

V

The Immortality of the Soul and the Resurrection of the Dead

I. THE STATE OF THE QUESTION

In the last few decades, a basic question has arisen about the immortality of the soul and resurrection. The ensuing discussion has increasingly transformed the panorama of theology and devotion. Oscar Cullmann put it cursorily, if dramatically:

If today one asks an average Christian, no matter whether Protestant or Catholic, whether intellectually inclined or not, what the New Testament teaches about the destiny of the individual human being after death, in almost every case one will receive the answer, 'The immortality of the soul'. In this form, this opinion is one of the greatest misunderstandings of Christianity there can be.²⁴

Today, few would venture to offer the answer that was earlier a matter of course, since the idea that this answer was based upon a misunderstanding has spread with astonishing speed among the congregations of Christendom. However, no new answer of any concreteness has taken its place. The way to this change of attitudes was paved by two men: the Protestant theologians Carl Stange (1870–1959) and Adolf Schlatter (1852–1938), to some extent aided and abetted by Paul Althaus whose eschatology was first published in 1922. Appealing to the Bible and to Luther, these men rejected as Platonic dualism the notion

of a separation of body and soul in death such as the doctrine of the immortality of the soul presupposes. The only truly biblical doctrine is that which holds that when man dies "he perishes, body and soul." Only in this fashion can one preserve the idea of death as a judgment, of which Scripture speaks in such unmistakable accents. The proper Christian thing, therefore, is to speak, not of the soul's immortality, but of the resurrection of the complete human being and of that alone. The piety currently surrounding death, impregnated as it is with an eschatology of going to heaven, must be eliminated in favor of the only true form of Christian hope: expectation of the Last Day. In 1950, Althaus tried to enter some caveats against this view which had meanwhile gained so much ground. He pointed out that the Bible was perfectly familiar with the "dualistic scheme." It too knew not only the expectation of the Last Day, but a form of individual hope for heaven. Althaus also tried to show that the same was true for Luther. And so he reformulated his position in the following words:

Christian eschatology must not fight against immortality as such. The scandal which in recent times we have frequently given by this fight is not the *skandalon* that the Gospel speaks of.²⁵

Though the discussion which followed Althaus' article produced a broad consensus in his favor,²⁶ his "retractions" had no impact on the continuing debate as a whole. The idea that to speak of the soul is unbiblical was accepted to such an extent that even the new Roman Missal suppressed the term *anima* in its liturgy for the dead. It also disappeared from the ritual for burial.

How was it possible to overthrow so quickly a tradition firmly rooted since the age of the early Church and always considered central? In itself, the apparent evidence of the

biblical data would surely not have sufficed. Essentially, the potency of the new position stemmed from the parallel between, on the one hand, the allegedly biblical idea of the absolute indivisibility of man and, on the other, a modern anthropology, worked out on the basis of natural science, and identifying the human being with his or her body, without any remainder that might admit a soul distinct from that body. It may be conceded that the elimination of the immortality of the soul removes a possible source of conflict between faith and contemporary thought. However, this scarcely saves the Bible, since the biblical view of things is even more remote by modern-day standards. Acceptance of the unity of the human being may be well and good but who, on the basis of the current tenets of the natural sciences, could imagine a resurrection of the body? That resurrection would presuppose a completely different kind of matter, a fundamentally transformed cosmos which lies completely outside of what we can conceive. Again, the question of what, in this case, would happen to the dead person until the "end of time" cannot simply be pushed aside. Luther's idea of the "sleep of the soul" certainly does not solve this problem. If there is no soul, and so no proper subject of such a "sleep," who is this person that is going to be really raised? How can there be an identity between the human being who existed at some point in the past and the counterpart that has to be re-created from nothing? The irritated refusal of such questions as "philosophical" does not contribute to a more meaningful discussion.

