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IMMORTALITY AND RESURRECTION¹

C. K. Barrett

THE SUBJECT I am obliged to handle in this lecture, which, in terms of its foundation, must deal with the soul's destiny, and the nature and reality of the life hereafter, is one that must needs evoke a good deal of anxiety in a lecturer who has a strong preference for subjects about which he is not entirely ignorant. Is there a subject that grips human imagination so tenaciously, and exercises the human spirit so deeply, as this one? And is there a subject where, I do not say the heathen, but the Christian, nourished in the revealed truths of his religion, is so completely uninformed? *That* Christ was raised from the dead, and raised as the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep, he may well believe; but, even at the cost of incurring Paul's rebuke, he may still find himself asking: 'But how are the dead raised, and with what kind of body do they come?'

There are questions to which we do not know the answers which it may, nevertheless, be profitable and edifying to discuss, and I do not propose simply to run away from the direct inquiry: 'If a man die, shall he live again?' I do, however, beg leave to approach it in my own way, and my way is not that of a philosopher or dogmatic theologian, but that of a historian. I shall have my feet firmly and reassuringly planted in this world if I may at least begin by inquiring and recounting what men have felt, believed, and said (and what they have said is to be found not only in works of theology, but in plays and pictures, on tomb-stones and in burial vaults) about what happens to them when they die. It may be that, at least for some, this will prove not only to be of historical value but also to provide as good a starting-point for our own thinking, and as practical a setting for our own faith, as a more philosophical discourse might afford.

Our historical study has all the more chance of issuing in a positive and useful result because it will have the New Testament at its centre. It would be easy indeed to fill the whole of a lecture with New Testament exegesis: there is plenty of material, and the material affords problems enough to keep the exegete busy, and substance enough to provide for the systematic theologian—to say nothing of the support it offers to the trembling mortal (whether theologian or not) who stands on the river's brink. But I intend (even though this means abjuring detail) to investigate a wider field: to look into some of the antecedents of the New Testament, and to ask what the next generations made of the New Testament.

I can best introduce my sketch in this way. For a generation or so it has been popular to draw a sharp contrast between the idea of immortality, and that of resurrection. The immortality of the soul, we have been told, is a philosopher's toy, with no better foundation than human speculation; not merely insubstantial, therefore, but positively misleading, since it encourages

man to find his eternal security in himself and not in God. The resurrection of the body, however, can be only the act of God; it is the divine miracle, exemplified in the resurrection of Christ himself, in which alone the Christian can properly put his trust. Christians, it is said, do not believe in the immortality of the soul, but in resurrection at the last day. This sharp distinction is often coupled with the distinction between Greek and Hebrew: the Greeks believed in immortality, which is wrong; the Hebrews believed in resurrection, which is right.

An outstanding exponent of these views is Oscar Cullmann. In referring to him I must first of all say that in his lecture *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* (London, 1958) there is very much that any serious student of the New Testament must accept. Indeed, I suspect that Dr Cullmann takes a little too warmly, and attaches too much importance to, some of the criticisms of the original (Swiss) publication of his work. A great deal of it strikes the reader as familiar, and in many respects I am in agreement with him. I have, however, ventured to express a point of significant difference by using in my title not his disjunctive 'or' but the conjunctive 'and'—Immortality and Resurrection. But in saying so much I am anticipating my conclusion, and for this we are not yet ready.

For the erroneous notion of the immortality of the soul Dr Cullmann blames the Greeks. That we can respect and admire both Plato and Paul 'is no reason for denying a radical difference between the Christian expectation of the resurrection of the dead and the Greek belief in the immortality of the soul'.² Repeatedly Dr Cullmann refers to the 'Greek concept of the immortality of the soul'. In this expression there is concealed a serious oversimplification of the facts.

Early Greeks and early Hebrews were markedly similar in their outlook upon physical death and what lay beyond it. This is in fact well-known ground, and I need not linger over it. For both, death was the end of worthwhile existence. For the Hebrew, this meant Sheol, an undesirable abode of wretched shades.

The dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. As well their love, as their hatred and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in anything that is done under the sun . . . there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol, whither thou goest (Eccles 9^{5, 6, 10}).

As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away,
So he that goeth down to Sheol shall come up no more.
He shall return no more to his house,
Neither shall his place know him any more. (Job 7⁹⁻¹⁰)

The Greeks thought of the underworld, the home of departed spirits, in a very similar way. Life and memory did indeed persist. This is part of the tragedy of the situation. In one of the most famous scenes in the *Odyssey* (xi. 465-540), Odysseus, permitted to visit the shades, addresses the dead Achilles, 'than whom no man, before or after, was more fortunate'. Formerly, in your lifetime, we Argives used to honour you equally with the gods, and now that you are here you exercise great power over the dead. Do not grieve about it, Achilles, now that you are dead.

He answered, Do not make light of death to me, noble Odysseus. I would rather be on earth a serf to a landless man, with small enough living for himself, than act as king over all these dead men who have perished. (484-91)

So far the thought of the primitive Hebrew runs parallel with that of the primitive Greek. We can take a further step. Each was capable of imagining a 'standing up of corpses' (as Hoskyns used to say ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν should be rendered, if we wish to feel the original force of the words), but each imagined it only to reject it. Such things did not, and presumably could not, happen. We have already seen some of the Old Testament evidence. More can be added.

Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead?
 Shall the shades arise (LXX, ἀναστήσουσιν) and praise thee?
 Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave?
 Or thy faithfulness in Abaddon?
 Shall thy wonders be known in the dark?
 And thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

There is also David's explanation of his composure when he learns of the death of Bathsheba's child.

While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, Who knoweth whether the LORD will not be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me (2 Sam 12²²⁻²³).

In a similar way the Greeks speak of the rising up of the dead as something that no one supposes can or will ever happen, even though the mind can conceive it (as it can conceive other absurdities). Thus Prexaspes to Cambyses:

I did what you commanded me, and buried him with my own hands. If dead men do rise up (εἰ μὲν νῦν οἱ τεθνεώτες ἀνεστήσῃσι) you can expect Astyages the Mede to rise up against you; but if things continue as they have been you will never have any further trouble from him [Smerdis] (Herodotus, 3.62).

Other writers reveal the same scepticism. Thus Achilles to Priam, when the latter comes to beg for the body of his dead son, Hector.

You will achieve nothing by lamenting for your son, nor will you raise him up (οὐδέ μιν ἀνστήσεις) (*Iliad*, xxiv. 550f).

With this we may compare David's despair of his dead child. Again, when the Chorus suspects the death of Agamemnon

I have no means of raising up the dead again in words.

(Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1360f)

And similarly Sophocles: Electra will never succeed in raising her dead father from Hades.

But never by laments or prayers will you raise up (ἀνστήσεις) your father from the lake of Hades to which all go.

(*Electra* 137ff)

Thus, if we go back to the earliest stages of their histories and literatures, we find Greeks and Hebrews thinking alike about death, and what happens after it. A living dog is better than a dead lion; a living serf is better than a

dead king—they are agreed in this. Survival of a sort there is, but it is so wretched and poor that it would almost be better that existence should cease altogether.

It is true that neither Hebrews nor Greeks remained in this primitive stage and that subsequent developments did not follow identical lines. It is a commonplace observation that only towards the close of the Old Testament period was the national hope of a future for the people partially replaced, or supplemented, by the personal hope of a future for the individual Israelite. There are only a few passages in the Old Testament where this hope appears unmistakably.

Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

(Daniel 12³)

Thy dead shall live; my dead bodies shall arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust: for thy dew is as the dew of light, and the earth shall cast forth the shades.

(Isaiah 26¹⁹)

After the close of the Old Testament period evidence multiplies, and for the moment one passage will suffice as illustration:

They that fear the Lord shall rise to life eternal,
And their life shall be in the light of the Lord, and shall
come to an end no more.

