

# Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?

## *The Witness of the New Testament*

### Part Two

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#### III. THE FIRST-BORN FROM THE DEAD

##### **Between the Resurrection of Christ and the Destruction of Death**

We must take into account what it meant for the Christians when they proclaimed: Christ is risen from the dead! Above all we must bear in mind what death meant for them. We are tempted to associate these powerful affirmations with the Greek thought of the immortality of the soul, and in this way to rob them of their content. Christ is risen: that is, we stand in the new era in which death is conquered, in which corruptibility is no more. For if there is really *one* spiritual body (not an immortal soul, but a spiritual body) which has emerged from a fleshly body, then indeed the power of death is broken. Believers, according to the conviction of the first Christians, should no longer die: this was certainly their expectation in the earliest days. It must have been a problem when they discovered that Christians continued to die. But even the fact that men continue to die no longer has the same significance after the Resurrection of Christ. The fact of death is robbed of its former significance. Dying is no longer an expression of the absolute lordship of Death, but only one of Death's last contentions for lordship. Death cannot put an end to the great fact that there is *one* risen Body.

We ought to try simply to understand what the first Christians meant when they spoke of Christ as being the "first-born from the dead". However difficult it may be for us to do so, we must exclude the question

whether or not we can accept this belief. We must also at the very start leave on one side the question whether Socrates or the New Testament is right. Otherwise we shall find ourselves continually mixing alien thought-processes with those of the New Testament. We should for once simply listen to what the New Testament says. Christ the first-born from the dead! His body the first Resurrection Body, the first Spiritual Body. Where this conviction is present, the whole of life and the whole of thought must be influenced by it. The whole thought of the New Testament remains for us a book sealed with seven seals if we do not read behind every sentence there this other sentence: Death has already been overcome (death, be it noted, not the body); there is already a new creation (a new creation, be it noted, not an immortality which the soul has always possessed); the Resurrection age is already inaugurated.<sup>1</sup>

Granted that it is only inaugurated, but still it is *decisively* inaugurated. *Only* inaugurated: for death is at work, and Christians still die. The disciples experienced this as the first members of the Christian community died. This necessarily presented them with a difficult problem.<sup>2</sup> In 1 Corinthians 11:30 Paul writes that basically death and sickness should no longer occur. We still die, and still there is sickness and sin. But the Holy Spirit is already effective in our world as the power of new creation; He is already at work visibly in the primitive community in the diverse manifestations of the Spirit. In my book *Christ and Time* I have spoken of a tension between present and future, the tension between "already fulfilled" and "not yet consummated." This tension belongs *essentially* to the New Testament and is not introduced as a secondary solution born of embarrassment,<sup>3</sup> as Albert Schweitzer's disciples and Rudolph Bultmann maintain.<sup>4</sup> This tension is already present in and with Jesus. He proclaims

<sup>1</sup> If, as the Qumrân fragment most recently published by Allegro seems to confirm, the "teacher of righteousness" of this sect really was put to death and his return was awaited, still what most decisively separates this sect from the original Christian community (apart from the other differences, for which see my article, "The Significance of the Qumrân Texts," *J. B. L.*, 1955, 213ff) is the absence in it of faith in a Resurrection which has *already* occurred.

<sup>2</sup> See in this regard Ph. H. Menoud, "La mort d' Ananias et de Saphira," *Aux sources de la tradition chrétienne. Melanges offerts à M. Goguel* (1950), particularly 150ff.

<sup>3</sup> See particularly F. Buri, "Das Problem des ausgebliebenen Parusie," *Schweiz. Theol. Umschau* (1946), 97ff. See in addition O. Cullmann, "Das wahre durch die ausgebliebene Parusie gestellte neutestamentliche Problem," *Theol. Zeitschr.* 3 (1947), 177ff; also 428ff.

<sup>4</sup> R. Bultmann, "History and Eschatology in the New Testament," *New Test. Stud.*, I, 1954, 5ff.

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the Kingdom of God for the future; but on the other hand, he proclaims that the Kingdom of God has already broken in, since he himself with Holy Spirit is indeed already repulsing death by healing the sick and raising the dead (Matthew 12:28, 11:3ff, Luke 10:18) in anticipation of the victory over death which he obtains in his own death. Schweitzer is not right when he sees as the original Christian hope *only* a hope in the future; nor is C.H. Dodd when he speaks *only* of realized eschatology; still less Bultmann when he resolves the original hope of Jesus and the first Christians into existentialism. It belongs to the very stuff of the New Testament that it thinks in temporal categories, and this is because the belief that in Christ the Resurrection is achieved is the starting point of all Christian living and thinking. When one starts from this principle, then the chronological tension between “already fulfilled” and “not yet consummated” constitutes the *essence* of the Christian faith. Then the metaphor I use in *Christ and Time* characterizes the whole New Testament situation: the decisive battle has been fought in Christ’s death and Resurrection; only V-day is yet to come.