In other words, it soon becomes obvious that pure biblicalism does not take us very far. One cannot get anywhere without "hermeneutics," that is, without a rational rethinking of the biblical data which may itself go beyond these data in its language and its systematic linkage of

ideas. If we leave aside those radical solutions which try to solve the problem by forbidding all "objectifying" statements and permitting only "existential" interpretations, we find ourselves confronted with a twofold attempt to take the matter further. This twofold attempt turns on a new concept of time, and a fresh understanding of the body. The first set of ideas is related to the reflections we glanced at in III.1 above in the context of the question of imminent expectation. There we saw that some writers tried to solve the problem of the imminently expected Kingdom by noting that the end of time is itself no longer time. It is not a date which happens to come extremely late in the calendar but rather non-time, something which, since it is outside of time, is equally close to every time. This idea was easily combined with the notion that death itself leads out of time into the timeless. In Catholic circles, these suggestions received some support in the discussion about the dogma of Mary's assumption into glory. The scandal attaching to the assertion that a human being, Mary, has already risen in the body was a challenge to rethink more generally the relation between death and time as well as to reflect on the nature of human corporality. If it is possible to regard the Marian dogma as offering a model of human destiny at large, then two problems at once evaporate. On the one hand, the ecumenical and speculative scandal of the dogma disappears, while on the other the dogma itself helps to correct the traditional view of immortality and resurrection in favor of a picture at once more biblical and more modern. Although this new approach received no very clear or consistent elaboration, it became generally accepted that time should be considered a form of bodily existence. Death signifies leaving time for eternity with its single "today." Here the problem of the "intermediate state" between death and

resurrection turns out to be a problem only in seeming. The "between" exists only in our perspective. In reality, the "end of time" is timeless. The person who dies steps into the presence of the Last Day and of judgment, the Lord's resurrection and parousia. As one author put it, "The resurrection can thus be situated in death and not just on the 'Last Day'."²⁷ Meanwhile, the view that resurrection takes place at the moment of death has gained such widespread acceptance that it is even incorporated, with some qualifications, into the *Dutch Catechism*, where we read:

Existence after death is already something like the resurrection of the new body.²⁸

This means that what the dogma of the assumption tells us about Mary is true of every human being. Owing to the timelessness which reigns beyond death, every death is an entering into the new heaven and the new earth, the parousia and the resurrection.

And here two questions suggest themselves. First, is this not merely a camouflaged return to the doctrine of immortality on philosophically somewhat more adventurous presuppositions? Resurrection is now being claimed for the person still lying on his deathbed or on the funeral journey to his grave. The indivisibility of man and his boundness to the body, even when dead, suddenly seems to play no further role, even though it was the point of departure of this whole construction. Indeed, the *Dutch Catechism* asserts:

Our Lord means that there is something of man, that which is most properly himself, which can be saved after death. This 'something' is not the body which is left behind.²⁹

G. Greshake formulates the claim even more incisively:

Matter as such [as atom, molecule, organ . . .] cannot be perfected. . . . This being so, then if human freedom is finalised in death, the

body, the world and the history of this freedom are permanently preserved in the definitive concrete form which that freedom has taken.³⁰

Such ideas may be meaningful. The only question is by what right one still speaks of "corporeality" if all connection with matter is explicitly denied, and matter left with a share in the final perfection only insofar as it was "an ecstatic aspect of the human act of freedom." Be this as it may, in this model the body is in fact left to death, while at the same time an afterlife of the human being is asserted. Just why the concept of the soul is still disowned now ceases to be intelligible. What we have here is a covert assumption of the continuing authentic reality of the person in separation from his or her body. The idea of the soul meant to convey nothing other than this. In this amalgam of notions of corporeality and soulhood we have a strange mishmash of ideas which can hardly count as a definitive solution of our problem.

The second component in the characteristic modern approach to the idea of death and immortality is the philosophy of time and of history which constitutes its true lever. Are we really confronted with a choice between the stark, exclusive alternatives of physical time on the one hand, and, on the other, a timelessness to be identified with eternity itself? Is it even logically possible to conceive of man, whose existence is achieved decisively in the temporal, being transposed into sheer eternity? And in any case, can an eternity which has a beginning be eternity at all? Is it not necessarily non-eternal, and so temporal, precisely because it had a beginning? Yet how can one deny that the resurrection of a human being has a beginning, namely, after death? If, coerced by the logic of the position, one chose to deny this, then surely one would have to suppose that man has always existed in the risen state, in an eter-