(Ps. Sol. 3.16)

It is often said that this new belief in resurrection to a new life in a new age came into Judaism from without, and especially from Persian sources, whence the idea was borrowed. I should certainly not wish to deny that Iranian influence can be detected in the later parts of the Old Testament and in post-biblical Judaism; but I believe that Dr Mowinckel is right in saying that 'Persian influence served as a catalyst'.³ The real constituents of the late Jewish belief lay within the earlier religion, and fundamentally in the conviction that he who was the judge of the whole earth would not fail to do right.⁴ We can see in the earlier wisdom literature how a growing individualism raised problems for those who held to this conviction, and these problems were brought to a head when Jewish martyrs accepted death, thereby renouncing all hope of earthly reward and any direct share in the national hope, precisely in order to maintain the national religion. It was in this context that Daniel 12³ (and possibly Isaiah 26¹⁹) arose, and must be understood. In other words, it was in the light of human experience, illuminated by fundamental convictions about God, that Hebrew thought about man's future developed: Persian belief provided the mould into which this developing thought was poured rather than an essential constituent of the thought itself. In this process we cannot name any one outstanding thinker of unique personal insight and influence; not even the author of Daniel would qualify for such a description.

Not least at this point the Greek line of development differs markedly from the Hebrew; here there arises a figure so outstanding that even Dr Cullmann can speak of 'the Greeks' and 'Plato' almost as if these were interchangeable terms. This they certainly were not, for dominating as the Socrates-Plato

figure is to us, it was probably unknown to and without direct influence upon the majority of 'Greeks' in the Hellenistic world. As with Jewish developments, so here we must probably bear in mind the presence of non-indigenous (that is, non-Hellenic) religious beliefs, particularly the influence of Orphism. But I venture to think that, as in Judaism, the really decisive force is to be found elsewhere. It is surely no accident that the essential development of Plato's thought about personal future life is to be found in the dialogues that deal with the martyr-figure of Socrates. Plato's thought follows a more intellectual and less purely religious course than that which led to the development we have noted in Judaism. He does not argue: Socrates was unjustly condemned, and since he refused to take the opportunity that presented itself to escape the hemlock in this world we must suppose that he will receive true justice hereafter. Rather Socrates appears as the human instrument of those ideas whose eternity points to the immortality of the human soul: 'There is no change in him; only now he is invested with a sort of sacred character, as the prophet or priest of Apollo the God of the festival, in whose honour he first of all composes a hymn, and then like the swan pours forth his dying lay. Perhaps the extreme elevation of Socrates above his own situation, and the ordinary interests of life (compare his *jeu d'esprit* about his burial, in which for a moment he puts on the "Silenus mask") create in the mind of the reader an impression stronger than could be derived from arguments that such an one, in his own language, has in him "a principle which does not admit of death".'⁵

We must not, as I have said, make the mistake of supposing that every Greek was a Plato, believing in the eternity of ideas and the immortality of the soul. Many in the ancient world had, as the inscriptions show, no hope for the future.

Non fui, fui, non sum, non curo.

πεινε, βλέπεις τὸ τέλος

The badly spelt Greek points out the common man, and attests his belief—or unbelief. So far as hope penetrated to the unintellectual levels it did so by way of the cults; and it is well to remember that these rested in great measure upon a cycle, natural, mythological, or both, of death and resurrection.

Conditions in Palestine may not have been altogether different, but the Jews were an instructed people, and the more advanced beliefs of Pharisaic intellectuals probably spread farther downwards into society than Platonic speculation spread in the Greek world. And of the Pharisees Dr Schweizer has rightly written: 'The Pharisees believed in the immortality of the soul *and* in the resurrection. Both conceptions are so formulated that they are not mutually exclusive.'⁶ That they believed in resurrection appears from the passage in the Psalms of Solomon that I have already quoted. And according to Josephus the Pharisees hold that 'every soul is imperishable, but the soul of the good alone passes into another body, while the souls of the wicked suffer eternal punishment'.⁷ We need not dismiss this as simply Josephus's hellenistic version of the Hebrew doctrine of the resurrection of the body. Instead of cumbering this lecture with references I will simply quote Billerbeck: 'Of no less significance for the earlier conceptions of Sheol [than the separation of righteous and wicked in Sheol] was the doctrine of immor-

tality, which, from hellenistic Judaism, gradually pressed into Palestinian circles too'.⁸ The same observation would probably be true with reference also to the Qumran type of Judaism.⁹

