the flesh at that moment.

4.0 Conclusion

So far, we have traced the development of Augustine's understanding of the "resurrection of the flesh" from the representative treatises/texts,

namely; *De fide et symbolo*, *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, *De Enchiridion* and *De Civitate Dei*. It is his staunch belief that instead of leaving the body behind, he instead affirmed the power of God to transform it.⁶³ The beauty of the transformed body could be seen and appreciated only in relation to God.⁶⁴

The resurrection of Christ is the pattern and it is the basis of our hope.⁶⁵ So that, "we might believe in the resurrection of the dead"⁶⁶ and the norm and measure of the risen bodies we hope for is the risen body of Christ, our head.

Although, Augustine quoted St. Paul on the assurance that our body will be "transformed into something spiritual," (1Cor. 15:44) we do not know from the treatises of Augustine how the soul and the risen body will be related to each other.⁶⁷ But he cautioned us not to think simply the risen body as 'spirit' and his development of the concept of the spiritual body as to refer primarily as the body's incorruptibility.

He suggested that the transformed bodies could be able to see God's communicated life, with their bodily eyes (beatific vision?) in the bodies of those around them.⁶⁸ But the basic ground of all these is, it is possible because of the creative and transformative power of God. For God, everything is possible. That might be a fitting conclusion to Augustine's discourse.

There are some doctrinal lacunae or rather questions that could be raised in Augustine's presentation of the resurrection of the dead. His exegesis of 1Timothy 2:4 is a little bit awkward and unsatisfactory. One example is his pessimism about the number to be saved, 'the fewness of whom he accepts as given.' Even though God desires for "universal salvation is not impeded inasmuch as, even though each individual may not be saved."⁶⁹

The exegetical position is so pessimistic which any present theologian would outrightly reject.

Another important reflection wherein Augustine's position is unclear is the appropriate place where the souls abide before the final resurrection. The different interpretations and hypotheses have great effect on subsequent theology. The medieval Augustinians would posit limbo and other intermediary state or place between heaven and the life before death. If the souls are not in heaven because the resurrection of the flesh is yet to come and neither they are in hell for eternal damnation nor are they on earth for they are dead already; then the appropriate hypothesis given by his followers is that there should be some state or place between heaven and hell. Augustine never conjectured on this matter nor has he discussed this thoroughly in his writings.

Another weak spot in Augustine's treatment was that he was not able to expound the "bodily condition of the damned." This might be due to the fact that the DFS and *Enchiridion* were works that were requested for a purpose and Augustine wanted to suit his treatise according to that request. The context of the question and the context of the polemics were to instruct the faithful and the catechumens. It is pitiable and is not appropriate to expound about hell and the state of the damned when one, as catechist, is expounding the doctrine of faith and teaching or sharing it with the newly converts. However, Augustine was not given the opportunity to raise the question or to be prompted or requested to write something on the matter. He gives more weight to the saving power of Christ and the power of God to save or not to save the damned. This is due maybe to his theology of the *Fall* by which everybody is damned and needs a mediator in

order to be saved. It seems that Augustine's view of human nature is something negative. He would complement this by the love and mercy of God and his doctrine of the primacy of grace. He sees our nature as negative or something 'fallen' in order to exalt the omnipotence and power of God to save us and restore us to our original pristine nature.

The reflection on the "two cities" after the final judgment is a logical consequence of the dichotomy he has secured in the doctrine of the Fall. The number of those who will be saved and the subsequent reflection on it have impelled Augustine in some of his writings to discuss the predestination of the saints and other elects or the predestination of the damned. This has been rejected by the Church and contemporary theologians. If we put too much emphasis on the Fall and the negative exegesis of 1 Timothy 2:4 and juxtaposed it with the text of the Letter to the Romans, the logical consequence might be the compromise of creating a concept such as predestination. He had lucidly emphasized that this was only possible because sin entered the world and that neither bodily death nor damnation would have befallen man had there been no sin.⁷⁰ Augustine would describe this, however, as a "happy fault" (*felix culpa*) for without the commission of sin by the first man and woman the Savior would have not come. Salvation history could have not been written and history could have been different. Although Augustine insisted that the torments are eternal in contra relation to the felicity and eternal life experienced by those who are saved, he allows for an occasional mitigation of their sufferings which is a reversal of his previous opinion on the matter.⁷¹