nity without beginning. But this view would abolish all serious anthropology. It would fall, in fact, into a caricature of that Platonism which is supposed to be its principal enemy. G. Lohfink, an advocate of the thesis that resurrection is already achieved in death, has noticed these difficulties. He tries to deal with them by invoking the mediaeval concept of the *aevum*, an attempt to describe a special mode of time proper to spiritual creatures on the basis of an analysis of angelic existence. Lohfink sees that death leads not into pure timelessness but into a new kind of time proper to created spirits. The purpose of his argument is primarily to give a defensible sense to biblical imminent expectation which he takes to be the central theme of the message of Jesus. His concern is not with the body-soul problematic from which such speculations emerged but with the necessity, at least as he reads the Gospels, of a discourse that would throw light on the permanent temporal closeness of the Parousia. Such imminence is feasible, according to Lohfink, if the human person may be said to enter through death into the peculiar time of spirits and so into the fulfilment of history. The idea of the *aevum* thus becomes the hermeneutically respectable way of saying that the parousia and resurrection take place for each person in the moment of death. Imminent expectation can now be identified with the expectation of death itself, and so warranted for everybody.

... we have now seen that a reflective concept of time, which eschews the naive assumption that time in the beyond is commensurable with earthly time, necessarily leads to our locating the last things—and not simply those concerning the individual, but the end of the world itself—in the moment of death. The last things have thereby become infinitely close to us. Every human being lives in the 'last age'. . . .³¹

This proposal for a differentiated concept of time entails genuine progress. Yet the queries listed above are in no

way rendered redundant by it. Looking more closely, one discovers that this concept of the *aevum* has simply been added on, in somewhat external fashion, to a predetermined conceptual construct. The point of this construct is the claim that on the other side of death history is already complete. The end of history is ever waiting for the one who dies. But this is just what can hardly be reconciled with the continuation of history. History is viewed as simultaneously completed and still continuing. What remains unexplained is the relationship between, on the one hand, the ever new beginnings of human life in history, both present and future, and, on the other, the state of fulfilment not only of the individual but of the historical process itself, a state said to be already realized in the world beyond death. The idea of the *aevum* is helpful when we are considering the condition of the individual person who enters into perfection while remaining a creature of time. In this domain the concept has a precise meaning. But it says nothing at all which could justify the statement that history as a whole, from whatever point of view, can be seen as already fulfilled.

It is odd that an exegete should appeal in support of this speculation to the "primitive Christian view" for which, in the case of Jesus, "resurrection from the dead follows immediately upon death," a view which supposedly supplies the "real model of Christian eschatology" which the early Church somehow forgot to apply more widely.³² For, to begin with, one can hardly ignore the fact that the message of resurrection "on the third day" posits a clear interim period between the death of the Lord and his rising again. And, more importantly, it is evident that early Christian proclamation never identified the destiny of those who die before the Parousia with the quite special event of the resurrection of Jesus. That special event depended on Jesus' unique and irreducible position in the

history of salvation. Moreover, there are two respects in which one must bring the charge that all this is a case of aggravated Platonism. First, in such models the body is definitively excluded from the hope for salvation. Secondly, the concept of the *aevum* as here employed hypostatizes history in a way which only falls short of Plato's doctrine of the Ideas by virtue of its logical inconsistencies.

Perhaps we have lingered overlong on these theses. That seemed necessary because at the present time they have been almost universally received into the general theological consciousness. Such a consensus, it should now be clear, rests on an extremely fragile foundation. In the long run, theology and preaching cannot tolerate such a quirky theological patchwork, full of logical leaps and ruptures. As quickly as possible we should bid farewell to this way of thinking which deprives Christian proclamation of an appropriate discourse and thus cancels its own claim to be taken seriously as a form of Christian understanding.

2. THE BIBLICAL DATA

Having thus sketched the present state of the question, we can now turn to an investigation of the Bible's teaching about these two questions: resurrection and immortality.

(a) *The Resurrection from the Dead*

In our reflections on the theology of death we have already considered the approach of Old Testament faith to the idea of resurrection. So we can begin here with the witness of the *New Testament*. The doctrine of the resurrection had not been generally accepted in intertestamental Judaism. If we are looking for an explanation of why it became the fundamental confession of Christians we shall find it easily enough in the fact of Jesus' resurrection as

experienced and communicated by the witnesses. The risen Lord became, so to speak, the canon within the canon: the criterion in whose light tradition must be read. In the illumination which he brought, the internal struggles of the Old Testament were read as a single movement towards the One who suffered, was crucified and rose again. The travail of Old Testament faith became itself a testimony to the resurrection.