To sum up so far: we are guilty of an over-simplification so radical as to amount to falsification if we suggest that the background of New Testament thought about the future life is composed of 'Greeks' maintaining in intellectual terms the intrinsic immortality of the individual soul, and 'Hebrews' believing that at death man's whole being is extinguished and that he is miraculously raised up, body and soul, by God at the last day. The facts are far more complicated, and the distinction far less clear-cut. For both Greeks and Hebrews the common substratum of belief was the conception of Hades or Sheol—continuing, but quite undesirable existence. Many Greeks, and at least some Hebrews (the Sadducees as a matter of principle) did not go beyond this. Greek intellectuals developed the notion of immortality; Jewish mystics and apocalyptists looked for the resurrection of dead bodies. But many Jews believed at the same time in the immortality of what we may call the soul (whether they called it the soul or something else scarcely matters); and, on the other side, we must remember that Greeks could at any rate conceive the idea of rising up, that the cults were based on a death-resurrection cycle, that the Stoic belief in an ἐκπύρωσις and renewal of the universe involved something like resurrection, and that a similar implication may be found in the Orphic and Pythagorean notion of the transmigration and reincarnation of souls.

That the New Testament emerged from this background with a new and powerful conviction of life beyond the grave was due neither to some chance turn of the wheel in the syncretistic mixing-machine, nor to a new theory of the nature of the soul, the nature of the body, or the relation of the one to the other, but to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus was dead, and is alive for evermore: this is the unanimous conviction of the New Testament and the fact has consequences far wider than the subject at present under discussion, important as that is. It means that God has acted in history to deal with the total human situation, in which death is a symptom, with sin as its more fundamental cause. The death and resurrection of Jesus are represented by the New Testament writers as the means of God's decisive victory over the powers of evil, but they are never, I believe, used to vindicate one theory of body and soul against another; they issue in the defeat of death, but this fact does not in itself provide a history of what happens to a man after the death of his body. Here as in other fields men were left to bear witness to the new fact as best they could, using the categories and forms of thought that were available to them. Life and incorruption, not a ready-made new dogma, were brought to light through the Gospel.

At the centre of the New Testament treatment of our subject stands 1 Corinthians 15, and it is necessary at this stage to recall the contents of the chapter, though, when I have brought out some of its themes, I shall return to our sketch of the development of thought. After that we shall return (I hope, with profit) to the New Testament.

The centre of Paul's argument is the point that I have already mentioned as essential to the New Testament treatment of our theme: the connexion

between Christ's resurrection and ours. He was raised as the first-fruits of all sleepers (1 Cor 15²⁰); to deny, as some had done, the possibility of our resurrection was to deny the possibility of Christ's (15¹⁶), and thus to exclude a vital element of the Christian proclamation, in which all preachers were agreed (15¹¹). If we ask in what the Corinthian error consisted, the answer is probably not an Epicurean denial of all life after death, nor a preference for the immortality of the soul over the resurrection of the body, but the belief (cf. 2 Tim 2¹⁸, 1 Cor 4⁸) that the resurrection had already, in a spiritual but complete sense, taken place.¹⁰ This view accounts for the fact that Paul devotes a great part of the chapter to straightforward apocalyptic, describing what he expects to take place at the time of the end. This futurist eschatology it was necessary (from Paul's point of view) to ensure. The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed (15⁵²). But this is not the only theme in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul's insistence upon the apocalyptic fulfilment of the work of Christ does not lead him to forget that the decisive work of Christ has already been accomplished. I note here especially the description of Christ as the new Adam (15^{21-2, 45}), who has become the head of a new humanity. Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead; for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. As is the heavenly man, so also are (or will be) the heavenly men. Now it must be remembered that Paul understood the inheritance which Adam had handed down to his descendants to be death. Through the sin of that one man death entered into the experience of men (Rom 5¹²); Paul is, of course, dependent on Genesis 2¹⁷. Correspondingly, the inheritance that the new humanity received from the new Adam was life and incorruption; from the heavenly man springs the race of heavenly men. The human race will not reach its goal until Christ has handed over the kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all (15^{24, 28}); but already men have moved into the new age ushered in by Christ's resurrection, and their transformation—from glory to glory (2 Cor 3¹⁸)—has begun.