Another point of reflection is the non-utility of Augustine of the Nicene Creed even though in

DFS he stated that the Council was presented with the creed of Nicaea for confirmation. He was asked as *peritus* on matters of faith which was unusual at that time. The mind boggling question for me is: "Why did he not use the Nicene creed as a basis of exposition in DFS or later as a Bishop in writing the *Enchiridion*?" This could be a good topic for another research. Does it mean that in Catholic Africa, the Nicene Creed or the Creed of Constantinople was not that highly promulgated? By 422 AD, Augustine was already a bishop and has built a reputation of being a defender of orthodoxy. The creed of Constantinople was promulgated in the East, but one of the Church's greatest defenders did not use it as basis in writing his "manual of faith." Instead, he used the creed which he was taught during his catechumenate and the baptismal creed he received in Milan. The only thing we could surmise from this is that the Nicene and Constantinopolitan creeds were not that popular in Africa at the time of Augustine.

One thing is clear in Augustine's discourse on the resurrection - that is, we were given a hope that there is resurrection of the body as Christ has shown to us and there is a transformation of the body "from corruptible to incorruptible;" from "earthly body into angelic body" is an ingredient of the assurances in Christ resurrection. What would be the state in the life to come has been given to us in a glimpse in the transfiguration of Christ on the mountain when he appeared transfigured with Moses and Elijah in the eyes of the four disciples. Augustine's discourse on the firm belief on the power of God to transform our body and the state by which we should be is something commendable even with the meager theological tools of the period.

Another point, corollary to the resurrection of

the body, is the care we should give for burial of the dead, and our love and care for the body for the resurrection is about the body and not of the soul⁷² which will take its place in the beauty and delight of heaven.⁷³ This is maybe the source of the reverence for the body of the dead and the care that we give to the dead. In consequence, the burial grounds are considered sacred in the life of the faithful. The Christian rituals that are influenced by the theology of the resurrection of the body are greater than what we think. The celebrations of November 1st and 2nd, the All Saints' Day and the All Souls' Day, respectively are in fidelity to that theology.

A question could be raised however in these pious practices: if the transforming power of God is responsible for the corruptible to become incorruptible, the matter or the body left by the dead is unimportant because God could use any matter to transform in the resurrection of the dead. The specific body or matter becomes irrelevant in this sense. This would be a subject for another research.

So far, what we have done in this paper is to trace the development of Augustine's interpretation of the resurrection of the body by tracing in it in his four representative works. The development was traced and orthodoxy affirmed but there are new questions that were not addressed by Augustine and are recommended for further research by this paper.

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End Notes

¹Henri Marrou, *The Resurrection and St. Augustine's Theology of Human Values*, 1965 Saint Augustine Lecture (Pennsylvania: Villanova Press, 1966), 4: "Why so prominent a place? Primarily, (It is) because the doctrine of the final resurrection is one of the fundamental dogmas of the Christian faith."

² *De fide et symbolo* (DFS), 1.1; *Retractations*, I.16 (74-75) [All translations of the works of Augustine are from the Fathers of the Church series, unless indicated.]

