

## Life After Death: Resurrection or the Intermediate State?

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The shattering of illusions is no doubt a painful process; yet if this should lead to a deepening of our comprehension of the apostolic message of the New Testament, the distress will be more than offset by joy at new discovery. The reader is invited to take a closer look at the almost universally accepted opinion that death for the faithful means an immediate presence with Christ in a realm beyond the skies. The New Testament is, of course, everywhere concerned with life beyond the grave. An important question arises, however, as to how far our cherished traditional notions about departing at death to heaven are consonant with the New Testament view of our future.

The Ministry of Christian Information (active in Britain), whose aim is to provide instruction about Christian belief on a wide variety of subjects, tackles this subject in a pamphlet entitled "Life after Death." Here we find it stated that "Paul described death as being 'absent from the body and at home with the Lord' (2 Cor. 5:6, 8), and 'departing to be with Christ' (Phil. 1:23, 24). At death the spirit is immediately clothed until the resurrection with a *temporary* body. . . . At death the natural body is laid in the grave, where it returns to dust and remains till the resurrection, when it is raised 'a spiritual body.'"

A quick glance at the verses offered as proof-texts might well satisfy the enquirer, provided, that is, that one or two questions are not posed: Why the enormous emphasis throughout the New Testament on the

resurrection at the return of Christ, if in fact the real moment of glory is to be achieved at death? If the resurrection is to be genuinely a resurrection "from the dead" (as the New Testament describes it), how can it also, according to the popular scheme, be the conferring of spiritual bodies upon already living departed spirits? Would this really be a resurrection at all? The traditional idea becomes even more perplexing when we see that the New Testament verb describing the act of resurrecting the dead is the ordinary word for "to awake from sleep." What possible sense can be made of the "waking up" of already fully conscious spirits in possession of the beatific vision?

### I. THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

The fact is that the average churchgoer has not given the matter much attention. The assumption is that the experts must know what they are talking about. The traditional idea is thus embraced wholeheartedly; ways must be found of squaring it with the New Testament. The task is apparently performed with ease, as the Ministry of Christian Information has shown. But the nagging question remains: What sense can be made of an "awakening" (i.e., resurrection) of the living spirits of the departed? And there are other difficulties, not the least of which is the striking lack of passages in the New Testament describing any present conscious state for the dead. For while the New Testament states clearly that Jesus has "passed into the heavens" (Heb. 4:14), no such description is applied to others who have died. The latter are constantly pictured as having fallen asleep, and as *remaining asleep* until the resurrection; and the resurrection is invariably placed in the *future*, at the return of Christ.

There can be no doubt that what the Apostle hoped to attain to was the resurrection of the dead, to coincide with the reappearance of Jesus at the end of the age:

. . . if by any means I might attain to the resurrection of the dead. . . . This one thing I do . . . I press toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. . . . For our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body . . . (Phil. 3:11, 13, 14, 20, 21).

This passage contains the three indispensable elements of Paul's eschato-

logical view: Resurrection, Second Coming (“the Lord from heaven”), and change of state from mortal to immortal. In complete agreement with the verses quoted, the great exposition of resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 places the waking of the dead in Christ at the Second Coming and equates this event with the moment when mortality is exchanged for immortality:

In Christ shall all be *made alive*. But every man in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s, *at His Coming*. . . . So also is the resurrection *of the dead*. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. . . . As we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. . . . Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption. . . . We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trumpet*, for the trumpet shall sound and *the dead* shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. . . . *Then* shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:22, 23, 42, 49, 50-54).

How, we are bound to ask, can this passage possibly be reconciled with the popular concept that the departed dead are *already* in possession of immortality? Isn’t it plainly stated that *resurrection* confers immortality? And resurrection is unquestionably placed “at His Coming,” “at the last trumpet.” It is then that the dead shall be “raised,” i.e., “wakened,” “*made alive*.” Is it not clear beyond all question that the dead must remain in the grave until they are “raised” from it? There is no suggestion here that resurrection means the reuniting of an *already* conscious spirit with its body. We are faced with an irreconcilable contradiction, if the dead have already been made alive. For it is quite specifically stated that they are to be *made alive* “at His Coming” (v. 23).