Basically the whole contemporary theological discussion turns upon this question: Is *Easter* the starting point of the Christian Church, of its existence, life, and thought? If so, we are living in an interim time.

In that case, the faith in resurrection of the New Testament becomes the cardinal point of all Christian belief. Accordingly, the fact that there is a resurrection body—Christ’s body—defines the first Christians’ whole interpretation of time. If Christ is the “first-born from the dead”, then this means that the End-time is already present. But it also means that a temporal interval separates the first-born from all other men who are not yet “born from the dead.” This means then that we live in an interim time, between Jesus’ Resurrection, which has already taken place, and our own, which will not take place until the End. It also means, moreover, that the quickening Power, the Holy Spirit, is already at work among us. Therefore Paul designates the Holy Spirit by the same term—*ἀπαρχή*, first-fruits (Romans 8:23)—as he uses for Jesus himself (1 Corinthians 15:23). There is then already a foretaste of the Resurrection. And indeed in a twofold way: our inner man is already being renewed from day to day by the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 4:16; Ephesians 3:16); the body also has already been laid hold of by the Spirit, although the flesh still has its citadel within it. Wherever the Holy Spirit appears, the vanquished power of death recoils, even in the body. Hence miracles of healing occur even in our still mortal body. To the despairing cry in Romans 7:24, “Who shall

deliver me from this body of death?” the whole New Testament answers: The Holy Spirit!

The foretaste of the End, realized through the Holy Spirit, becomes most clearly visible in the early Christian celebration of the breaking of bread. Visible miracles of the Spirit occur there. There the Spirit tries to break through the limits of imperfect human language in the speaking with tongues. And there the community passes over into direct connexion with the Risen One, not only with his soul, but also with his Resurrection Body. Therefore we hear in 1 Corinthians 10:16: “The bread we break, is it not communion with the body of Christ?” Here in communion with the brethren we come nearest to the Resurrection Body of Christ; and so Paul writes in the following Chapter 11 (a passage which has received far too little consideration): if this Lord’s Supper were partaken of by all members of the community in a completely worthy manner, then the union with Jesus’ Resurrection Body would be so effective in our own bodies that even now there would be no more sickness or death (1 Corinthians 11:28-30)—a singularly bold assertion.<sup>5</sup> Therefore the community is described as the body of Christ, because here the spiritual body of Christ is present, because here we come closest to it; here in the common meal the first disciples at Easter saw Jesus’ Resurrection Body, his Spiritual Body.

Yet in spite of the fact that the Holy Spirit is already so powerfully at work, men still die; even after Easter and Pentecost men continue to die as before. Our body remains mortal and subject to sickness. Its transformation into the spiritual body does not take place until the whole creation is formed anew by God. Then only, for the first time, there will be nothing but Spirit, nothing but the power of life, for then death will be destroyed with finality. Then there will be a new substance for all things visible. Instead of the fleshly matter there appears the spiritual. That is, *instead of corruptible matter there appears the incorruptible*. The visible and the invisible will be spirit. But let us make no mistake: this is certainly not the Greek sense of bodiless Idea! A new heaven *and* a new earth! That is the Christian hope. And then will our bodies also rise from the dead. Yet not as fleshly bodies, but as spiritual bodies.

The expression which stands in the ancient Greek texts of the Apostles’ Creed is quite certainly not biblical: “I believe in the resurrection of the

<sup>5</sup> F.J. Leenhardt’s new study, *Ceci est mon corps. Explication de ces paroles de Jésus-Christ* (1955), is also to be understood in the light of this.

flesh!”<sup>6</sup> Paul could not say that. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom. Paul believes in the Resurrection of the *body*, not of the *flesh*. The flesh is the power of death, which must be destroyed. This error in the Greek creed made its entrance at a time when the biblical terminology had been misconstrued in the sense of Greek anthropology. Our body, moreover (not merely our soul), will be raised at the End, when the quickening power of the Spirit makes all things new, all things without exception.