More light is thrown on Paul's thought by 2 Corinthians 5¹⁻¹⁰, where the same pattern of hope and anticipation recurs, though with perhaps a slightly different balance. The apocalyptic element remains: we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ (5¹⁰). But it is now more plainly stated that we already have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (5¹), which, Paul says (with a sharp change of metaphor), we long to put on. It is because of this heavenly dwelling that he can speak of his desire to be absent from the body and present with the Lord (5⁸; cf. Phil 1²³).

Paul's conception of the future life is thus two-fold, as is his conception of (for example) the moral life. Great and decisive things have already been done for men by God in Christ; yet an hour of judgement and of transformation is still to come. This complex doctrine sprang directly out of the person of Jesus himself, recognized by Paul as alive, yet still to be manifested in glory, overcome the last enemy, death (1 Cor 15²⁶), and thus complete his work. It is not surprising that it was simplified and distorted by men whose minds were less subtle and profound, and less firmly fixed on Christ, than was Paul's.

It was not long before the vital distinction which Paul draws between body and flesh was overlooked. Already the author of 2 Clement had failed

to see the point, and was insisting, as Paul does not, upon the resurrection of the flesh. 'Let none of you say that this flesh (αὕτη ἡ σὰρξ) is not judged or raised up. Understand this. In what were you saved, in what did you recover sight, if it was not when you were in this flesh? We must therefore guard the flesh as God's shrine; for as you were called in the flesh, so also shall you come in the flesh' (9). A little later Justin makes the same point even more explicitly. There are, he says, men who say that there is no resurrection of the dead, but that immediately upon death their souls are received up into heaven.¹¹ Do not suppose, Justin goes on, that these men are Christians. They are no more Christians than Sadducees are Jews. All orthodox Christians know that there will be a resurrection of the flesh (σὰρκος ἀνάστασιν γενήσεσθαι ἐπιστάμεθα). Again, it is profitable to trace in the history of the Creeds the development of *resurrectio mortuorum* or *resurrectio corporis* into *resurrectio carnis*, and in due course into *resurrectio carnis hujus*; and I cannot forbear to add the statement of Bachiarus, who in the early fifth century defended his orthodoxy before the Pope in these terms:

We confess that the flesh of our resurrection is an entire and perfect (resurrection) of this, in which we live in the present age, whether we are governed by good morals or give in to evil works, in order that in it we may be able either to suffer the torments of punishment for evil deeds, or receive the rewards of good things for good deeds. Nor do we say, as some most absurdly do, that another flesh will be raised up instead of this one, but this very flesh, with no member cut off from it nor any other part of the body abandoned.

It is easy to smile at this *naïveté*, but equally it should not be difficult to see the motives that lay behind it. One motive has already been brought out in the quotation from 2 Clement. If you remember that your flesh is to be raised up you will keep it pure. This is very close to Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 6¹²⁻¹⁵, except that Paul speaks not of the flesh but of the body—a distinction which Bachiarus was not alone in failing to grasp. A second motive appears in Ignatius. The resurrection of Jesus was a resurrection of the flesh, a fact which secures (against the Docetists) the reality of His whole fleshly ministry; and it was their conviction of, their actual contact with, His fleshly existence after His resurrection that gave the apostles their confidence and victory in the face of death. That is, they themselves looked forward to a fleshly (as well as spiritual) resurrection, and this hope was linked with a realistic and anti-docetic estimate of the person of Christ Himself.¹² Ignatius, indeed, has another interest in this matter, which appears when he describes the bread of the eucharist as the medicine of immortality, the antidote against death (*Ephesians* 20); but to discuss this would take us too far from our main theme.

