



# The Wounds and the Ascended Body

## The Marks of Crucifixion in the Glorified Christ from Justin Martyr to John Calvin

Peter Widdicombe

Volume 59, Number 1, février 2003

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/000793ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/000793ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

Faculté de philosophie, Université Laval  
Faculté de théologie et de sciences religieuses, Université Laval

### ISSN

0023-9054 (print)

1703-8804 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this article

Widdicombe, P. (2003). The Wounds and the Ascended Body: The Marks of Crucifixion in the Glorified Christ from Justin Martyr to John Calvin. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 59(1), 137–154. <https://doi.org/10.7202/000793ar>

### Article abstract

The question of whether the ascended and glorified body of Christ retains the marks of the wounds first became an issue of theological importance in the fifth century with the writings of Cyril of Alexandria and it continued to be developed until the Reformation, when both Luther and Calvin rejected the idea. For the patristic and medieval theologians, the enduring reality of the wounds testify to the intimate connection between the economy of God's salvific work within the created order and the eternal economy. It underscored God's ongoing good intention for, and engagement with, fallen creation. However transformed in glory, the ascended Christ is not to be thought of as dehumanised and the evidence of his history as the incarnate and suffering human being is not to be erased. Suffering and sinful humanity finds itself in the Son at the right hand of the Father and it can see there the evidence that the divine heart has and continues to beat with compassion for humanity in its continuing brokenness. It is the enduring presence of the marks of the wounds in heaven that testifies to the divine engagement with the sinful human condition, in both judgment and mercy, which in turn is the basis of humankind's response of thankfulness.

# THE WOUNDS AND THE ASCENDED BODY

## THE MARKS OF CRUCIFIXION IN THE GLORIFIED CHRIST FROM JUSTIN MARTYR TO JOHN CALVIN\*

Peter Widdicombe

Department of Religious Studies  
McMaster University, Hamilton

*RÉSUMÉ* : L'idée que le corps glorifié du Christ, lors de son Ascension, portait ou ne portait pas les stigmates de ses souffrances, devint une question théologique importante pour la première fois au 1<sup>e</sup> siècle, dans les écrits de Cyrille d'Alexandrie, et continua d'être discutée jusqu'à la période de la Réforme, lorsque Luther et Calvin rejetèrent d'emblée cette idée. Aux yeux des Pères de l'Église et des théologiens de l'époque médiévale, la permanence des plaies ouvertes témoignait du rapport étroit entre l'économie salvifique de Dieu à l'intérieur d'un ordre créé et l'économie éternelle. Cela soulignait la continuité de la bienveillance de Dieu et son engagement envers la création déchue. Même glorifié, le Christ de l'Ascension ne doit pas être perçu comme non humain, et les preuves de son passage sur la terre, comme être humain ayant connu la souffrance, ne doivent pas être effacées. Une humanité pécheresse et souffrante se retrouve dans le Fils, à la droite du Père, et reconnaît la compassion du Cœur divin qui continue de battre pour l'humanité sans cesse brisée. La présence durable au ciel des plaies ouvertes témoigne de l'engagement de Dieu envers l'humanité pécheresse, dans son jugement ou sa clémence ; en retour, cet engagement s'avère être le fondement de la réponse de gratitude de l'humanité.

*ABSTRACT* : The question of whether the ascended and glorified body of Christ retains the marks of the wounds first became an issue of theological importance in the fifth century with the writings of Cyril of Alexandria and it continued to be developed until the Reformation, when both Luther and Calvin rejected the idea. For the patristic and medieval theologians, the enduring reality of the wounds testify to the intimate connection between the economy of God's salvific work within the created order and the eternal economy. It underscored God's ongoing good intention for, and engagement with, fallen creation. However transformed in glory, the ascended Christ is not to be thought of as dehumanised and the evidence of his history as the incarnate and suffering human being is not to be erased. Suffering and sinful humanity finds itself in the Son at the right hand of the Father and it can see there the evidence that the divine heart has and continues to beat with compassion for humanity in its continuing brokenness. It is the enduring presence of the marks of the wounds in heaven that testifies to the divine engagement with the sinful human condition, in both judgment and mercy, which in turn is the basis of humankind's response of thankfulness.

---

\* This article is based on a paper first given at the Canadian Society for Patristic Studies conference, at the Learned, Université Laval, 29 May, 2001.

There is a legend, possibly medieval in origin, that the Devil, possessing the power to do whatever he wants, transformed himself into the image of Christ and appeared before the walls of the heavenly city. When the angels, gathered upon the ramparts, called down to asked him what he wanted, he replied “Lift up your heads O ye gates ; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors ; and the King of glory shall come in” (Ps. 24:7 and 9). At which point, the Angels called out to him to show them his hands, but when he held them up, there were no marks, and he was not admitted. The devil does not have the power to imitate the passion and death of the Saviour.<sup>1</sup>

While the idea that the ascended and glorified body of Christ retains the marks of the wounds continues to have a place in Christian art, worship, and devotion — one may think, for instance, of the Easter hymn “Crown him with many crowns” with its reference to “rich wounds yet visible above, in beauty glorified” — and, while the idea does occasionally appear in modern Christian writings<sup>2</sup>, it does not seem to have been a subject of theological concern, at least within Protestant theology, since the Reformation.<sup>3</sup> It was, however, given considerable attention earlier in the tradition. Cyril of Alexandria — the first to my knowledge to address the question theologically — wrote about it at length in his *Commentary on John* ; the Venerable Bede further drew out its theological significance in his *Commentary on Luke* and in his *Homilies on the Gospels* ; and Aquinas, relying on Bede, gave it a central place in his treatment of the resurrection in the *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*. Prior to the Reformation, those who wrote about the wounds and the glorified body assumed that the glorified body does retain the marks. For Cyril, Bede, and Aquinas, the question had to do with the reality of Christ’s bodily resurrection, the identity of his body, the permanence of his bodily presence in heaven, and the enduring significance of his earthly suffering and death. Calvin and Luther, however, are notable departures from this tradition. Neither gave the question more than passing attention and both denied that the ascended body retains the marks.