This new fact, which brought about the passage from the Old Testament to the New, was prepared for by the words of Jesus which interpreted it before it took place. Only because its intelligibility was prepared beforehand could the resurrection of Jesus gain any historical significance at all. Mere facts without words, without meaning, fall into nothingness as fully as do mere words to which no reality corresponds. To this extent we can say with complete certainty that the origin of the Easter proclamation is unthinkable without some corresponding announcement by Jesus himself. In this context, the crucial text is Jesus' discussion with the Sadducees about the resurrection as given in the gospel according to Mark.⁴³ In his debate with the Sadducees who argued in fundamentalistic fashion that only the Pentateuch might be acknowledged as Scripture, and took it as the exclusive rule of faith, *sola scriptura*, Jesus is obliged to prove his thesis on the basis of the books of Moses. He does so in a way which is both exciting and wonderfully simple. He points to the Mosaic concept of God, or more precisely to the divine self-presentation in the burning bush as reported by Moses: "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."⁴⁴ That means: those who have been called by God are themselves part of the concept of God. One would turn God into a God of the dead and thus stand the Old Testament concept of God on its head if one declared that those who

belong to him who is Life are themselves dead. This text shows that, in principle, Jesus adopted the Pharisaic, over against the Sadducean, variety of Jewish teaching which included, then, the confession of the resurrection. However, there is also something new in Jesus' presentation. The resurrection moves into a central position in the expression of faith. It is no longer one tenet of faith among many others, but rather is identified with the concept of God itself. Resurrection faith is contained in faith in God. The massive simplicity of Israel's early faith is not obscured by the addition of other obligatory items but is deepened by a more acute seeing. Faith remains simple. It is simply faith in God. Yet it becomes both purer and richer by being thus deepened. All that business of demythologization is taken care of from the outset. Cosmological, anthropological, speculative, psychological and chronological aspects of religion: all these are set aside. What is affirmed is that God himself, and the communion he offers, are life. To belong to him, to be called by him, is to be rooted in life indestructible.

The nascent Church had the task of rethinking the earlier Pharisaic tradition, as applied to the words and actions of Jesus, in the light of the new fact of the Lord's resurrection. On the basis of the original insights, this process would flow on in the stream of the Church's faith through all succeeding generations. Within the limits of this book it would be impossible to catalogue every relevant text. We shall consider simply the two main witnesses within the New Testament corpus, namely Paul and John. In what follows we shall be looking at some characteristic texts in which the further development of the doctrine of the resurrection is already indicated.

Two Pauline texts especially important for our enquiry are Romans 6, 1-14 and First Corinthians 15. In the Letter

to the Romans, baptism is interpreted as being engrafted onto the death of Christ. By baptism we enter on a common destiny with that of Jesus and so with the death which was his fate. But that death is ordered intrinsically to the resurrection. Of necessity, then, suffering and dying with Christ means at the same time a participation in the hope of the resurrection. One permits oneself to be inserted into the passion of Christ since that is the place at which resurrection breaks forth. The theological concept of resurrection which we discovered in Mark 12 suddenly becomes quite concrete. It becomes, in fact, theo-christological in a suitable correspondence with the christological extension of the concept of God which had taken place in the period between the historical ministry and Paul's calling to the apostolate. Communion with God, which is the native place of life indestructible, finds its concrete form in sharing in the body of Christ. Through the sacramental dimension of this idea, the Church's Liturgy and the Church herself as the bearer of the Liturgy become part of the same doctrine. Theo-christology also possesses an ecclesiological aspect. In comparison with the simple grandeur of the words of Jesus things may seem to have become rather complicated. It is more correct to say that they have become, rather, more concrete. What is now described in more detail is *how* the belonging to God that Jesus spoke of actually takes place. The fundamental structure of the doctrine is not impaired but remains fully intact. Faith in the resurrection is not part of some speculation in cosmology or the theology of history but is bound up with a person, with God in Christ. Thus the theologizing of resurrection faith is also its personalization.