Among Christians who would otherwise be described as orthodox there is a growing tendency to think of the future life in not merely corporeal but carnal terms. What lies before the Christian is a raising up of the flesh he now has. If he has kept it pure he will be rewarded; if not, in his impure flesh he will suffer.

A second line of development can be traced in early Christian thought, and this too has clearly discernible motivation. We have already heard

echoes of it, in (for example) Justin. The trend of gnostic thought was to reject the flesh as intrinsically evil (this incidentally is not really a Greek but an oriental view), and to look forward to its annihilation in death, and to the correspondingly brighter burning of the inward spark of divine life.

At its worst, Christian gnosticism was fundamentally unbiblical speculation destructive alike of Christian faith and Christian morals; but the whole phenomenon of gnosticism cannot be dismissed in these terms, and there are places where it seems to do more justice to the Pauline teaching we have glanced at than do some of the more reputable patristic writers. I propose to illustrate this briefly from some of the recently recovered gnostic texts.

It is characteristic of gnosticism that it individualizes the biblical eschatology. Thus we may compare with the New Testament parable of the Pearl of Great Price the variation, similar in form but decidedly different in emphasis, found in the Gospel of Thomas :

The kingdom of the Father is like a man, a merchant, who possessing merchandise [and] found a pearl. That merchant was prudent. He sold the merchandise, he bought the one pearl for himself. Do you also seek for the treasure which fails not, which endures, there where no moth comes near to devour and [where] no worm destroys.¹³

Contempt of the flesh appears in *Logion* 37 :

His disciples said : When wilt thou be revealed to us and when will we see thee? Jesus said : When you take off your clothing without being ashamed, and take your clothes and put them under your feet as the little children and tread on them, then [shall you behold] the Son of the Living (One) and you shall not fear.

This is scarcely a scriptural outlook. But in *Logion* 51 there is a biblical truth which the Church too often overlooked :

His disciples said to him : When will the repose of the dead come about and when will the new world come? He said to them : What you expect has come, but you know it not.

This point may be taken farther by means of some quotations from the Gospel of Philip, which calls in question any facile understanding of death and life.

A Gentile man does not die, for he has never lived that he should die. He who has come to believe in the truth has found life, and this man is in danger of dying, for he is alive since the day Christ came.¹⁴

Saying 21 makes a similar point with regard to the resurrection of the Lord himself, and Saying 90 returns to the same theme :

Those who say 'They will die first and rise again' are in error. If they do not first receive the resurrection while they live, when they die they will receive nothing.

In other words, it is useless simply to look for an act of resurrection in the future; there can be no such act in the future if an act of resurrection has not already taken place. The decisive moment of vivification must take place before death; otherwise there will be nothing to look forward to after death. That this is related to Paul's own belief is clear, but in itself it might be no more than the error contained in the belief of Hymenaeus and Philetus (2

Tim 2¹⁶) that 'the resurrection' had already happened. The question is, what will take place as the third step, after the inauguration of new life, and the death of the body? An answer, obscure and not entirely satisfactory, but with an even clearer Pauline ring, is given in the Gospel of Philip.