- 
1. I first heard the legend recounted in a sermon preached by Michael Bedford-Jones, now suffragan Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Toronto, on Ascension Day 1980 at the Church of the Epiphany, Scarborough.
  2. The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* in the entry “Wounds of Our Lord, Devotion to”, p. 1035, states that “After the Resurrection Our Lord retained the marks of His wounds as badges of triumph.” Simone WEIL, in an apparent reference to the ascended body of Christ, writes in *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd, New York, Harper & Row, 1951, p. 123, that the “glorified body bore the marks of the nails and spear ;” she does not, however, go on to explain what significance she thinks this has. More recently, the wounds have been written about in the light of post-modern concerns. See, for instance, Frederick BAUERSCHMIDT, “The Wounds of Christ,” *Journal of Theology and Literature*, 5 (1991), p. 83-100. At p. 93, he analyses the wounds in terms of absence and presence, the “openness and emptiness of the wound being an expression of divine fecundity”, but he does not take up the question of the retention of the marks. Theresa SANDERS, *Body and Belief: Why the body of Christ cannot heal*, Aurora, Colorado, The Davis Group, 2000, on the other hand, does. For her, the enduring “holes in Jesus’s body articulate a longing for God that is humans’ deepest knowledge of God. This longing [...] is not a lack that could ever be filled but is grace itself. In our present life it is the grace that impels us outward towards others in love, and in the resurrected life it is the very space that love requires in order to be itself” (*ibid.*, p. IV).
  3. And neither, it would appear, for such modern Catholic theologians as Rahner and Balthasar, although SANDERS remarks that “for the most part, Catholics believe the wounds to be a permanent part of the risen Jesus” (*Body and Belief*, p. III).

In what follows, I shall trace the development of the question of the wounds and the glorified body in theological writings from the second to the sixteenth centuries and I shall also make reference to its representation in Christian art. The biblical passages that feature in the discussions, as we might expect, are Christ's showings of the wounds in Jn. 20:24-29 and Lk. 24:36-43, but Psalm 24:7-10, Is. 63:1-2, and Zechariah 12:10 and 13:6 also are cited and commented on.

Two preliminary observations are in order before we turn to the substance of our study : the first is that the doctrine of the ascension proper has not been a major topic of discussion in the history of Christian thought.<sup>4</sup> This at least in part is because the ascension has tended not to be differentiated from the resurrection and to be subsumed under it.<sup>5</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that this should have been so : the two moments are closely related — both deal with questions of the triumph of Christ and the final nature and status of Christ's body and ours. One of the consequences of the tendency to blend the two moments together, however, is that it is often not clear whether an author or artist is distinguishing between the two or treating them as one. The second observation is that both events present similar difficulties of representation in both words and art. They are events that take place at the transition between the realm of time and space and that of the eternal and infinite, the realm of the being of God. Narrative and pictorial accounts are stretched to their limits.<sup>6</sup>

During the patristic period prior to Cyril of Alexandria, little attention was paid to the question of the wounds and the ascended body. The only Apologist to comment on the condition of the ascended body is Justin Martyr, but he has little to say about it ; he does not cite the showings from either Lk. or Jn. ; and he makes no explicit reference to the wounds. Justin refers briefly to Psalm 24:7-10,<sup>7</sup> in *Dialogue with Trypho* 36.5-6, in the course of his attempt to prove that Christ and not Solomon is being referred to in the Hebrew Bible with the title "Lord of Hosts". He there remarks that

[...] when our Christ rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, the rulers in heaven, under appointment of God, are commanded to open the gates of heaven, that he who is king of glory may enter in, and, having ascended, may sit on the right hand of the Father until he make the enemies his footstool, as has been made manifest by another Psalm. For when the rulers of heaven saw him of "uncomely and dishonoured appearance" (Is. 53:2

- 
4. But see now Douglas FARROW, *Ascension and Ecclesia : On the Significance of the Doctrine of the Ascension for Ecclesiology and Christian Cosmology*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1999.
  5. See the comments of Oliver O'DONOVAN, *On the Thirty Nine Articles : A Conversation with Tudor Christianity*, Exeter, The Paternoster Press, 1986, p. 34-37, where he observes that in the Gospels only Luke narrates the ascension as an event, John and Matthew hint at it allusively, and Mark has nothing to say about it. In the Pauline epistles it is most often undifferentiated from the resurrection.
  6. Witnessed, for example, in the attempt to portray the ascension by showing a pair of divine feet dangling from a cloud, which I first saw in the medieval stained glass of St. Mary's Church, Fairford, Oxfordshire.
  7. For a history of the interpretation in the Bible and in patristic literature of Ps. 24:7-10, in the context of the discussion of the ascension, see J.G. DAVIES, *He Ascended into Heaven : A Study in the History of Doctrine*, London, Lutterworth Press, 1958.

and 3), and inglorious, not recognizing him, they inquired “Who is this king of glory ?” And the Holy Spirit [...] answers them, “the Lord of hosts, he is the king of glory.”<sup>8</sup>

This notion of the heavenly host failing to recognize Christ because of the incongruity between the condition of his ascended body and what they seemingly had expected to see is a theme we shall see in later writings.<sup>9</sup> Irenaeus, the early Christian writer who gave most attention to the resurrection and ascension of Christ, also refers to Psalm 24.7-10, in *Demonstration* 84, and remarks on the incredulity of the angels on the ramparts, implying that it was occasioned by Christ’s ascending in the flesh, but he does not make reference to the condition of the body generally or to the wounds.<sup>10</sup>

In the Alexandrian tradition prior to Cyril, the wounds are only rarely commented on. Origen seldom refers to either Jn. 20:24-29 or Lk. 24:36-43 and makes nothing of the wounds when he does ; neither does he refer to Psalm 24:7-10.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Athanasius seldom refers to either of the two Gospel passages. His only use of them that is of significance for our theme occurs in the *Letter to Epictetus*, where he employs them to bolster his attempt, on the one hand, to refute the claim that the Word was changed into flesh and bones, and on the other hand, to argue both that Christ had assumed a whole human being, body and soul, and that the body was a real body.<sup>12</sup> He quotes Psalm 24:7, in *De Incarnatione* 25, to make the point that, inasmuch as he was Lord, it was not the Word who needed the gates opened to him, but rather it is we “whom he carried up in his own body” who need to have them opened.<sup>13</sup> This notion of a path being beaten for us<sup>14</sup> we shall see again with Cyril. Athanasius does not comment on the condition of the ascended body.

Gregory of Nazianzus, by contrast with the earlier figures, does discuss the question of the wounds and the ascended body. His comments are brief but they anticipate some of what we shall find at much greater length with Cyril. In his *Second Oration on Easter*, in the course of an exhortation to the believer to ascend into heaven with Christ, Gregory remarks that the angels had to be convinced that the one bearing a body and “the marks of his passion” is the one who had gone down from heaven. Accordingly, as Justin had done, he portrays the angels as quoting Psalm 24:8 and 10,

- 
8. E. GOODSPEED, ed., *Die ältesten Apologeten*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1914 (re-impression, 1984), p. 132-133. In *Dialogue* 85.1, Justin again quotes Ps. 24:10 and once again remarks on the ascended Christ’s “uncomely and inglorious appearance” (*Die ältesten Apologeten*, p. 196-197).
  9. Clearly, by the time of the development of the legend with which I began (assuming it to be medieval), the heavenly host’s expectations had changed : the wounds were what allowed the ascended figure to be identified as Christ.
  10. *Démonstration de la prédication apostolique*, trans. Adelin Rousseau, Paris, Cerf (coll. « Sources Chrétiennes », 406), 1995, p. 197-198.
  11. It is uncertain whether Origen believed that Christ ascended bodily. See the discussion in FARROW, *Ascension and Ecclesia*, p. 97-98, and further, Peter WIDDICOMBE, “Ascension and Ecclesia and Reading the Fathers”, *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 58 (2002), p. 169-170.
  12. *Epistola ad Epictetum* 9-10, PG 26, 1064-1068.
  13. *Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, Oxford Early Christian Texts, ed. and trans. Robert THOMSON, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1971, p. 197.
  14. A phrase used by O’DONOVAN, *On the Thirty Nine Articles*, p. 37.