³ *Contra Julianum*, VI.31-40

⁴ *Retractations*, I.40; *Catechizandis Rudibus* (CR), 1.1-1.2

⁵ *Enchiridion* 1.3; 1.6; 33.122; Letter 231

⁶ *Retractations*, I.89

⁷ *Retractations*, I.89 (264 commentary)

⁸Marrou, 4

⁹Retractations, I.89 (263-264 commentary)

¹⁰Soliloquies I.2.7

¹¹ Alan Fitzgerald, OSA, "Body," *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*. Edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald, OSA (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 105

¹²Fitzgerald, 105

¹³DFS, 10.24: "For all flesh is also body; but every body is not also flesh. In the first instance, in the case of those terrestrial bodies, in as much as wood is a body, but not flesh."

¹⁴ De beata vita 2.7; De ordine, II.1.31; De quantitate animae 36.81 [The so-called "early dialogues" of Augustine, densely Neo-platonic, written during his retreat at Cassiciacum in 386 AD, before his baptism by Ambrose, were *De beata vita* (On the Blessed or Happy life), *Soliloquia* (Soliloquies), *De Ordine* (On Order), *De quantitate animae* (On the Magnitude of the Soul), *Immortalitate animae* (Immortality of the Soul) and *Contra Academicos* (Against the Skeptics or Academics). Together with *Regula Sancti Augustini* (The Rule), *De Civitate dei* (City of God) and *Confessiones* (Confessions), they were required readings during the Order of Saint Augustine's students' "collegium" and novitiate years, especially for those who are pursuing philosophical studies].

¹⁵Sermon 155.14

¹⁶De moribus ecclesiae I.22.40

¹⁷ Soliloquies I.6.12; De quantitate animae 28.54-55; Fitzgerald, 105

¹⁸De quantitate animae, 14.24

¹⁹ De quantitate animae 13.22; Soliloquies I.14.24

²⁰ Soliloquies I.4.9; II.18.32; De ordine I.8.28;

Confer also Tarcisius van Bavel, OSA, "No one ever hated his own flesh: Ephesians 5:29 in Augustine," *Augustiniana* 45 (1995), 65.

²¹ De quantitate animae 33.70-76

²² van Bavel, 65-68

²³ van Bavel, 67

²⁴ De quantitate animae 13.22; *Immortalitate animae* 13.20

²⁵ *Contra Academicos* III.19.42; confer *De Ordine* II.5.16. This is one of the more popular images of Augustine of heaven.

²⁶ Robert Russell, OSA, "The Role of Neoplatonism in St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*," *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought*, edited by H.J. Blumenthal and R.A. Markus (London: Variorum Publications, 1981), 163-64.

²⁷ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, third edition (London and New York: Continuum, 1972), 172-173.

²⁸ Kelly, 173; Sermons 212, 213 and 214 which were delivered in 393- 396 AD.

²⁹ Finbarr Clancy, SJ, "De Fide et symbolo," *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*. Edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald, OSA (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 360.

³⁰ Joseph T. Lienhard, SJ, "Creed, Symbolum," *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*. Edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald, OSA (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 254-255.

³¹ *Retractations* I.16: "In the same period, in the presence and at the request of Bishops who were holding the plenary council of all Africa at Hippo Regius, I spoke on faith and creed. On the urgent insistence of some who loved me especially dearly, I compressed this disputation into a book. In this book, the points in question

are so discussed that the text is not precisely in the form given to catechumens to be committed to memory.”

³² Retractations I.16

³³ DFS, 10.23

³⁴ DFS, 10.23

³⁵ DFS, 10.24

³⁶ Retractations I.16 (75)

³⁷ Retractations I.16 (75)

³⁸ De Civitate Dei (DCD), XII.5.21

³⁹ Retractations I.40; Catechizandis Rudibus (CR) 1.1-1.2

⁴⁰ Boniface Ramsey, OP, “De Catechizandis Rudibus,” *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*. Edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald, OSA (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 144.

⁴¹ Retractations II.89

⁴² Enchiridion 1.1

⁴³ Enchiridion 1.4

⁴⁴ Enchiridion 1.5; John Cavadini, OSA, “Enchiridion,” *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*. Edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald, OSA (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 296.