In 1 Thessalonians 4, the question had arisen in the minds of the believers as to what would be the fate of those Christians who had died before the expected return of Jesus. Now Paul could have so easily removed all anxiety by pointing out that the dead “in Christ” were already happily with Christ, having at the moment of death overcome the grave and passed to their reward in heaven. It is well known that he says nothing of the sort; rather he reinforces the certainty that at the coming of Jesus, the dead in Christ, those “asleep” (v. 14), will be resurrected and united with those who survive until the great day. The antidote to despair was the prospect of the resurrection at the future return of Christ, not the

consciousness of the dead in another location, of which “intermediate state” Paul says not one word. It is only *through resurrection* that the dead achieve the goal of being “with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17).

Such is our reluctance to question the accepted scheme that we have not taken seriously the remarks of New Testament scholars who, though they may not be concerned with what *we* choose to believe, nevertheless make it quite clear that the New Testament writers pinned their entire hope on the Second Coming and the resurrection to occur at that time—and not before. The important question is whether we have not tried to “jump the gun” in ascribing immortality to departed spirits *apart from* resurrection. To do this we must begin with an assumption of an intermediate conscious state for the dead between death and the resurrection—and then “find” it in the New Testament. A more scientific method would be to start with an open mind and test the received hypothesis against Scripture. It is the purpose of this article to suggest that such scrutiny will show the received teaching to be unsound. It cannot claim a basis in apostolic Christianity.

There are two passages in the New Testament which are supposed to provide solid evidence for Paul’s belief in the departed dead being immediately “with Christ.” But before examining these, we note the remarks of J.A.T. Robinson about 1 Corinthians 15 (quoted earlier), the resurrection chapter. His observations suggest that there has been some “foul play” in this matter of trying to square our popular belief with Paul’s teachings. This fact should arouse our suspicions, for it is clear that if the popular view does not accord with Scripture, we should expect just such evidence of unfair handling of the New Testament. J.A.T. Robinson says:

The reading of 1 Corinthians at funerals *reinforces the impression* that this chapter is about the moment of death; in fact it revolves around two points: the third day (Christ’s resurrection) and the *last day*. . . . The modern age tries to apply Paul’s language to a single resurrection *thought of as following immediately upon death*.<sup>1</sup>

These facts are sufficient to show that this central passage has not been allowed its proper sense; it has been forced to lend support to an idea unknown to Paul.

There is evidence of similar mishandling in another section of Scripture normally quoted in support of the popular view. J.A.T. Robinson has this to say:

<sup>1</sup>*In the End God*, Collins, Fontana Books, 1968, 105, emphasis mine.

It is to 2 Corinthians 5:1-8 that the modern view, if it refers to Scripture at all, makes its appeal: "We are willing rather to be at home with the Lord." This is commonly interpreted to mean, *in clear opposition to 1 Corinthians 15*, that our spiritual body is waiting for us to put on at the moment of death.<sup>2</sup>

Elsewhere Robinson speaks of the

remarkable transformation which overtook Christian eschatology almost as soon as the ink of the New Testament was dry. And it affects the centre of interest or pivotal point of the whole subject. The interest of modern man in Christian eschatology centres in the fact and moment of death. . . . But it comes as a shock to realize *how foreign is this perspective which we take for granted* to the whole New Testament picture upon which Christianity is *supposedly based*. For in the New Testament the point around which hope and interest revolve is not the moment of death at all, but the day of the appearance of Christ in the glory of His Kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