In the other Pauline text, First Corinthians 15, we find the apostle engaged in controversy with spiritualizing re-interpretations of faith in the resurrection. In such rein-

terpretation, resurrection as a future bodily event touching both the cosmos and our own destiny is called into serious question. What precisely was being put in its place the text hardly permits us to say. But some light is thrown thereon by Second Timothy 2,18 where the author mentions a view of the Gospel for which "the resurrection has already happened." Here the sacramental foretaste of the resurrection hope has been misconceived. The resurrection event is robbed of its futurist character, and identified with the event of becoming or being a Christian. Resurrection thus undergoes a "mystical" or "existential" reduction. It is probably ideas of this kind which lie behind the Corinthian denial of the resurrection as well. In opposing them, the apostle has to emphasize that the resurrection is not simply a mystical or existential assurance to the Christian in the present. In the last analysis, this would mean nothing: your faith would be vain.³⁵ Rather is the resurrection a pledge to the future of man and the cosmos, and in this sense a pledge to space, time and matter. History and cosmos are not realities alongside spirit, running on into a meaningless eternity or sinking down into an equally meaningless nothingness. In the resurrection, God proves himself to be the God also of the cosmos and of history. To this extent, the temporal and cosmic elements in the Jewish belief in the resurrection take their places within Christian confession. Yet they are strictly related to the new theological and christological structure, and in this way the inner simplicity of that structure remains untouched. The point is still the same. If the dead do not rise, then Christ has not arisen.³⁶ The resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead are not two discrete realities but one single reality which in the end is simply the verification of faith in God before the eyes of history.

We should look as well at two monuments to Johannine

theology: John 6 and John 11. The story of Lazarus in John 11 leads up to the affirmation, "I am the resurrection and the life."³⁷ The theo-christological conception of the resurrection met with in Paul finds here its purest and most consistent form. The evangelist has found his way back to the utter simplicity of that vision in Mark 12. He has translated its theology into christology in a systematic fashion. "He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."³⁸ The bond with Jesus is, even now, resurrection. Where there is communion with him, the boundary of death is overshot here and now. It is in this perspective that we must understand the Discourse on the Eucharist in John 6. Feeding on Jesus' word and on his flesh, that is, receiving him by both faith and sacrament, is described as being nourished with the bread of immortality. The resurrection does not appear as a distant apocalyptic event but as an occurrence which takes place in the immediate present. Whenever someone enters into the 'I' of Christ, he has entered straight away into the space of unconditional life. The evangelist does not raise the question of an intermediate state between death and resurrection, a rupture in life, precisely because Jesus is himself the resurrection. Faith, which is the contact between Jesus and myself, vouchsafes here and now the crossing of death's frontier. The entire Old Testament inheritance is thus presented in the new mode of christological transformation. In the Old Testament, it had become clear that death is the absence of communication in the midst of life. Similarly, it had become evident that love is a promise of life. But now it becomes manifest that a love stronger than death actually exists. The borderline between Sheol and life runs through our very midst, and those who are in Christ are situated on the side of life, and that everlastingly.

Bultmann took this Johannine theology to be the perfect

expression of authentic Christianity. As we know, this means for him that resurrection is to be interpreted exclusively and without remainder in an "existential" sense. He is obliged to treat St. John's references to the Last Day³⁹ as the interpolations of a later ecclesiastical redactor, whose effect is to drag down the lofty insights of the evangelist to the crude level of the Church populace. Yet in reality, when the work of the evangelist is thus snapped into two fragments, not even the aspect which Bultmann favors can survive. If the passage into the christological sphere be not an entry into that unconditional life that abides even beyond earthly dying, then it is not a real passover at all. It is nothing more than a gyration in the inescapable futility of a private existence whose fundamental nothingness is not overcome but rather reconfirmed.

Just one more comment on the biblical data as a whole will be in order here. For the New Testament, the resurrection is a positive event, a message full of hope. By contrast, we know from the Old Testament, with its phenomenological analysis of "life" and "death," that when human existence issues in opposition to God, in the nothingness of spiritual shipwreck, it cannot itself be called "life." On the contrary, such a fate is really the definitive presence of "death." Even for resurrection faith this possibility—which of course must not be confused with the sheer annihilation of the human existent—still remains open. We will have to look at it in greater detail somewhat later.

Meanwhile, let us try to formulate a conclusion. Faith in the resurrection is a central expression of the christological confession of God. It follows, indeed, from the concept of God. Its emphasis is placed not on a particular anthropology, whether anti-Platonic or Platonic, but on a theology. This is why we may reasonably expect it to have the capacity to make a variety of anthropologies its own and find

appropriate expression by means of them. But at the same time, and equally, we must expect that this theology will confront all anthropologies with its own critical measuring rod. From its thought of God it draws forth a number of affirmations about man. On the one hand, the new life has already begun and will nevermore be snuffed out. On the other hand, that *vita nuova* is ordered to the transformation of all life, to a future wholeness for man and for the world.