Some are afraid lest they rise naked. Because of this they wish to rise in the flesh, and they do not know that those who bear the flesh [it is they who are] naked; those who . . . themselves to unclothe themselves [it is they who are] not naked. 'Flesh [and blood shall] not inherit the kingdom [of God].' What is this which will not inherit? This which we have. But what is this which will inherit? That which belongs to Jesus with his blood. Because of this he said: He who shall not eat my flesh and drink my blood has no life in him. What is it? His flesh is the logos, and his blood is the Holy Spirit. He who has received these has food and drink and clothing. For myself, I find fault with the others who say that it will not rise. Then both of these are at fault. Thou sayest that the flesh will not rise; but tell me what will rise, that we may honour thee. Thou sayest the spirit in the flesh, and it is also this light in the flesh. But this too is a logos which is in the flesh, for whatever thou shalt say thou sayest nothing outside the flesh. It is necessary to rise in this flesh, in which everything exists.¹⁵

The divergence of a gnostic heresy, which nevertheless preserved some of the truths of the New Testament faith, and an anti-gnostic orthodoxy, which nevertheless petrified where it did not deny fundamental Christian conviction, is the great tragedy of the post-apostolic age. It is well illustrated by the particular theme of this lecture. The story I have sketched may be roughly compared to a converging beam of light. A variety of rays, the sombre half-light of Hades and Sheol, the intellectual conception of the immortality of the soul, the often crude notion of reawakened corpses, is brought to a blazing focus, where all half-truths find their full realization, in the resurrection of Jesus. But no sooner is the focus reached than it is passed, and the beam of light fans out again, and not without distortion, so that some confine themselves to a grossly materialist conception of the resurrection of this flesh, others to mystical abstractions or sacramentarian realism. The Christian man who is bereaved of his loved ones, who in the end himself faces the last enemy, can be satisfied with nothing less than the full content of New Testament teaching; and our study has been pure antiquarianism if we are not now prepared to grasp this teaching more firmly and completely.

What we have seen in our historical sketch has been, first, the development among Greeks and Hebrews of a variety of categories in which men's hope for a blessed life after the death of the body could be expressed, and second, the disintegration of the New Testament conviction of the victory of Christ into partial and doctrinaire statements, expressing now one aspect, now another, of a comprehensive belief, according to the taste and preconceived notions of believers. The New Testament (taken as a whole) called on the full range of pre-Christian categories, and needed to do so, because its own conception was many-sided and demanded a wide range of expression. Its writers all accept, and in a variety of ways develop, the fact that Jesus of Nazareth, having truly died, was truly raised from the dead—a fact of history, but a fact without precedent or parallel, and of unique significance in the

history of mankind. Equally, they accept, in varying forms, as a fact of the future, that the work of Jesus will be consummated in final victory. The life of Christians is an eschatological existence, totally determined by its position between these two poles, and it follows that, for the individual Christian and for the human race as a whole, the divine gift of life may be viewed under two aspects. God has given life to men, and he will give it; God has raised them from the dead, and he will raise them from the dead. And the gift that has already been given, and the resurrection that has already happened, though not final, are more than metaphorical. If any man is in Christ, there is a new act of creation; old things have passed away, new things have come into being (2 Cor 5¹⁷).

The New Testament does not borrow precisely the old Jewish conception of the rising up of corpses (though before long, Papias for example, was to do so, in the crudest way imaginable). In a passage we have already studied Paul insists that the resurrected body, though continuous with the natural body, is not identical with it, since it is a spiritual body (1 Cor 15⁴). Similarly the New Testament does not simply reproduce the 'Greek' notion of the immortality of the soul, since it makes clear that what man has inherited from Adam is death. As man and sinner he can expect no other wage. The New Testament writers commit themselves to no ready-made doctrine; but just as, beyond question, they use and adapt the notion of resurrection so also they may be said to use and adapt that of immortality, though the latter is less widespread in the New Testament than, and is secondary to, the former. Man as man is not immortal; neither as man is he assured of resurrection. As Christian, as the new man, he receives a present life that assures him of future life, and a preliminary resurrection that assures him of final resurrection; may we not say, he receives a kind of immortality in the assurance that God will raise him up at the last day? Man may be said to become immortal, not in his own right, as being, or having, a soul, but because God assures him that He will raise him up at the last day. It is this pregnant compound of gift and promise that gnostics and orthodox, from the second century onwards, were to rend in two. It must be remembered that the New Testament itself uses the term immortality, and its near synonym incorruption. Immortality belongs in the first instance to God alone:

The blessed and only potentate, the king of those who reign as kings and lord of those who exercise lordship, who alone possesses immortality (ἀθανασία), dwelling in light unapproachable, whom no man ever saw, or can see (1 Tim 6¹⁵⁻¹⁶).