⁴⁵ Boniface Ramsey, OP and Bruce Harbert, *The Augustine Catechism* (The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love) (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 1999).

⁴⁶ Enchiridion 23.84 -24-113

⁴⁷ Enchiridion 23, 84-91

⁴⁸ Enchiridion 23.84

⁴⁹ Enchiridion 23.85

⁵⁰ Enchiridion 23.86

⁵¹ Ramsey, 23

⁵² Ramsey, 24

⁵³ Ramsey, 24

⁵⁴ Enchiridion 23.87: “And so other births,

which, because they have either a superfluity or a defect, or because they are very much deformed, are called monstrosities, shall at the resurrection be restored to the normal shape of man; and so each single soul shall possess its own body; and no bodies shall cohere together even though they were born in cohesion, but each separately shall possess all the members which constitute a complete human body.”

⁵⁵ Enchiridion 23.88: “Nor does the earthly material out of which men’s mortal bodies are created ever perish; but though it may crumble into dust and ashes, or be dissolved into vapors and exhalations, though it may be transformed into the substance of other bodies, or dispersed into the elements, though it should become food for beasts or men, and be changed into their flesh, it returns in a moment of time to that human soul which animated it at the first, and which caused it to become man, and to live and grow.”

⁵⁶ Enchiridion 23.89

⁵⁷ Enchiridion 23.89

⁵⁸ Enchiridion 23.90: “But if in the bodies of those who rise again there shall be a well-ordered inequality, such as there is in the voices that make up a full harmony, then the material of each man’s body shall be so dealt with that it shall form a man fit for the assemblies of the angels, and one who shall bring nothing among them to jar upon their sensibilities. And assuredly nothing that is unseemly shall be there; but whatever shall be there shall be graceful and becoming: for if anything is not seemly, neither shall it be.”

⁵⁹ Enchiridion 23.91: The bodies of the saints, then, shall rise again free from every defect, from every blemish, as from all corruption,

weight, and impediment. For their ease of movement shall be as complete as their happiness. Whence their bodies have been called spiritual, though undoubtedly they shall be bodies and not spirits. For just as now the body is called *animate*, though it is a body, and not a soul [*anima*], so then the body shall be called spiritual, though it shall be a body, not a spirit. Hence, as far as regards the corruption which now weighs down the soul, and the vices which urge the flesh to lust against the spirit, it shall not then be flesh, but body; for there are bodies which are called celestial. Wherefore it is said, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God;" and, as if in explanation of this, "neither does corruption inherit incorruption." What the apostle first called "flesh and blood," he afterwards calls "corruption;" and what he first called "the kingdom of God," he afterwards calls "incorruption." But as far as regards the substance, even then it shall be flesh. For even after the resurrection the body of Christ was called flesh. The apostle, however, says: "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body;" because so perfect shall then be the harmony between flesh and spirit, the spirit keeping alive the subjugated flesh without the need of any nourishment, that no part of our nature shall be in discord with another; but as we shall be free from enemies without, so we shall not have ourselves for enemies within.

⁶⁰ Retractations I.16. Augustine was referring to the "flesh and body" distinction that he made in DFS and was discussed more in the DCD XXII.5.21

⁶¹ DCD XXII.5.22

⁶² DCD XXII.5.44

⁶³ DCD XIII.16-18; XXII.5.30

⁶⁴ Retractations 1.26

⁶⁵ Mamerto Alfeche, OSA, "The Basis of Hope in the Resurrection of the Body according to Augustine," *Augustiniana* 36 (1986): 240-96.

⁶⁶ Sermon 243.3

⁶⁷ Enchiridion 23.91

⁶⁸ DCD XXII.5.29

⁶⁹ Ramsey, 23

⁷⁰ Ramsey, 23

⁷¹ Enchiridion 29.111-113

⁷² *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* 11.3

⁷³ Fitzgerald, 107; DCD XXII.5.30