(b) *The "Intermediate State" Between Death and Resurrection*

If the "Last Day" is not to be identified with the moment of individual death but is accepted as what it really is, the shared ending of all history, then the question naturally arises as to what happens "in-between." In Catholic theology, as that received its systematic form in the high Middle Ages, this question received its answer in terms of the immortality of the soul. To Luther, such a solution was unacceptable. For him it was a result of the infiltration of faith by philosophy. Yet his own enquiry into the matter produced an ambiguous report. In great majority, the relevant texts of Luther take up the biblical term for death, "sleep," seeing in it a description of the content of the intermediate state. The soul sleeps in the peace of Christ. It is awakened, along with the body, on the last day. Elsewhere one finds Luther in a different state of mind, for instance in his comments on the story of Lazarus.⁴⁰ There he remarks that the distinction between body and soul whereby hitherto people had tried to explain Lazarus' life "in the bosom of Abraham" was *ein Dreck*, "a load of rubbish." As he explains: "We must say, *totus Abraham*, the whole man, is to live. . . ."⁴¹ The impression one takes away from this is that Luther's concern was not so much

with the denial of the life of the dead, but with an attack on the body-soul distinction. Luther does not succeed in replacing that distinction by any clear or even recognizable new conception. In our survey of the *status quaestionis*, we discovered that recent theology rules out an "intermediate state." By doing so, it gives systematic expression to a point of view first developed by Luther.

i. *Early Judaism*. What does the Bible have to say? In the light of our investigation into the ideas of the New Testament about the resurrection we can already make one fairly general statement. To posit an interruption of life between death and the end of the world would not be in accord with Scripture. In fact, the texts permit a much more precise set of assertions than this, as the exemplary work of P. Hoffmann in particular has shown in careful detail.⁴² The first point to notice is that both the primitive community and St. Paul belonged with the Jewish tradition of their time, just as had Jesus himself. Naturally, they situated themselves vis-à-vis the internal debate within that tradition by reference to the fundamental criterion found in Jesus' own image of God.⁴³ This produced in time a gradual transformation of the preexisting tradition, by way of its thorough-going assimilation to the demands of Christology. Our first task, therefore, is to get acquainted with the data of intertestamental Judaism—a complicated affair for which I must rely on Hoffmann's study.

Let us look at some characteristic documents. The book of *Enoch* in its Ethiopian recension, datable to c. 150 B.C., offers in its twenty-second chapter an account of the abode of the spirits or souls of the departed. Here the ancient idea of Sheol, earlier taken as the realm of shadow-life, receives more articulated and differentiated description. Its "space" is characterized in greater detail. The world in which the dead are kept until the final judgment is no

longer located simply in the earth's interior, but, more specifically, in the West, the land of the setting sun, in a mountain where it occupies four different regions (pictured as caves). The just and the unjust are now separated. The unjust await the judgment in darkness whereas the just, among whom the martyrs occupy a special position, dwell in light, being assembled around a life-giving spring of water. We already get a glimpse of how such "early Jewish" notions lived on in unbroken fashion in the early Church. The memento of the departed in the Roman Canon (now the "First Eucharistic Prayer") prays that God may grant to those who have died marked with the sign of faith and now "sleep the sleep of peace" a place of light, "fresh water" (*refrigerium*) and repose. The prayer thus identifies the three conditions which inhabitants of the Mediterranean world consider the proper expression of all good living. Patently, the idea coincides in all respects with the destiny of the just as described in *Enoch*.

A further stage of development can be observed in the Fourth Book of *Ezra*, written somewhere around the year 100 A.D. Here too the dead dwell in various "chambers," their "souls" the bearers of a continuing life. As in *Enoch*, the just have already entered upon their reward. But whereas the author of *Enoch* defers the start of the punishment of sinners until the final judgment, in *Ezra* the pains of the Godless begin in the intermediate state, with the result that at a number of points their position seems to be that of a definitive Hell. In Rabbinic Judaism, the dividing line between two kinds of human destiny is even more consistently observed. From the moment of judgment, which follows immediately upon death, two paths open up. One leads into the paradise garden of Eden, conceived either as lying in the East or as preserved in heaven. The other goes to the alley of Gehenna, the place

of damnation. But, besides the idea of paradise, the destiny of the just is represented by other images and motifs as well. Thus we hear of the "treasury of souls," of waiting "beneath the throne of God," and of the just—and especially martyrs—being received into Abraham's bosom.⁴⁴ Here again the continuity between Jewish and early Christian conceptions is striking. The idea of paradise;⁴⁵ the image of the bosom of Abraham;⁴⁶ the thought of the tarrying of souls beneath the throne of God⁴⁷: all these are present in the New Testament tradition.