This analysis by a leading New Testament scholar provides us with the necessary key to unraveling the perplexing discrepancy between the actual facts of the New Testament in regard to life after death and traditional thinking on this subject. The truth is that our scheme represents a "remarkable transformation" of the New Testament plan. Our view is quite "foreign" to the New Testament upon which Christianity is "supposedly based." The only wise course is to face the unpalatable fact that Christian belief has undergone a radical change. It appears that the teachings of the apostles have been mishandled in an effort to justify a view of eschatology unknown to the writers of the New Testament. The all-important moment of the coming of the Kingdom of Christ at his return has been replaced in our thinking by the moment of the individual's death. Our understanding of this matter is therefore not recognizably Christian by New Testament standards, and on a question so central to the faith. History shows, however, that rather than admit this, we persist with the illusion that a satisfactory compromise can be achieved between original Christianity and its development in a transformed state. We are apparently unwilling to disturb our own tradition, while wishing to enjoy the comfort of the belief that our faith rests upon apostolic teaching. The compromise can only be attempted, however, by a subtle change of language. For the New Testament speaks only of the resurrection of *dead*

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 42, emphasis mine.

*people*, who are to be raised to life at the return of Christ. We speak—and the creeds reflect this—of the resurrection of the *body*, thus opening the way for the insertion of the belief that the actual conscious person in a disembodied soul or spirit form<sup>4</sup> has already gone to his reward in heaven, while his body alone awaits the resurrection. We attempt thus to reserve at least some significance for the future corporate resurrection, so clearly taught in the New Testament, by maintaining that it is a resurrection of *bodies only, as distinct from real persons*. The crucial question is whether the New Testament countenances such a distinction between the body and a separable, fully conscious "soul" or "spirit." The student of history will know that the Hebrews knew nothing of the doctrine of the innate "immortality of the soul," which owes its origin to the Greeks.

The inevitable result of the new "twist" which was given to eschatology is of course to shift the center of interest away from the future resurrection to the moment of death, and in consequence—and this is highly significant—away from the great event which the New Testament everywhere associates with the future resurrection, the Second Coming and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Quite clearly it is what happens to the conscious person after death, not what happens to his body, which captures our interest. The transformed system, taking its cue from alien Platonic ideas, introduced into the original faith the (to the Hebrews) foreign concept of the immortality of the soul. Scope was then available for the placing of the "departed soul" in conscious bliss immediately at death. The whole idea of resurrection at a later time then becomes quite secondary, if not entirely unnecessary. No more deadly blow could have been struck at the entire biblical eschatological scheme.

The business of trying to read the popular system into the New Testament writings involves some questionable handling of the two or three passages which stand the best chance of being accommodated to the traditional belief. If these verses cannot bear the weight placed on them, we may have to concede that what we have been believing is untrue to the New Testament. Faced with this possibility, scholars of the "demythologizing" school claim that one eschatological system is as good as another. All are "myths," and whether they are found inside or outside the New Testament, they offer no divinely authoritative statement about what actually happens to us after death. However, for those who are convinced

<sup>4</sup>The Ministry of Christian Information attempts to avoid the notion of disembodiment in the intermediate state by positing the (unscriptural) idea of a "temporary body."

that Paul's view owes its origin (as he himself claims) to the Spirit of Jesus, such an escape into agnosticism is not satisfactory at all; and at that point we are left with no recourse but to abandon the traditional view in favor of the original teaching preserved in the New Testament. Church history shows that there has been an earnest minority of many denominational persuasions, who have taken this course, while the mainstream has persisted with its traditions.<sup>5</sup> The challenge to choose the apostolic faith over the later traditions faces each individual believer.

## II. PHILIPPIANS 1:23 AND 2 CORINTHIANS 5:8

Justification for the almost universally held opinion that Christianity teaches that the dead are conscious with God at the moment of death is commonly based on Philippians 1:23. Paul here finds himself torn between a desire to remain with the believers and his longing "to depart and be with the Lord." Corroboration of this is sought in 2 Corinthians 5. Paul there expresses the wish to be "absent from the body and present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). Isolated from their immediate context and from the wider context of both Old and New Testaments as a whole, no doubt these verses can be made to bolster the popular view. A closer look will show on what shaky ground the whole attempt rests. It is undeniable, as we have seen, that the New Testament everywhere strains toward the Second Coming of Christ and the resurrection of the faithful, which is consistently placed at that Great Day, as the collective resurrection of all the saints. Paul has a precise and simple system of resurrection: "In Christ shall all be made alive. . . . Those who belong to Christ *at His Coming*" (1 Cor. 15:22, 23). In 1 Thessalonians 4, he offers comfort to the believers in connection with those Christians who are said to be "sleeping"—an extraordinary term to use if he thought that they were already fully conscious in bliss with the Lord. There is no need for the surviving Christians to grieve, because all will be reunited at the future resurrection. In a similar situation today, the Church would presumably be consoled with claims that the dead were already alive with God. The fact that Paul says nothing like this demonstrates the gulf between the two systems. For