An incorruptible body! How are we to conceive this? Or better, how did the first Christians conceive of it? Paul says in Philippians 3:21 that at the End Christ will transform our lowly body into the body of his own glory (δοξα), just as in 2 Corinthians 3:18: “We are being transformed into his own likeness from glory to glory [απο δοξης εις δοξαν].” This glory (δοξα) was conceived by the first Christians as a sort of light-substance; but this is only an imperfect comparison. Our language has no word for it. Once again I refer to Grunewald’s painting of the Resurrection. He may have come closest to what Paul understood as the spiritual body.

#### IV. THOSE WHO SLEEP

### The Holy Spirit and the Intermediate State of the Dead

And now we come to the last question. When does this transformation of the body take place? No doubt can remain on this point. The whole New Testament answers, at the *End*, and this is to be understood literally, that is, in the temporal sense. That raises the question of the “interim condition” of the dead. Death is indeed already conquered according to 2 Timothy 1:10: “Christ has conquered death and has already brought life and incorruptibility to light.” The chronological tension which I constantly stress, concerns precisely this central point: death is conquered, but it will not be abolished until the End. According to 1 Corinthians 15:26, death will be conquered as the *last enemy*. It is significant that in the Greek the same verb καταργέω<sup>1</sup> is used to describe both the decisive victory already accomplished and the not-yet-consummated victory at the end. John’s Apocalypse 20:14 describes the victory at the end, the

<sup>6</sup> W. Bieder, “Auferstehung des Leibes oder des Fleisches?,” *Theol. Zeitschrift*, I (1945), 105ff, seeks to explicate the expression “resurrection of the flesh” both from the point of view of biblical theology and of the history of dogma.

<sup>1</sup> Luther translates καταργέω by “er hat ihm ‘die Macht genommen’ ” in 2 Timothy 1:10, and by “er wird aufgehoben” in 1 Corinthians 15:26.

annihilation of Death: “Death will be cast into a pool of fire”; and a few verses farther on it is said, “Death will be no more.”

That means, however, that the transformation of the body does not occur immediately after each individual death. Here too we must once again guard against any accommodation to Greek philosophy, if we wish to understand the New Testament doctrine. This is the point where I cannot accept Karl Barth’s position as a simple restatement of the original Christian view, not even his position in the *Church Dogmatics*<sup>2</sup> where it is subtly shaded and comes much nearer<sup>3</sup> to New Testament eschatology than in his first writings.<sup>4</sup> Karl Barth considers it to be the New Testament interpretation that the transformation of the body occurs for everyone immediately after his individual death—as if the dead were no longer in time. Nevertheless, according to the New Testament, they are still in time. Otherwise, the problem in 1 Thessalonians 4:13ff would have no meaning. Here in fact Paul is concerned to show that at the moment of Christ’s return “those who are then alive will have no advantage” over those who have died in Christ. Therefore the dead in Christ are still in time; they, too, are *waiting*. “How long, oh Lord?” cry the martyrs who are sleeping under the altar in John’s Apocalypse (6:10). Neither the saying on the cross, “Today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43), the parable of the rich man, where Lazarus is carried directly to Abraham’s bosom (Luke 16:22), nor Paul’s saying, “I desire to die and to be with Christ” (Philippians 1:23), proves as is often maintained that the Resurrection of the body takes place immediately after the individual death.<sup>5</sup> In none of these texts is there so much as a word about the Resurrection of the body.

<sup>2</sup> K. Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, II, I, 1940, 698ff; III, 2, 1948, 524ff, 714ff.

<sup>3</sup> It is another question, of course, whether Barth does not have the *right* to adduce relationships in this whole matter which yet lie outside the New Testament circle of vision. But if so, then this “going beyond the New Testament” should perhaps be done consciously and should always be identified as such with clarity and emphasis, especially where a constant effort is being made to argue from the point of view of the Bible, as is the case with Barth. If this were done, then the inevitable danger which every dogmatician *must* confront (and here lies the dignity and greatness of his task) would be more clearly recognized: namely, the danger that he may not remain upon an extension of the biblical line, but rather interpret the biblical texts primarily *ex post facto*, from the point of view of his “going beyond the New Testament.” Precisely because of this clear recognition of the danger, discussion with the exegete would be more fruitful.

<sup>4</sup> Especially *The Resurrection of the Dead* (1926).