“Who is the king of glory?”, but he goes on to say more than Justin had. To those who marvel at such an appearance and say words like those of Is. 63:1-2, a passage which would also be quoted by Cyril, “Who is this that comes from Edom and the things of earth? Or how are the garments of him red who is without blood or body, as one that treads in the full wine press?”, he advises that one should “Set forth the beauty of the array of that body that suffered, adorned by the passion, and made splendid by the godhead, than which nothing can be more lovely or more beautiful.”<sup>15</sup> But beyond this Gregory does not develop the topic of the wounds; and he leaves unexplained how the body is “made splendid by the godhead” and of what the splendour consists. Later writers, as we shall see, were cognisant of the problem of how to reconcile the idea of an incorruptible body with the idea of the retention of marks of wounds inasmuch as they considered such marks to be an indication of corruption. Aquinas would discuss the problem in terms of degrees of glory.

With Cyril, we encounter a different order of reflection on the question. For him whether the glorified body retains the marks of the wounds is of great theological significance: it has direct implications for how we are to think about what it is that God has done for us in the sending of the Son and how we are to understand the process of redemption. His principle discussion of the question occurs in the *Commentary on John*, written about 428, at the point where he is commenting on Jn. 20:24-29. The passage runs for 12 pages in the Greek text.<sup>16</sup> He remarks in the midst of the passage that one might well be amazed at the minuteness of detail recorded in the text of Jn. 20:24-29 and he gives it commensurate attention.<sup>17</sup> He also briefly refers to the wounds and the ascended body again, in similar terms, in his *Letter to Acacius*, Bishop of Scythopolis, which dates from between 433 and 435. The reference there comes in the course of a Christological interpretation of the phrase from Leviticus 16:5, “and he shall take two male goats.”<sup>18</sup> What Cyril has to say in the *Commentary on John* is complex and, in contrast to Gregory’s discussion, theologically refined. The burden of Cyril’s analysis of the retention of the marks of the wounds is twofold: to establish that the resurrection of the body of Christ actually took place, and thus that our bodies too will be raised; and to show that the divine

15. *Discourse* 45.25, PG 36, 637.

16. *Sancta Patris nostri Cyrilli archiepiscopi Alexandrini in D. Ionnis Evangelium. Accedunt fragmenta varia necnon tractatus ad Tiberium Diaconum duo* (hereafter, *In Joannem*), vol. 3, ed. P. Pusey, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1872, p. 141-153. He briefly alludes to the matter in another passage of the commentary (*In Joannem*, vol. 2, p. 403-404), which I shall return to below.

17. I shall here only take up the points that are germane to the topic, but I note in passing one other of the topics he discusses: how we are to regard the disciple Thomas. Cyril gives an enormously sympathetic reading to the doubting figure, whom he describes as “wise” (*In Joannem*, vol. 3, p. 141). He comments not only that Thomas’ doubt was for the sake of those who would come later, but also that given the extraordinary nature of the event, it was perfectly understandable that he should raise questions about it (*In Joannem*, vol. 3, p. 149). Calvin’s attitude to Thomas, on the other hand, stands in marked contrast to Cyril’s. Thomas’ doubt demonstrated to the Reformer that Thomas was “not only obstinate, but also proud and contemptuous in his treatment of Christ” (*Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. 2, trans. W. Pringle, Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1979, p. 275). Thomas, it would appear, had failed to appreciate the doctrine of justification by faith.

18. *Epistula ad Acacium Scythopolitanum* 18, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* 1.1.4, ed. E. Schwarz, Berlin and Leipzig, De Gruyter, 1927-1929, p. 46.

economy of salvation can be known to have been effected through the whole history of the incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension of the Son.

I shall begin with Cyril's discussion of the marks and the resurrected body, and then turn to his discussion of the ascended body. The appearance of the marks of the wounds in the resurrected body of Christ are, for Cyril, evidence specifically of two things : the identity of the body — the body which appeared to the disciples is the same one that hung on the cross ; and the physicality of the body — however it was to be conceived, what the disciples saw before them was a real body. On the identity of the body, Cyril states several times in the passage that the body that was raised was the self-same body that was crucified and died. Thomas' lack of faith, he remarks, was well timed, because through it, we "might be unshaken in our faith that the very body that hung upon the cross and suffered death was quickened by the Father through the Son"<sup>19</sup> ; and, to cite another example, farther on in the passage, he remarks that it was "no other body" that "was raised but that which suffered death."<sup>20</sup> As to the reality of the body as a body, Cyril explains that Christ, as he appeared in the midst of the disciples, "was no phantom or ghost, fashioned in human shape, and simulating the features of humanity, nor yet as others have foolishly surmised, a spiritual body that is compounded of a subtle and ethereal substance different from the flesh. For some attach this meaning to the expression 'spiritual body.'<sup>21</sup> This last point, the meaning of "spiritual body", is a topic to which he returns later in the passage.<sup>22</sup> The importance of establishing that Christ's body was an actual body is that it shows that that which is subject to death, namely the flesh, was in fact brought back to life, and, accordingly, it shows that our bodies too can be brought back to life.<sup>23</sup> It is, he says, with respect to our "earthly bodies" that the resurrection must be effected.<sup>24</sup> He goes on to observe that it was necessary for the marks to be manifest in order that there should be no excuse for us to be lacking in faith. Accordingly, Thomas had to see the risen Christ as he sought to see him, that is, with the marks of the wounds.<sup>25</sup> The reality of Christ's bodily resurrection is confirmed for Cyril by the Eucharist. When we, like the disciples, meet on the eighth day, we meet Christ not only invisibly as God, but also visibly in the body : "He allows us to touch his holy flesh, and gives us of it. For through the grace of God we are admitted to partake of the blessed Eucharist, receiving Christ into our hands, in order that we may firmly believe that he truly raised up the temple of his body."<sup>26</sup>

Cyril clearly then has no doubts that the resurrected body of Christ is a real body showing real marks of the wounds, but he acknowledges, as Gregory had not, that

---

19. *In Joannem*, vol. 3, p. 142.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 142-143.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

23. Cyril does not here address the question of whether Christ's body had a human soul ; he had already stated that it had in his exegesis of Jn. 1:14 (*In Joannem*, vol. 1, p. 138).