<sup>5</sup>The history of "Conditional Immortality" is admirably documented by L.E. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1965. A recent study of the subject appears in *Daring to Differ, Adventures in Conditional Immortality*, by Sidney Hatch, Brief Bible Studies, 1991.

the contemporary churchgoer the future resurrection can at best be only an afterthought, all that is really decisive having, as he thinks, already taken place at death.

What, then, of Paul's statement in Philippians 1:23 about departing to be with Christ? If this single verse is read without reference to 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Thessalonians 4, and his subsequent remarks *in the same letter* (Phil. 3:11-21), it would be possible to gain the impression that Paul expected to be with Christ immediately at death. But this would be to contradict his whole thinking, as we find it explained, much more fully, in the other passages. What Paul was really aiming for is fortunately clarified later in the same epistle: ". . . If by any means I might attain to the resurrection. . . . We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ [from heaven], who shall change our vile body so that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body" (Phil. 3:11, 20). It is beyond question that he sees as his goal the attainment of resurrection at the return of Christ. It would therefore be unfair to read his remarks about departing to be with Christ as relating to a quite different aspiration, one *not* involving resurrection, and thus quite distinct from his desire for the Last Day. The popular belief implies that a Christian can be alive with Christ, *apart from* resurrection. This will mean that death is not death in any real sense, but the continuation of life in another realm. This seriously undermines the concept of resurrection as a real return *from the dead*. Paul must therefore imply a departure to be with Christ through death and subsequent resurrection. The exact sequence of time is not detailed in this single verse; it must be supplied from the fuller account he gives elsewhere. Paul passes over the interval between death and resurrection.

If we now consider his statement about being "absent from the body and present with the Lord," we shall find that it, too, is set in a context which because of its striking similarity to 1 Corinthians 15 (written only a year earlier) must refer also to future resurrection, not to an intermediate state following immediately upon death. This can be seen clearly from the general statement with which Paul prefaces his account of the Christian hope of attaining a "spiritual body": ". . . We believe, therefore we speak; knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up through Jesus and present us with you. . . . Therefore we faint not" (2 Cor. 4:14, 16). These remarks should warn us not to try to read into Paul's following account ideas about a future state divorced from resurrection. There are three clear points of contact between 2 Corinthians 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, and when these are noted it will be impossible to maintain that Paul

is dealing with two *different* “termini.” The first feature common to both passages is the notion of being “clothed with immortality”: “For indeed we groan in this tabernacle, longing to be *clothed* with our dwelling which comes to us from heaven. . . . We do not wish to be unclothed (i.e., disembodied), but to be *clothed*, so that mortality may be swallowed up in life” (2 Cor. 5:2, 4). Exactly the same point is made in 1 Corinthians 15: “For it behoves this corruptible to be *clothed with immortality* . . . . Then shall come to pass the word that has been written: ‘Death was swallowed up in victory’ ” (1 Cor. 15:53, 54).

Secondly, common to both passages is the appearance of the Lord, or salvation from heaven:

Second Corinthians 5:2: “We are longing to be clothed with our dwelling which is *from heaven*.”

First Corinthians 15:47: “The second man, Christ, is the Lord [arriving] from heaven.”

First Corinthians 15:23: “Those belonging to Christ [will be resurrected] *at His Coming*.”

The third unifying idea is Paul’s reference to mortality being superseded by immortality:

Second Corinthians 5:4: “We wish to be clothed, so that mortality may be *swallowed up* by life.”