<sup>5</sup> Also the much-disputed words of Luke 23:43, “Today you will be with me in Paradise,” belong here. To be sure it is not impossible, though artificial, to understand σήμερον as modifying λέγω σοι. The statement is to be understood in the light of

Instead, these different images picture the condition of those who die in Christ before the End—the interim state in which they, as well as the living, find themselves. All these images express simply a special proximity to Christ, in which those dying in Christ before the End find themselves. They are “with Christ” or “in paradise” or “in Abraham’s bosom” or, according to Revelation 6:9, “under the altar.” All these are simply various images of special nearness to God. But the most usual image for Paul is: “They are asleep.”<sup>6</sup> It would be difficult to dispute that the New Testament reckons with such an interim time for the dead, as well as for the living, although any sort of speculation upon the state of the dead in this interim period is lacking here.

The dead in Christ share in the tension of the interim time.<sup>7</sup> But this means not *only* that they are waiting. It means that for them, too, something decisive happened with Jesus’ death and Resurrection. For them, too, Easter is the great turning point (Matthew 27:52). This new situation created by Easter leads us to see at least the possibility of a common bond with Socrates, not with his teaching, but with his own behavior in the face of death. Death has lost its horror, its “sting.” Though

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Luke 16:23 and of the late-Jewish conception of “Paradise” as the place of the blessed (Strack-Billerbeck, ad. loc.; P. Volz, *Die Eschatologie der jüdischen Gemeinde im neutest. Zeitalter* (2nd ed., 1934, 265). It is certain that Luke 16:23 does not refer to resurrection of the body, and the expectation of the *Parousia* is in no way supplanted. Such an interpretation is also decisively rejected by W.G. Kümmel, *Verheissung und Erfüllung*, 2nd ed. (1953), 67. A certain disparity here over against Pauline theology does exist in so far as Christ himself on the day referred to as “today” has not yet risen, and therefore the foundation of the condition wherein the dead are bound up with Christ has not yet been laid. But in the last analysis the emphasis here is on the fact that the thief will be *with Christ*. Menoud (*Le sort des trépassés*, 45) correctly points out that Jesus’ answer must be understood in relation to the thief’s entreaty. The thief asks Jesus to remember him when he “comes into his kingdom,” which according to the Jewish view of the Messiah can only refer to the time when the Messiah *will come* and erect his kingdom. Jesus does not grant the request, but instead gives the thief more than he asked for: he will be united *with Jesus* even before the coming of the kingdom. So understood, *according to their intention*, these words do not constitute a difficulty for the position maintained above.

<sup>6</sup> The interpretation which K. Barth (*Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, III, Sec. 2, 778) gives of the “sleeping,” as if this term conveyed only the “impression” of a peaceful going to sleep which those surviving have, finds no support in the New Testament. The expression in the New Testament signifies more, and like the “repose” in Apocalypse 14:13 refers to the *condition* of the dead before the *Parousia*.

<sup>7</sup> The lack of New Testament speculation on this does not give us the right simply to suppress the “interim condition” as such. I do not understand why Protestant theologians (including Barth) are so afraid of the New Testament position when the New Testament teaches only this much about the “interim condition”: (1) that it exists, (2) that it already signifies union with Christ (this because of the Holy Spirit).

it remains as the last enemy, Death has no longer any final significance. If the Resurrection of Christ were to designate the great turning point of the ages only for the living and not for the dead also, then the living would surely have an immense advantage over the dead. For as members of Christ’s community the living are indeed even now in possession of the power of the Resurrection, the Holy Spirit. It is unthinkable that, according to the early Christian point of view, nothing should be altered for the dead in the period before the End. It is precisely those images used in the New Testament to describe the condition of the dead in Christ which prove that even now, in this interim state of the dead, the Resurrection of Christ—the anticipation of the End—is already effective. They are “with Christ.”

Particularly in 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 we hear why it is that the dead, although they do not yet have a body and are only “sleeping,” nevertheless are in special proximity to Christ. Paul speaks here of the natural anxiety which even he feels before death, which still maintains its effectiveness. He fears the condition of “nakedness,” as he calls it; that is, the condition of the inner man who has no body. This natural dread of death, therefore, has not disappeared. Paul would like, as he says, to receive a spiritual body in addition, directly (*επενδύσασθαι*) while still living, without undergoing death. That is, he would like to be still alive at the time of Christ’s return. Here once again we find confirmation of what we said about Jesus’ fear of death. But now we see also something *new*: in this same text alongside this natural anxiety about the soul’s nakedness stands the great confidence in Christ’s proximity, *even in this interim state*. What is there to be afraid of in the fact that such an interim condition still exists? Confidence in Christ’s proximity is grounded in the conviction that our inner man is already grasped by the Holy Spirit. Since the time of Christ, we, the living, do indeed have the Holy Spirit. If He is actually within us, He has already transformed our inner man. But, as we have heard, the Holy Spirit is the power of life. Death can do Him no harm. Therefore something is indeed changed for the dead, for those who really die in Christ, i.e. in possession of the Holy Spirit. The horrible abandonment in death, the separation from God, of which we have spoken, no longer exist, precisely because the Holy Spirit does exist. Therefore the New Testament emphasizes that the dead are indeed *with Christ*, and so not abandoned. Thus we understand how it is that, just in 2 Corinthians 5:1ff where he mentions the fear of disembodiment in the interim time, Paul describes the Holy Spirit as the “earnest.”