24. *In Joannem*, vol. 3, p. 142.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

this presents us with a problem, inasmuch as Christ's body is an incorruptible body and such marks are indicative of corruption. This is a problem Augustine and Bede and Aquinas would also address. Quite what Cyril means by incorruption he does not explain ; he is content simply to affirm the reality of both the marks and the incorruptibility of Christ's body. He tells his readers that we ought to ask the following question :

Then how was it, someone may inquire, that the marks of corruption were apparent in an incorruptible body ? For the continuing trace of the holes bored through the hands and side, and the marks of the wounds and punctures made by steel, affords proof of physical corruption, though the true and incontrovertible fact that Christ's body was transformed into incorruption points to a necessary discarding of all the results of corruption, together with the corruption itself.<sup>27</sup>

But his response to the question is oblique. He asks rhetorically whether anyone who is lame will be raised with a maimed limb or foot and whether anyone who has lost their sight in this life will be raised blind. To seal his case, he quotes the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:43 : that which "is sown in weakness is raised in power", and that which "is sown in dishonour is raised in glory", and he concludes that there will be "no remnant of adventitious corruption left in us [...]. For the human body was not made for death and corruption."<sup>28</sup> Clearly, then, whatever we are to make of the retention of the marks of the wounds, they are not to be seen as signs of corruption in the saviour's body.

Cyril is at pains to dispel any erroneous conception that the marks may remain because of a lack of divine power, a point later writers would also make. In his *Letter to Acacius*, Cyril makes it clear that it was not that Christ was incapable of putting off the marks, "for, when he rose from the dead, he put off corruption and with it all that is from it."<sup>29</sup> But how then to explain the continuing presence of the marks in the ascended body ? What is their significance ? In both the *Commentary* and the *Letter to Acacius*, this is Cyril's principal concern.

There are several points to Cyril's explanation. His introduction to the discussion in the *Letter to Acacius* is remarkable and deserves to be quoted at length :

The only begotten Word of God ascended into the heavens with his flesh united to him, and this was a new sight in the heavens. The multitude of holy angels was astounded at seeing the king of glory and the Lord of hosts (Ps. 24:7-10) in a form like us. And they said, "'Who is this that comes from Edom,' that is from the earth, 'in crimson garments, from Bosor?'" (Is. 63:1). But Bosor is interpreted flesh or anguish and affliction. Then the angels asked this, "What are the wounds in the middle of you hands ?" And he said to them, "With these was I wounded in the house of my beloved" (Zech. 13:6).<sup>30</sup>

The angels in Cyril's account, as in Justin's and Gregory's, are astonished at seeing the divine Word, the king of glory and Lord of hosts, in human form. But more

27. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 146-147.

29. *Letter to Acacius* 18 (ACO 1.1.4, p. 46).

30. *Ibid.*



than that, as their questions imply, their astonishment is all the greater because it is a human form that carries with it the signs of anguish and affliction, being, as it were, almost dyed in his own blood, as Cyril remarks in the passage in the *Commentary*, where he quotes Is. 63:2, “Why is your apparel red, and why are your garments like one who treads in the wine vats?”<sup>31</sup> More specifically, it is a human form that carries with it the marks of the wounds in his hands. But lest the angels, and perhaps we, be uncertain about the identity of the one who has appeared in such an unprecedented way, Cyril (in the *Commentary*) has Christ take the initiative to ensure that the ascended figure be “known to be the living God.” He maintains that in reply to the question “Who is this that comes from Edom,” the ascended Christ first replies with the words of Is. 63:1b, “I speak righteousness,” which, according to Cyril, means that he is a lawgiver and thus is divine.<sup>32</sup>

This story of the heavenly appearance of the marked body, is, for Cyril, replete with theological significance. The first point he makes, but does not dwell on, concerns Israel’s place in the divine economy. In the *Commentary*, Cyril maintains that the statement, “With these was I wounded in the house of my beloved” (Zech. 13:6), signifies that it was Israel, acting through the Roman soldiers, that inflicted the wounds upon Christ;<sup>33</sup> and in the *Letter* he explains that Israel has been displaced in the angels’ friendship.<sup>34</sup> Of more importance to Cyril, however, is what Christ’s ascending with the marks intact means positively for humankind, and this has all to do with the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Paraphrasing Ephesians 3:10 and 11 in the *Commentary* — he quotes the same verses in the *Letter* without remark — he maintains that Christ ascended in the body marked by the wounds in order to make known “the meaning of the mysteries concerning himself to the rulers, principalities and powers above, and to those who commanded the legions of angels, he appeared to them also in the same guise that they might believe that the Word that was from the Father, and in the Father, truly became man for our sake, and that they might know that such was his care for his creatures that he died for our salvation.”<sup>35</sup> Several lines farther on in the text, Cyril takes this up again. There he says that Christ, not being content simply to quote the verse from Zechariah to the angels, showed them his wounds, in order to satisfy them of three things: “that he truly became man, and that he underwent the cross for us, and that he was raised again to life from the dead.”<sup>36</sup> The divine one, equal to the Father, who went down, has suffered and died as a man in the body and that very same man in the very same body, replete with the evidence of his death for humankind, has gone up.

---

31. *In Joannem*, vol. 3, p. 147.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 147-148.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 148. In the light of his use of this verse from Zech., it seems odd that Cyril makes nothing in the *Commentary* of the quotation of Zech. 12:10, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced,” in Jn. 19:37, a verse that Augustine, Bede, and Thomas refer to in their discussions of the ascended body.

34. *Letter to Acacius* 18 (*ACO* 1.1.4, p. 46).

35. *In Joannem*, vol. 3, p. 147.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

In terms typical of Cyril, then, the retention of the marks of the wounds tells us everything we need to know about God and salvation : they tell us that the Son is divine, that he became incarnate for our sake, and, that we might know the extent of his care for us : they tell us of his death for our salvation, specifically, death on a cross, and of his resurrection from death to life. The marks of the wounds are of a piece with the history of salvation, indeed, are integral to it. This seemingly is underscored by the notion that the “mystery concerning himself” needs to be made known to all the heavenly powers. The initial astonishment and implied incomprehension of the heavenly hosts suggests that what has taken place represents a stunning transformation of reality, both earthly and heavenly, made all the more remarkable, not only because a body ascended into heaven, but also because it is a wounded and bloody body. We see here, by implication at least, that the effects of the ascension of Christ’s body are comprehensive and that the wounds have eternal significance. Would it be too fanciful to conclude that for Cyril, the lawgiver, the “Lord by nature and ruler over all”<sup>37</sup>, is also the one who eternally manifests the signs of his human nature and his death for humankind, eternally manifests the holiness and graciousness, the judgment and mercy, the expression of love, that are entailed in that death ? This may be to go too far in our reading of the passage, but, as we shall see, these are themes which will be made much of by later writers.