First Corinthians 15:54: “When this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the word that has been written: ‘Death was *swallowed up* in victory.’ ”

These points of contact surely rule out any possibility that Paul has two entirely different events in mind, not least in view of the fact that he is writing to the same people, and within a short space of time. To take 2 Corinthians 5 as referring to the moment of death, to mean that each individual receives immortality independently at death is, as J.A.T. Robinson says, to read the passage “in clear opposition to 1 Corinthians 15.”<sup>6</sup> The time has surely come to stop making Paul contradict himself, and to acknowledge the remarkable consistency which extends to all his writings on this central matter of life after death.

We may demonstrate our point more fully by collating five relevant passages in a composite version. It will be clear that Paul looked for a single goal, that of the resurrection of all the faithful at the Coming of Christ. That moment alone is decisive for all the New Testament writers.

<sup>6</sup>*In the End God*, 106.

Paul may be allowed to speak for himself as follows (italics call attention to the unity of his thinking). The basis of Paul’s hope for the future is stated in 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:2:

And having the same spirit of faith, as it is written, “I believed, therefore I spoke”; we also believe and we also therefore speak, knowing that He who resurrected the Lord Jesus will *resurrect us* also and present us with you. . . . Therefore we do not faint. . . . We do not consider the visible things but those not visible. For the visible things are temporary, but the invisible pertain to the [coming] Age.<sup>7</sup> We know that if our earthly house of this [coming] Age, in the heavens. For indeed we *groan* in this tabernacle, longing to be clothed with our dwelling which comes to us *from heaven* (2 Cor. 5:2,3). We are awaiting the Saviour, the *Lord Jesus Christ from heaven* (Phil. 3:20). The Second Man is *the Lord from heaven* (1 Cor. 15:47). We *groan* in ourselves awaiting the redemption of our body. . . . The sufferings of this present time are not to be compared with the glory about to be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation awaits the *revelation* of the Sons of God (Rom. 8:18, 19, 23). If we suffer together, we shall also be glorified together (Rom. 8:17). When Christ our life is *manifested*, then you also shall be *manifested* with Him in glory (Col. 3:4). If indeed we shall not be found naked. . . . We do not wish to be unclothed, but to be *clothed*, so that *mortality may be swallowed up in life* (2 Cor. 5:3, 4). We shall not all fall asleep, but we shall all be changed, in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet (1 Cor. 15:51). In Christ shall all be made alive . . . those that are Christ’s, at His Coming (1 Cor. 15:23). The trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible. For it behoves this *corruptible to be clothed with incorruptibility* . . . . Then shall come to pass the saying: “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:52-54). Being always confident therefore, and knowing that being at home in the body we are absent from the Lord . . . we are confident . . . and willing rather to be absent from the body and *present with the Lord* (2 Cor. 5:6-8) . . . to die together and to live together (2 Cor. 7:3). For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we who remain until the Coming of the Lord shall be caught away together in the clouds to meet the Lord; thus shall we always be *with the Lord* (1 Thes. 4:16, 17). I have a desire to depart and be *with Christ* (Phil. 1:23). If by any means I may arrive at *the resurrection of the dead* (Phil. 3:11).

<sup>7</sup>The adjective “aionios” is used by New Testament writers as a technical term to describe the realities of the coming Messianic age. Cp. Nigel Turner, *Christian Words*, T & T Clark, 1980, 455-457.

### III. A RETURN TO THE NEW TESTAMENT SCHEME

The restoration of the biblical scheme will resolve the unwarranted tensions which have been created by our efforts to superimpose the traditional belief upon Scripture. Firstly, resurrection will mean a real transition of dead people from death to life, and that great future event will regain its central position in Christian thinking. Secondly, the individual will be conceived of as an indivisible unity, not as a soul deprived of its body at death. In this way the confusion introduced by Greek notions of the departing soul may be purged from the contemporary Christian outlook. Thirdly, the intensity of the enthusiasm for the return of Christ, shared by all the New Testament writers, will be restored. The traditional emphasis on the moment of death, which is of little consequence to the New Testament writers, has most successfully dissipated that intensity of expectation, so that the Christian view of the future is all but unknown in many church circles. Finally, there will be no need to bend isolated verses of the New Testament to make them conform to a non-biblical tradition.