According to verse 8 of the same chapter, it even appears that the dead are nearer Christ. The “sleep” seems to draw them even closer: “We are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord.” For this reason, the Apostle can write in Phil. 1:23 that he longs to die and be with Christ. So then, a man who lacks the fleshly body is yet nearer Christ than before, if he has the Holy Spirit. It is the flesh, bound to our earthly body, which is throughout our life the hindrance to the Holy Spirit’s full development. Death delivers us from this hindrance even though it is an imperfect state inasmuch as it lacks the Resurrection body. Neither in this passage nor elsewhere is found any more detailed information about this intermediate state in which the inner man, stripped indeed of its fleshly body but still deprived of the spiritual body, exists with the Holy Spirit. The Apostle limits himself to assuring us that this state, anticipating the destiny which is ours once we have received the Holy Spirit, brings us closer to the final Resurrection.

Here we find fear of a bodiless condition associated with firm confidence that even in this intermediate, transient condition no separation from Christ supervenes (among the powers which cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ is death—Romans 8:38). This fear *and* this confidence are bound together in 2 Corinthians 5, and this confirms the fact that even the dead share in the present tension. Confidence predominates, however, for the decision has indeed been made. Death is conquered. The inner man, divested of the body, is no longer alone; he does not lead the shadowy existence which the Jews expected and which cannot be described as life. The inner man, divested of the body, has already in his lifetime been transformed by the Holy Spirit, is already grasped by the Resurrection (Romans 6:3ff, John 3:3ff), if he *has* already as a living person really been renewed by the Holy Spirit. Although he still “sleeps” and still awaits the Resurrection of the body, which alone will give him full life, the dead Christian *has* the Holy Spirit. Thus, even in this state, death has lost its terror, although it still exists. And so the dead who die in the Lord can actually be blessed “from now on” (ἀπ’ ἄρτι),<sup>8</sup> as the

<sup>8</sup> In view of the places in the New Testament where ἀπ’ ἄρτι can only mean “from now on” (for instance, John 13:19), and in view of the good sense which the sentence makes when ἀπ’ ἄρτι is so translated, I continue to subscribe to the usual translation “from now on” and see it as modifying ἀποθνήσκοντες, although many factors support A. Debrunner’s view, *Grammatik des neutest. Griechisch* (1943), Part II, Appendix, 12, following A. Fridrichsen’s suggestion, which understands ἀπαρτί as the colloquial Attic word for “exactly, certainly” and then finds in P<sup>47</sup>’s omission of καί a support for reading ἀπ’ ἄρτι as ἀπαρτί, modifying λέγει τὸ πνεῦμα, not ἀποθνήσκοντες.

author of the Johannine Apocalypse says (14:13). What is said in 1 Corinthians 15:54b, 55 pertains also to the dead: “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?” So the Apostle in Romans 14 writes: “Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord” (verse 8). Christ is “Lord of the living and the dead” (verse 9).

One could ask whether in this fashion we have not been led back again, in the last analysis, to the Greek doctrine of immortality, whether the New Testament does not assume, for the time after Easter, a continuity of the “inner man” of converted people before and after death, so that here, too, death is presented for all practical purposes only as a natural “transition.”<sup>9</sup> There is a sense in which a kind of *approximation* to the Greek teaching does actually take place, to the extent that the inner man, who has already been transformed by the Spirit (Romans 6:3ff), and consequently made alive, continues to live with Christ in this transformed state, in the condition of sleep. This continuity is emphasized especially strongly in the Gospel of John (3:36, 4:14, 6:54, and frequently). Here we observe at least a certain analogy to the “immortality of the soul,” but the distinction remains none the less radical. Further, the condition of the dead in Christ is still imperfect, a state of “nakedness,” as Paul says, of “sleep,” of waiting for the resurrection of the whole creation, for the Resurrection of the body. On the other hand, death in the New Testament continues to be the enemy, albeit a defeated enemy, who must yet be destroyed. The fact that even in this state the dead are already living with Christ does not correspond to the natural essence of the soul. Rather it is the result of a divine intervention from outside, through the Holy Spirit, who must already have quickened the inner man in earthly life by His miraculous power.