There are two more points concerning Cyril’s view of the ascended body that it will be helpful for us to note and which go some way to supporting my suggestion that Cyril thinks of the wounds as having comprehensive, eternal significance (although in the context of the discussion of neither point does he mention the retention of the marks). The first is that he appears to have believed that Christ retains his ascended body permanently, or at least until the parousia. In his *Answers to Tiberius and his Companions* of 431-433, in the course of explaining that just as the Word did not change his nature into flesh in the incarnation, it is nonsensical to say that Christ’s body has become “merged or consubstantial with the nature of the holy Trinity,” Cyril remarks that at the second coming, Christ will come in the flesh.<sup>38</sup> The second point is that through the body of the risen Christ we have access to the Father. He states this in the *Commentary on John* in the midst of his exegesis of Jn. 14:2-3, “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you ? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am, you may be also.” Although he does not refer to the wounds, he does remark on the astonishment of the angels at seeing flesh ascended. He writes that “heaven was then utterly inaccessible to mortal man, and no flesh as yet had ever walked upon that pure and all-holy realm of the angels ; but Christ was the first who inaugurated for us the means of access to himself, and granted to flesh an entrance way into heaven.” A few lines later he adds that Christ, “in his absolute power as Son, while still in human form” obeys “the

---

37. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

38. *Cyril of Alexandria : Select Letters*, ed. and trans. L. Wickham, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1983, p. 156-158.

command: ‘Sit on my right hand’ (Ps. 110:1; Heb. 1:13), and so may transfer the glory of adoption through himself to the whole race [...]. He has presented himself therefore as man to the Father on our behalf” so that we might be made by the Son once again to stand “as in the Father’s presence.”<sup>39</sup> In the light of the central place we have seen that he gives to the retention of the marks later in the *Commentary* and in the *Letter*, it may well be that he thought of the wounds as integral to our gaining access to the Father. Both Bede and Aquinas later would reach just such a conclusion.

The evidence for Augustine’s attitude to our topic is not a clear-cut as it is for Cyril’s, but he appears to have believed that the ascended body retained the wounds. He does not take up the question explicitly and we shall have to get at the question indirectly. (Neither he nor the later writers I shall comment on sketch the scene of the heavenly drama of Christ’s arrival in heaven as the earlier writers had done.) Typically, when commenting on the wounds of Christ, he remarks that while Christ could have removed the marks of the wounds, he did not in order that the wound in our minds (hearts), by which he means sin, might be healed, which at least implies that the ascended body continues to bear the marks.<sup>40</sup> And in the *City of God* Bk XXII.12, he observes that if Christians maintain that the resurrected bodies of human beings will be without deformity and defects, their opponents can point to marks of Christ’s wounds, inasmuch as Christians claim that “Christ rose from the dead with those marks upon him.”<sup>41</sup>

But there is, for our purposes, a more telling context in which Augustine refers to the wounds. In my comments here, I am in part following the argument of Thomas Breidenthal.<sup>42</sup> Breidenthal argues that in his later writings at least Augustine considered the humanity of Christ to be permanent.<sup>43</sup> Christ retains his body up to and beyond the last judgment in the post-judgment period, it having been transfigured into the Church. Breidenthal’s concern is to show that Augustine’s Christology is a neighbour Christology. Christ judges us not only as the one who as divine judges with authority, but also as the one who, in retaining his human nature, judges as one who is in solidarity with us. We can, however, take Breidenthal’s argument a step further. Twice in the *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Augustine alludes to the wounds in the context of discussing the last judgment. In Tractate XXXVI.12, Augustine writes that the Son will judge “in the form in which he suffered, and rose again, and ascended into heaven,” quoting Acts 1:11, “He shall come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven,” in support of his claim.<sup>44</sup> In both this and the parallel

39. In *Joannem*, vol. 3, p. 403-404. Here we see a theologically elaborate account of the “beaten path” motif that what we saw earlier in Athanasius.

40. For instance, in Sermon 88.2 (*PL* 38, 540) and *Tractates on the Gospel of John* CXXI.4 (*CC* 36, p. 667).

41. *CC* 48, p. 832.

42. In “Jesus is My Neighbour: Arendt, Augustine, and the Politics of Incarnation”, *Modern Theology*, 14 (1998), p. 489-504.

43. See BREIDENTHAL, “Jesus is My Neighbour”, p. 496 for a brief summary of the question of whether Augustine believed Christ retained his body eternally and for references to the history of the scholarship on the matter.

44. *CC* 36, p. 331.

passage in Tractate XIX.16, he then quotes Jn. 19:37, “They shall look on the one whom they have pierced,” (which in turn is a quotation of Zech. 12:10). (To my knowledge, he never quotes Zech. 13:6 as Cyril does.) He then goes on to say in Tractate XIX.16, in a condensed and pithy formulation, that “That form which stood before the judge will be judge : that form will judge which was judged ; for it was judged unjustly, it will judge justly”.<sup>45</sup> I would suggest, then, that for Augustine it is not only that Christ retains his body eternally, but that integral to it are the wounds. It is the wounds, and the suffering and judgment on him to which they testify, that are the basis for our confidence that Christ will judge justly, and thus with authority, as the one who, in his identification with our plight, not only has been our neighbour, and but also continues to be so. The marks of the wounds are the perduring testimony to the perduring efficacy of the salvific death of the one whom Augustine identifies as Son of God and Son of Man. The taking on by the Son of the flesh and all that was entailed in that does not cease. We shall see below how Bede and Thomas take up the notion of the wounds and the final judgment.

Before turning to the medieval writers, however, I shall pause to look briefly at how the wounds and the glorified body are rendered in the representational tradition. In the early history of Christian art, the treatment of the wounds and the ascended body is rather different from what we have seen in the writings of the Fathers. Indeed, the passion and the wounds are given little attention. In the first known depiction of the crucifixion and resurrection in a narrative context,<sup>46</sup> in a set of four small Roman ivory panels, dating between 420 and 430, although a figure, presumably Thomas, points to the side of Christ, who appears to be either closing or opening his robe, it is unclear whether the wounds themselves are depicted ; but if they are, they are not as prominent as they would be in later representations.<sup>47</sup> In the great mosaic of the Second Coming in the apse of the Church of Sts Cosmas and Damian in Rome, which dates from the 530s,<sup>48</sup> there are no signs of Christ’s suffering and this is typical of the

45. CC 36, p. 199.

46. Felicity HARLEY, “Invocation and Immolation : The Supplicatory Use of Christ’s Name on Crucifixion Amulets of the Early Christian Period”, in Pauline ALLEN, Wendy MAYER and Lawrence CROSS, ed., *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church*, vol. 2, Centre for Early Christian Studies, Australian Catholic University, Everton Park, Queensland, Australia, 1999, p. 245-257, argues that the representation of the crucifixion on at least three gems predates the ivory panels. A particularly clear set of illustrations of the ivory plaques, which are housed in the British Museum (M & LA 56, 6-23, 4-7), is to be found in G. FINALDI, ed., *The Image of Christ*, ex. cat., National Gallery, London, 2000, p. 108-111. A discussion of the question of why the crucifixion appeared so relatively late in the artistic expression of the early church lies beyond the scope of this article, but what my account here suggests is that there was a parallel phenomenon for the wounds and the ascended body : the visual representation of the marks on the ascended body developed some time after the subject became a topic of theological importance. For a history of the depiction of the resurrection from its beginnings to the eleventh century, see Anna KARTSONIS, *Anastasis : The Making of an Image*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986. See also, Robin JENSEN, “The Suffering and the Dead Christ in Early Christian Art”, *ARTS*, 8 (1995), p. 22-28.