If it be granted that the simple scheme of “sleep” followed by “awakening” in resurrection, as described above, most satisfactorily accounts for the biblical data (as well as being supported by the evidence of early church history), it is fair to ask why Philippians 1:23, taken alone, appears to lend some support to the notion of an immediate presence with Christ. The problem is easily solved, if it is understood that for those who fall asleep in death, the passage of time is of no consequence whatever. The believer who wakes in the resurrection will have had no sense of the interval between death and the resurrection.<sup>8</sup> But this is very different from saying that no time actually elapses between death and the resurrection. The New Testament is everywhere committed to the belief that eschatological events are firmly rooted in future history, and that time will continue until (and after) the return of Christ and the resurrection of the faithful. The current tendency to remove all the great events of Christianity from the sphere of real history is playing havoc with the original faith of the apostles. There is therefore all the more reason to guard the

<sup>8</sup>Cf. F.F. Bruce in *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, Eerdmans, 1977, 312, n. 40: “The tension created by the postulated interval between death and resurrection might be relieved today if it were suggested that in the consciousness of the departed believer there is no interval between dissolution and investiture, however long an interval might be measured by the calendar of earthbound human history.” This is exactly what believers in Conditional Immortality have always proposed.

simple eschatological teachings of the New Testament against all demythologizing.

### IV. CORROBORATING TESTIMONY

In support of our thesis we append the following observations from scholars of biblical theology.

The Bible writers, holding fast to the conviction that the created order owes its existence to the wisdom and love of God and is therefore essentially good, could not conceive of life after death as a disembodied existence (“We shall not be found naked”—2 Cor. 5:3), but as a renewal under new conditions of the intimate unity of body and soul which was human life as they knew it. Hence death was thought of as *the death of the whole man*, and such phrases as “freedom from death,” imperishability or immortality could only properly be used to describe what is meant by the phrase eternal or living God “who only has immortality” (1 Tim. 6:16). Man does not possess within himself the quality of deathlessness, but must, if he is to overcome the destructive power of death, receive it as the gift of God “who raised Christ from the dead,” and put death aside like a covering garment (1 Cor. 15:53, 54). It is through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that this possibility for man (2 Tim. 1:10) has been brought to life and the hope confirmed that the corruption (Rom. 11:7) which is a universal feature of human life shall be effectively overcome.<sup>9</sup>

The hope of the early church centred on the resurrection of the Last Day. It is this which *first* calls the dead into eternal life (1 Cor. 15, Phil. 3:20ff.). This resurrection *happens to the man and not only to the body*. Paul speaks of the resurrection not “of the body” but “of the dead.” This understanding of the resurrection implicitly understands *death as also affecting the whole man*. . . . *Thus the original biblical concepts have been replaced by ideas from Hellenistic gnostic dualism*. The New Testament idea of the resurrection which affects *the whole man* has had to give way to the immortality of the soul. The Last Day also loses its significance, for souls have received all that is decisively important long before this. Eschatological tension is no longer strongly directed to the day of Jesus’ Coming. *The difference between this and the hope of the New Testament is very great.*<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Alan Richardson, ed., *A Theological Wordbook of the New Testament*, London: SCM Press, 111, 112, emphasis added.

<sup>10</sup>Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 413, 414, emphasis added.

The nearest thing in our ordinary experience to the Jewish and early Christian idea of death and resurrection is falling asleep and waking up; and it is a very significant fact that the first unmistakable reference to the resurrection of the dead in the Old Testament is made in terms of sleeping and waking: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." And equally, when there is no expectation of a resurrection the natural way to express it is in terms of a sleep from which there is no awakening: "Man lies down and rises not: Till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake nor be roused out of their sleep."