Thus it is still true that the Resurrection of the body is awaited, even in John’s Gospel—though now, of course, with a certainty of victory because the Holy Spirit already dwells in the inner man. Hence no doubt can arise any more: since He already dwells in the inner man, He will certainly transform the body. For the Holy Spirit, this quickening power, penetrates everything and knows no barrier. If He is really within a man, then He will quicken the whole man. So Paul writes in Romans 8:11: “If the Spirit dwells in you, then will He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead call to life your mortal bodies also *through the Spirit dwelling in*

<sup>9</sup> We have already spoken above of K. Barth’s attempt (which indeed goes too far) to place a positive valuation in dialectical fashion alongside the negative valuation of death.

you.” In Philippians 3:21: “We wait for the Lord Jesus Christ, who will conform our lowly body to the body of his glory.” Nothing is said in the New Testament about the details of the interim conditions. We hear only this: we are nearer to God.

We wait, and *the dead* wait. Of course the rhythm of time may be different for them than for the living; and in this way the interim-time may be shortened for them. This does not, indeed, go beyond the New Testament texts and their exegesis,<sup>10</sup> because this expression *to sleep*, which is the customary designation in the New Testament of the “interim condition,” draws us to the view that for the dead another time-consciousness exists, that of “those who sleep.” But that does not mean that the dead are not still in time. Therefore once again we see that the New Testament resurrection hope is different from the Greek belief in immortality.

#### V. CONCLUSION

On his missionary journeys Paul surely met people who were unable to believe in his preaching of the Resurrection *for the very reason* that they believed in the immortality of the soul. Thus in Athens there was no laughter until Paul spoke of the Resurrection (Acts 17:32). Both the people of whom Paul says (in 1 Thessalonians 4:13) that “they have no hope” and those of whom he writes (in 1 Corinthians 15:12) that they do not believe there is a resurrection from the dead are probably not Epicureans, as we are inclined to believe. Even those who believe in the immortality of the soul do not have the hope of which Paul speaks, the hope which expresses the belief of a divine miracle of new creation which will embrace everything, every part of the world created by God. Indeed for the Greeks who believed in the immortality of the soul it may have been harder to accept the Christian preaching of the Resurrection than it was for others. About the year 150 Justin (in his *Dialogue*, 80) writes of people, “who say that there is no resurrection from the dead, but that immediately at death their souls would ascend to heaven.” Here the contrast is indeed clearly perceived.

The Emperor Marcus Aurelius, the philosopher who belongs with Socrates to the noblest figures of antiquity, also perceived the contrast. As is well known, he had the deepest contempt for Christianity. One might think that the death of the Christian martyrs would have inspired respect

<sup>10</sup> Here I follow R. Mehl’s suggestion, *Der letzte Feind*, 56.

in this great Stoic who regarded death with equanimity. But it was just the martyrs’ death with which he was least sympathetic. The alacrity with which the Christians met their death displeased him.<sup>1</sup> The Stoic departed this life dispassionately; the Christian martyr on the other hand died with spirited passion for the cause of Christ, because he knew that by doing so he stood within a powerful redemptive process. The first Christian martyr, Stephen, shows us (Acts 7:55) how very differently death is bested by him who dies in Christ than by the ancient philosopher: he sees, it is said, “the heavens open and Christ standing at the right hand of God!” He sees Christ, the Conqueror of Death. With this faith that the death he must undergo is already conquered by him who has himself endured it, Stephen lets himself be stoned.

The answer to the question, “Immortality of the soul or resurrection of the dead in the New Testament,” is unequivocal. The *teaching* of the great philosophers Socrates and Plato can in no way be brought into consonance with that of the New Testament. That their *person*, their *life*, and their *bearing in death* can none the less be *honoured* by Christians, the apologists of the second century have shown. I believe it can also be demonstrated from the New Testament. But this is a question with which we do not have to deal here.

<sup>1</sup> M. Aurelius, *Med.*, XI, 3. To be sure, as time went on he more and more gave up the belief in the soul’s immortality.