47. In a private correspondence, Felicity Harley, who has studied the Crucifixion panel, has commented to me that it can be said with confidence that the wound in Christ’s side is clearly rendered in the Crucifixion panel. Whether it is to be seen in the Resurrection panel and whether a mark, now worn down, was visible in Christ’s open palm in the Resurrection panel is difficult to tell.

48. See the discussion in Neil MACGREGOR, ed., *Seeing Salvation : Images of Christ in Art*, London, BBC Worldwide, 2000, p. 194-198.

early mosaics showing Christ in his ascended glory. Seemingly, it is not until the ninth century that Christ is portrayed displaying his wounds in the Last Judgment — in an illustration in the *Sacra Parallela* of John of Damascus<sup>49</sup> (whose comments on the wounds we shall have occasion to touch on below). There is, of course, ample evidence of such depictions from paintings of later periods, among them Roger van der Weyden's Last Judgment of 1443-1451<sup>50</sup>, Petrus Christus' Christ as Saviour and Judge of about 1450,<sup>51</sup> and Juan de Valdés Leal's *Finis Gloria Mundi* of 1671-1672,<sup>52</sup> in which, variously, the wounds in Christ's hands, his feet, and his side are prominently displayed.

To extend this survey a little further, in the medieval period elaborate devotions developed over the wounds of Christ, devotions that were independent of the specific narrative details of Christ's life. The wounds became symbols "of Christ's continual and gracious action in the world and of his promise to act as humanity's advocate before the Throne of Judgment on the Last Day."<sup>53</sup> Such views concerning the wounds, as we shall see, were typical of the theology of period. The side wound, close to the heart, had a particular place in this. It was depicted as a refuge for sinners, a source of cleansing and feeding. A whole genre of images emerged that presented people bathing in the blood from the wound, the blood flowing into a chalice, and, occasionally, eucharistic wafers are seen to fall from the wound. The wound in the side was also referred to as a door to the Father or to eternal life.<sup>54</sup> This idea of the wound as a point of entry we shall have occasion to note again when we look at Aquinas' treatment of the wounds and the ascended body.<sup>55</sup>

To return to the textual tradition: the two last figures we shall consider before concluding with Calvin and Luther are Bede and Aquinas. Bede's treatment of the question of the wounds and the ascended body, which are found in his *Commentary on Luke* and his *Homilies on the Gospels*, is especially rich. The focus of his discussion is on the ongoing salvific effects of the retention of the marks. The significance that he attributes to the retention of the marks is reminiscent of Augustine's statement in Tractate XIX.16, but his explanation is more systematically and elaborately developed than was Augustine's. Bede observes in a condensed passage in Homily II.9 on Lk. 24:36-47, as had Augustine and Cyril before him, that though Christ could have "shown his body to the disciples with all signs of his passion abolished", he "preferred to keep the signs of the passion on it", in accordance with the divine plan, and

49. KARTSONIS, *Anastasis*, p. 155.

50. Hôtel-Dieu, Beaune.

51. Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, INV. P.306.35.c.1979.

52. Church of San Jorge, Hospital de la Santa Caridad, Seville.

53. Susannah AVERY-QUASH, *The Image of Christ*, ex. cat., p. 176, referring to the statue known as Christ showing the Wound in his Side of 1420-1425, Florentine, Victoria and Albert Museum, INV. A. 43-1937.

54. AVERY-QUASH, *The Image of Christ*, p. 176.

55. The idea that the Church was born from the pierced side of Christ by the water and the blood is, of course, found in patristic literature. AUGUSTINE, for instance, in *Contra Faustum* XII.8 (CSEL 25.6.1, p. 336) writes that "Eve was born from the side of her sleeping spouse, and the Church was born from the dead Christ by the mystery of the blood that gushed forth from his side."

this for several reasons.<sup>56</sup> The first two reasons are the obvious ones we have seen before. Firstly, he kept the marks of the wounds in order that the disciples might believe that the body he showed them was the same body as the body that was crucified; and secondly, to show that it was a real body, which would mean that the disciples could preach a belief in Christ's complete resurrection, body as well as soul, and a hope for the future resurrection of all human beings. Thirdly, he retained the marks in order that the one who intercedes for us with the Father, "might demonstrate to him forever, by showing the scars of his wounds, how much he [Christ] laboured for human salvation", and that he might tell the Father, who is "always prepared to show mercy, how just it would be for him to show mercy toward human beings", of whose "sorrow and suffering the Son of God became a sharer" and "overthrew the sovereignty of death." Fourthly, Christ retained the signs of his passion so that "all the elect who have been received into everlasting happiness [...] never stop thanking him, recognizing that it is by his death that they live." Fifthly, they were retained so that "even the damned" may see them in the "judgment, as it is written, 'They shall see him whom they have pierced' (Jn. 19:37), and may understand that they have been most justly condemned." The damned, he goes on to explain, are not only those who crucified Christ, but those who have rejected and despised his "mysteries". To this list of five reasons he adds in the *Commentary on Luke* that Christ preserved the wounds in order that there might be "a perpetual sign of his glorious triumph."<sup>57</sup> The comprehensive and enduring significance of the retention of the marks which were implied in Cyril's discussion, and the more explicitly worked out statement of the significance of the wounds for Christ as judge in Augustine's, are here drawn out more fully.

The marks of the wounds, for Bede, are an everlasting reminder both to the Father and to human beings, both the saved and the damned, of Christ's compassion and the efficacy of his death, of his glorious triumph. They stand as both a promise and threat, testifying to both the mercy and the justice of God. They are a reminder that gives us access to the mercy of the Father and provokes our gratitude, but they also serve as a sign of the justness of God's judgment on sinners. Once again, we see here with Bede, as we saw with Augustine, the notion that Christ judges us as our neighbour, as the one who knows our suffering, has shared in it, and rendered death ineffective. The enduring reality of the wounds perpetually gives us access to the Father's mercy, to provoke thanksgiving on the part of the believer, and they allow the condemned to recognise the rightness of their punishment.