But men may seek incorruption (ἀφθαρσία, Rom 2⁷), and God in giving men the Gospel, has brought to light the incorruption they seek (2 Tim 1¹⁰). The passage in which these words are used most frequently (1 Cor 15^{42, 50, 52-4}) looks unmistakably to the future, to the last day when God will raise the dead in a state of incorruption, and miraculously transform those who still survive. But as we have already seen, we must put 2 Corinthians 5 along with 1 Corinthians 15, not to contradict it but to supplement it, and 2 Corinthians 5¹ speaks of an eternal dwelling already existing in heaven.

The fact that the New Testament hope is thus, in some sense, related both to the idea of personal immortality and to that of resurrection, accounts for

the apparent inconsistencies in the Pauline epistles. It has often been pointed out that whereas in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15 Paul draws an apocalyptic picture of a future resurrection, thereby implying that the Christian unfortunate enough to die before the *parousia* can hope for nothing more than sleep in a bodiless nakedness (in Sheol perhaps) until the last day, in 2 Corinthians 5¹⁰ and Philippians 1²³ he implies that death is gain, since immediately the departed Christian is at home with the Lord—which is very far better. It must be granted at once that in these two groups of passages Paul is not saying the same thing. This is because he is applying a rich and diverse doctrine in different directions for different purposes. For the Thessalonians, what really matters is that their dead will not miss the joy of those who survive till the *parousia*. In Corinth, denial of the future aspect of the Christian life had to be countered by its reaffirmation. But elsewhere we find a Christian man face to face with the question: 'What happens next?' And Paul at least is confident that life in the future will mean what life means now—Christ.

A further key to these apparently inconsistent statements is perhaps to be found in the idea of sleep. The significance of this metaphor has been sought by Dr Cullmann (and by Shakespeare before him) in the thought of 'what dreams may come', but it may rather be found in the notion of timelessness. Sleep is essentially timeless. Between the moment of falling asleep and that of waking five minutes or five hours by the clock may intervene, but the sleeper himself passes instantaneously from the one to the other. So after death the intervals of time lose their relevance; for those who are in Christ, there is only a 'for ever with the Lord'. And the Christian may well be thankful for the manifold complexity of his hope. It is not grounded in himself—his intellectual processes, his virtues, or his religious observances—but in God alone. Yet God Himself has assured His creatures of the future, first by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and secondly by implanting in man, in virtue not of his creation but of his redemption, the seed of immortality. But this immortality is not an intellectually and individualistically conceived survival, but a hope that is realized only in the completed people of God in the timeless life beyond the last day.

¹ The 1964 Drew Lecture on Immortality (New College, London) given on 6th November.

² Cullmann, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

³ *He That Cometh* (Oxford, 1956), p. 273.

⁴ I had written this sentence before I saw the Drew Lecture for 1963, and am glad now to be able to appeal to Dr N. H. Snaithe's 'Justice and Immortality' (*Scottish Journal of Theology*, XVII.(1964).309-24).

⁵ B. Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato* (Oxford, 1875) i.423.

⁶ *T.W.N.T.*, VI.377.46ff.

⁷ *Bell. Jud.*, ii.163.

⁸ *S.B.* iv. 1017.

⁹ See M. Black, in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology* (Cambridge, 1956), p. 175; also *The Scrolls and Christian Origins* (London, 1961), pp. 138f, 190f; and Millar Burrows, *More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London, 1958), p. 346.

¹⁰ See the note by W. G. Kümmel in his revised edition (Tübingen, 1949) of Lietzmann's *An die Korinther I, II*, pp. 192f.

¹¹ *Trypho*, 80.

¹² See especially *Smyrnaeans* 3.

¹³ *Logion*, 76.

¹⁴ *Saying* 4.

¹⁵ *Saying* 23.