Now one of the standing wonders of life is just the fact that when I come out of my oblivion any fine morning, I am at once aware that I am the same person that lived in my home yesterday and went to sleep there last night. The task I left unfinished yesterday is still there, still my task, and I can take it up where I left off. The plans I was making yesterday are still there waiting for further consideration and elaboration. This continuity of personality and life is a great marvel; and it is only excessive familiarity with it that hides its wonder from us. When we try to think of death and resurrection, as the first Christians thought of them, we cannot do better than think in terms of sleeping and waking.<sup>11</sup>

It is important that we understand clearly what Christians mean by the resurrection of the dead. We do not mean mere survival of the soul. That is a pagan notion, and the Bible has practically nothing to say about the souls of men apart from their bodies.<sup>12</sup>

The Christian doctrine of life after death . . . is a doctrine of resurrection. In resurrection, man regains a life that has been lost. He comes into being from nothingness. . . . Death for a Christian does not mean a shifting from one mode of being to another but the very destruction of life, the drifting of being into non-being. All the thinkers of Christianity have been trying to evade this notion of death as the complete destruction of life. Where they succeed, the notion of resurrection means next to nothing.<sup>13</sup>

Men have speculated like this: At death the soul is separated from the body. It appears then before God in a preliminary judgment (mentioned nowhere in Scripture) and enters into a preliminary state either of bless-

<sup>11</sup>T.W. Manson, *The Servant-Messiah*, Cambridge: University Press, 1953, 90ff.

<sup>12</sup>H.M. Cundy, cited from correspondence in Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, Vol. 2, 821

<sup>13</sup>Seiichi Hatano, cited by C. Michalson, *Japanese Contributions to Christian Theology*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960, 123.

edness or condemnation. Then, when the last trumpet sounds, the body is resurrected and rejoined with the soul, and complete once more, the reunited body and soul appear for the final, public judgment scene, from there to enter either into final bliss or final condemnation. *It is no wonder that, with this view, men have had little use for a resurrection, and have finally dropped the notion altogether and have been satisfied with the redemption of only the soul.*

To die then means to pass to the resurrection and the judgment *at the end of time*.<sup>14</sup> Even if someone should say that all men sleep until the final trumpet sounds, what is the passage of time for those who are asleep? *The transition from the moment of death to the resurrection would still be instantaneous for them.* It would be no different from going to bed at night and being waked in the morning.<sup>15</sup>

Strange as this sounds in some ears, the Bible knows nothing of the immortality of the soul separable from the body. It knows only of a resurrection of the total man from the dead.

Man in the Bible is a psychosomatic unity, and as such he passes through death to the resurrection and the judgment to the fulfillment, from faith through death and resurrection to sight. This makes all speculations about a place of the departed spirits absolutely futile.<sup>16</sup>

The fact that later Christianity effected a link between the two beliefs [the Christian expectation of the resurrection of the dead and the Greek belief in the immortality of the soul] and that today the ordinary Christian simply confuses them, has not persuaded me to be silent about what I, in common with most exegetes, regard as truth; and all the more so, since the link established between the expectation of the "resurrection of the dead" and the belief in "the immortality of the soul" is not in fact a link at all but renunciation of one in favour of the other. 1 Corinthians 15 has been sacrificed for the *Phaedo*. No good purpose is served by concealing this fact, as is often done today when things that are really incompatible are combined by the following type of over-simplified reasoning: that whatever in early Christian teaching appears to us irreconcilable with the immortality of the soul, viz. the resurrection of the body, is not an *essential* affirmation for the first Christians but simply an accommodation to the mythological expressions of the thought of their time, and at the heart of

<sup>14</sup>The New Testament does not, in fact, expect time to end at the resurrection. It looks forward to the new age of the Kingdom of God on earth.

<sup>15</sup>M.J. Heineken, *Basic Christian Teachings*, Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1949, 135, 136.

<sup>16</sup>M.J. Heineken, *God in the Space Age*, The John C. Winston Co., 1959, 113.

the matter is the immortality of the soul. On the contrary we must recognize loyally that precisely those things which distinguish the Christian teaching from the Greek belief are at the heart of primitive Christianity.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* London: The Epworth Press, 1958, 5-6.