Aquinas largely relies on Bede for his explanation of why, as he puts the matter in the *Summa* 3a, 54, 4, it "was fitting that in the resurrection Christ's soul" should have "taken up once more a body with wounds."<sup>58</sup> In Question 54, 4, he deals with the topic of the qualities of the risen Christ and there simply lists the reasons given by Bede in the *Commentary on Luke*, which, the point about Christ's triumph excepted,

56. CC 122, p. 242. All the reasons are laid out on p. 242.

57. CC 100, p. 420.

58. *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 55, trans. C.T. Moore, London, BlackFriars, 1976, p. 33.

are the same as those given in the *Homilies*, although more briefly stated. To the list he adds a quotation from Pseudo-Augustine which, among other things, parallels the popular medieval notion of the wound in Christ's side as the door, which we noted above. The quotation reads: "Christ knew why he kept the scars on his body. He showed them to Thomas who did not believe until he touched and saw them. So too will he show them to his enemies to convince them by his proclamation of truth itself: Look at the man whom you have crucified. You see the wounds you have inflicted. You recognize the side which you have pierced: it was opened by you for your own benefit, yet you did not wish to enter therein."<sup>59</sup> Here the notion of the threat that the wounds pose to those who do not accept Christ is underscored. Aquinas then goes on to take up the question that had concerned Cyril, of how to reconcile such signs of corruption with Christ's incorrupt body. He argues that the wounds should not be thought of as indications of incorruption or imperfection, because they are "signs of virtue" intended "to manifest a greater degree of glory." Indeed, there "even appeared in the place where the wounds were a special type of beauty."<sup>60</sup> The body of Christ, then, was not less but more perfect because of the wounds, and Aquinas concludes the discussion in Question 54 with the comment that "Thus it is clear that the scars which Christ manifested after the resurrection never left his body afterwards".<sup>61</sup>

Aquinas had opened Question 54, in articles 1 and 2, with a lengthy discussion of the nature of bodies in general, of Christ's ascended body in particular, and of the nature of glorification, arguing that there are different degrees of glory.<sup>62</sup> The substance of this discussion need not detain us, but it is perhaps such a concern with the metaphysics of the question, and the fascination of medieval and early modern writers and artists with the physicality of the wounds and the blood, that may in part account for why Luther and Calvin shy away from the topic of the wounds. For the Reformers, what was definitive for the salvation of humankind was the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, and they were reluctant to address questions pertaining to what went on in those spheres — heaven and hell — which lay outside time and space. They were concerned to strip away what they thought of as the mythological beliefs that commonly were used to comfort Christians in the face of death, as witnessed in their rejection of the doctrine of purgatory and the invocation of the saints in prayer. Furthermore, it appears that Luther felt that an absorption with the Passion was incompatible with a proper understanding of justification by faith alone.

---

59. *Ibid.*, p. 32-35.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

61. *Ibid.* Not surprisingly, there were variations on how the marks and the ascended body were viewed in the medieval period. MECHTHILD OF MAGDEBURG, for instance, writing in 1250-1270 in *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, trans. F. Tobin, *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, New York, Paulist Press, 1998, p. 71-72, maintains that Christ's wounds will remain unhealed, "ready to prevail over the Father's justice", until after the last judgment, at which time, although the wounds will be healed, the scars will remain, "bright red — love's colour", and never fade.

62. *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 55, p. 19-27.

For the most part, Luther's references to the marks of the wounds are brief and his interest in them principally has to do with his attempt to show that the ascension does not mean that Christ cannot be bodily present in the Eucharist. But in one passage at least — in *A Meditation on Christ's Passion* of 1519 — where he does discuss the issue of the marks and the ascended body, he maintains that the marks are not to be seen on the ascended body. It is the absence of the marks, not their presence, which is of importance in understanding his spiritual psychology. In contrast to the earlier writers we have considered, the focus for Luther lies squarely on the question of the believer's subjective spiritual condition. In *A Meditation on Christ's Passion*, he criticises what he perceives to be the unacceptable consequences of popular, theologically ill-ordered devotion to the passion of Christ: a superstitious belief that "carrying pictures and booklets, letters and crosses" on one's person will protect one from "all sorts of perils"; and an absorption in the contemplation of scenes from the passion so intense that devotees never get beyond a sentimental response to it.<sup>63</sup> The passion, rather, is to stir us to a correct understanding of ourselves through the creation of a despairing conscience, in order that we might come through grace (and only through grace) to recognize the severity of our sin and thus to a softening of our hearts. Properly contemplated, the "passion of Christ performs its natural and noble work, strangling the old Adam and banishing all joy, delight, and confidence which man could derive from other creatures, even as Christ was forsaken by all, even God."<sup>64</sup> But Luther goes on to warn that contrition and penance are not enough in themselves to bring about one's salvation, for in the end they will lead to despair. The key to finding peace of mind is the resurrected body of Christ. We are to cast our sins from ourselves onto Christ, in the firm belief that his wounds and sufferings are our sins, borne and paid for by him. If, then, we see sin "resting on Christ and [see it] overcome by his resurrection, and then boldly believe this, even it is dead and nullified. Sin cannot remain on Christ, since it is swallowed up by his resurrection. Now you see no wounds, no pain in him, and no sign of sin."<sup>65</sup> He goes on to enjoin the believer to pass beyond the suffering of Christ to "see his friendly heart," a heart which beats with a love that draws us to the Father's heart and the knowledge of the Father's eternal love for us. This knowledge will lead to faith and confidence and to our being born anew in God.<sup>66</sup>

Calvin's interest in the wounds and the ascension is even more scant than Luther's, but he gives us little indication of why this is. He dismisses the idea that the ascended body retains the marks in a few sentences in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Commenting on Jn. 20:20, "He showed them his hands and his side," he begins by asking whether it is "strange and inconsistent with the glory of Christ, that

---

63. *A Meditation on Christ's Passion*, trans. M. Bertram, in M. DIETRICH, ed., *Devotional Writings I*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press (coll. "Luther's Works", 42), 1969, p. 7-8.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 13. In the light of this understanding of our relation to God, we are then able to take Christ's passion as a pattern for our lives because we will enter actively into it and not think of it as something that mechanically works for us while we remain passive.



he should bear the marks of the wounds after his resurrection,” and he concludes it is not, as the wounds serve to confirm belief in the resurrection and anything which contributes to our salvation augurs to the glory of Christ. He goes on to make it clear, however, that “if any person should infer from this, that Christ still has the wounded side and pierced hands, that would be absurd ; for it is certain that the use of the wounds was temporary, until the apostles were fully convinced that he was risen from the dead.”<sup>67</sup> This is all he has to say on the subject in the *Commentary*, no explanation is given, and the passage seems to be the only place in his writings where he addresses the subject. In the course of his discussion of the resurrection of the body in the *Institutes*, however, he does give us an oblique indication of why he may have held such an attitude concerning the marks. It appears to have to do with his notion of perfection and the basis for our having confidence in the reality of the resurrection. He does not mention the marks in the passage, but, quoting Psalm 16:10, “Thou wilt not allow thy meek one to see corruption”, he remarks that “Christ alone, who is immune from all corruption, received back a perfect body,” to which perfection, he makes it clear, we may be confident our bodies also will be conformed on the day of judgment.<sup>68</sup> Here we have the suggestion that the removal of the wounds is a sign of the triumph of the power of God over sin and the imperfection within creation to which it has led, and that it is in this power that one is to trust, rather than in the mercy and love of God evidenced by the enduring reality of the marks, as it was for the earlier writers in the tradition. Although he rails elsewhere in the *Institutes* against Severus’ view that the ascended body of Christ was swallowed up in his divinity,<sup>69</sup> that body for Calvin nonetheless is a body devoid of the marks of what he must have regarded as the principle *raison d’être* for the taking on of that body.

That the Reformers may have rejected the notion of the permanence of the wounds, did not, of course, mean that the wounds did not continue to play a role in Protestant piety and art. Such a painting as Lucas Cranach the Younger’s *The Crucifixion (Allegory of Redemption)* of 1555 (Stadtkirche of Saints Peter and Paul, Weimar, Germany), although its subject is the crucifixion, and not the ascended body, clearly suggests that the wounds, properly theologically construed, have an on-going significance for the believer. The artist, standing at the foot of the cross, is being washed with the blood that flows from the wound in Christ’s side, while Luther, who stands beside him, points to passages in his own German translation of the Bible ; and, although the lesson of the painting is that the word of God, received in faith, is sufficient to redeem us, the painting suggests that the wounds remain of contemporary importance for the Church. In another genre, Buxtehude’s beautiful passion-

---

67. *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. 2, p. 265. There may have been precedents for this view. AQUINAS, for instance, in the *Summa* 54, 4, implies that John of Damascus believed that the marks of the wounds were dispensed with once their purpose of establishing the identity of the body had been accomplished. In the passage of *De Fide Orthodoxa* IV.18 (PG 94, 1189) on which Aquinas is drawing, however, JOHN OF DAMASCUS does not in fact say that.

68. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2, ed. J. NEILL and trans. F. Battles, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press (coll. “The Library of Christian Classics”, XXI), 1960, Bk III.25.3, p. 990-991.

69. See, for instance, *Institutes*, vol. 2, Bk IV.17.29, p. 1398-1399.

meditation *Membra Jesu Nostri* (Members of our Jesus), dating from 1680, contemplating seven parts of Christ's body on the cross, the text of which is drawn from a medieval poem "Salve mundi salutare", also attests to an ongoing interest in the wounds in a Lutheran context, probably liturgical, although once again the focus is on the crucifixion and not the glorified body.<sup>70</sup>

For Luther and Calvin, in contrast to Cyril, Augustine, Bede, and Aquinas, it is the very removal of the marks of the wounds which point to the salvific efficacy of Christ's death and resurrection, his triumph over sin and suffering, and it is their removal that allows us to have confidence that we are the objects of God's love and that we will be alright in the end. With his focus on the spiritual condition of the believer and his concern with what he perceived to be the abuse devotion to the passion had caused, it was more important for Luther that the spiritually anxious be assured that the wounds and the sin to which they testify had been overcome. The perfect, unmarked glorified body of Christ gave just that assurance. For Calvin, the issue appears to turn on a conception of perfection which in the end requires the obliteration of all signs of the marring of God's good creation; created reality is to be restored to what it was before the Fall. It is on this that we are to base our hope. There is little evidence, however, that for the earlier writers the issue had to do with the immediate spiritual condition of the believer, or with an abstract notion of perfection. In contrast to Luther, they do not discuss the issue principally in spiritual-psychological terms. Their concern is more with the objective significance of the retention of the marks than with the subjective. For them, no less than the Reformers, it is of course important that it be understood that the sins of humankind have been dealt with by the death and resurrection of Christ and that we appreciate that that is so; but for them it is also important that God's encompassing of the reality of the human condition, God's entry into that condition, and the suffering that the Son endured there for the sake of humankind, be seen to be eternally present at the right hand of the Father. And, whatever we may say about Calvin's conception of perfection, for the earlier writers the issue of the perfection of creation was not to be abstracted from the consequences of humanity's corruption of that creation and the awfulness endured by Christ in order to overcome those consequences. The triumph of the resurrection is only a triumph because of its integral and permanent connection to the suffering and death of Christ. If for Cyril, Bede, and Thomas, this created a tension in their thought about how to reconcile the notions of corruption and incorruption, it is a tension they were prepared to live with rather than to put the continuity between the incarnate body and the eternal body in jeopardy.

We see here, expressed in its various ways by the pre-Reformation theologians, an attempt to tie together as closely as possible the economy of God's salvific work within the created order with the eternal order, to underscore God's ongoing good

---

70. For a discussion of the piece and its composition, see K. SNYDER, *Dieterich Buxtehude: Organist in Lübeck*, London, Collier Macmillan, 1987, p. 142 and 198-200. The wounded side of Christ features here as well. In Cantata IV, we read, "Hail side of the Saviour / Where lies the honey of sweetest / Where is seen the force of love / From which pours a fount of blood / Which washes clean foul hearts."

intention for, and engagement with, his fallen creation. By contrast, both Luther and Calvin, by their rejection of the sign of the divine engagement with humanity's fallenness, allow the possibility of a discontinuity to be perceived between Christ's body as it was on earth and the body as sits at the right hand of the Father. This may be of little significance in itself — the ascended body remains after all for both a real body, a body which suffered and which is the Son's. Nevertheless, it also allows for the possibility of the perception of a discontinuity between the reality of the human nature of Christ as man on earth and the life lived then, and the reality of that human nature and the life of the Son of Man as that is expressed at the right hand Father. However transformed in glory, Christ is not to be thought of as dehumanised and the evidence of his history as the incarnate and suffering human being is not to be erased. For the earlier theologians, the reign of Christ in all its fullness is signified by the retention of the marks. Suffering and sinful humanity indeed finds itself in the Son at the right hand of the Father and it can see there the evidence that the divine heart has and continues to beat with compassion for humanity in its continuing brokenness. It is the enduring presence of the marks of the wounds in heaven that testifies to the divine engagement with the sinful human condition, in both judgment and mercy, which in turn is the basis of our response of thankfulness. If in the modern post-Kantian world, a world in which theology adheres closely to the historical narrative of the biblical texts, we may be reluctant to go beyond the purely historical and are reticent to speculate about the heavenly sphere, if we are tempted to smile at such heavenly dramas as that of Cyril, surely, nonetheless, it is the case that the theological instinct of the pre-Reformation theologians was correct. There are, no doubt, many ways to affirm that the one who reigns at the right hand of the Father is our neighbour, is the one who has suffered with us and will judge us as the one who has suffered with us ; but the belief that the marks of the wounds endured in the glorified body of Christ served the patristic and medieval theologians well, as they sought to give systematic expression to the reality of God's eternal good intention for his creation.