But before we turn to the New Testament itself, something should be said about the writings bequeathed to us from Qumran. So long as the community represented under this name, the Essenes, were known only from Josephus, scholars were obliged to regard them as belonging to the Hellenizing strand within early Judaism, at any rate where our question in this present section was concerned. Josephus had summed up their views in the following words:

For their doctrine is this: that bodies are corruptible, and that the matter they are made of is not permanent; but that the souls are immortal, and continue for ever, and that they come out of the most subtle air, and are united to their bodies as to prisons, into which they are drawn by a certain natural enticement; but that when they are set free from the bands of the flesh, they then, as released from a long bondage, rejoice and mount upward.⁴⁸

But with the discovery of the original Qumran manuscripts, our image of the Covenanters has necessarily undergone revision. As K. Schubert, in his study of the Dead Sea community, commented on the text just cited:

In all probability, this description is nothing more than a concession by Josephus to his Greek readership. . . . The Essenes were not a Hellenistic-syncretistic group, but a Jewish apocalyptic movement.⁴⁹

However, we are dealing here with ideas of the afterlife conceived in markedly material terms, so much so that this same writer can say that the Essenes of Qumran "believed in a continuation of bodiliness, even though they accepted the passing-away of their bodies in the first instance."⁵⁰ To this extent, Josephus' description is perhaps not too far removed from the truth. He too ascribes to the sect a materialist understanding of the soul of the kind common in Stoic philosophy.⁵¹ This shows how complex in this period the reciprocal interpenetration of the Hellenistic and Jewish worlds could be. The much-favored dichotomy between "Greek" and "Hebrew" simply does not stand up to historical examination. The discussion of the Qumran texts also indicates that the mere maintaining of strictly material notions about the life to come does not in itself guarantee fidelity to the spiritual inheritance of the Old Testament. The heart of that option which entered history in Abraham's faith cannot be grasped without finer differentiation than this. In this perspective, a number of contemporary contributions seem to belong to a continuing "Essene" tradition, in that the issue of materiality has overshadowed every other consideration.

ii. *The New Testament*. It should be clear by now that the New Testament belongs to that Jewish world whose fundamental contours have been sketched in the preceding section. As a general methodological assumption, it is legitimate to suppose that Jesus and the earliest Church shared Israel's faith in its (then) contemporary form. The acceptance of Jesus' awareness of his own mission simply gave to this faith a new center, a nucleus by whose power the individual elements of the tradition were step by step transformed: first and foremost, the concept of God, but then following it, and in a graduated order of urgency, all the rest.

The Synoptic tradition preserved two sayings of Jesus on the topic of the "intermediate state." These are Luke 16, 19–31 and Luke 23, 43, and they were briefly touched on above. So far as the first, the story of Lazarus, is concerned, we may admit that the parable's doctrinal content lies in its moral, a warning against the dangers of wealth, rather than in the descriptions of Lazarus in Abraham's bosom and Dives in Hell. And yet, manifestly, the teller of the parable does regard these evocations of the afterlife as appropriate images of the real future of man. In this, the text clearly testifies to the fact that the earliest Christianity shared in the faith of contemporary Judaism about the beyond. So much we can say without even entering into the (quite independent) question of whether in the parable we are overhearing the *ipsissima vox* of Jesus himself.

Something along the same lines must be said about the second text, the dialogue of the Crucified with the good thief. Here too the Jewish background is palpable. Paradise is the place where the Messiah, concealed, awaits his hour, and whither he will return.⁵² But it is in this self-same text that we begin to see the Christian transformation of the inherited Jewish tradition at work. That destiny reserved by Jewish tradition to the martyrs and the privileged "righteous ones" is now promised by the Condemned Man on the Cross to a fellow condemnee. He possesses the authority to open wide the doors of paradise to the lost. His word is the key which unlocks them. And so the phrase "with me" takes on a transformative significance. It means that paradise is no longer seen as a place standing in permanent readiness for occupation and which happens to contain the Messiah along with a lot of other people. Instead, paradise opens in Jesus. It depends on his person. Joachim Jeremias was right, therefore, to find a connection between the prayer of the good thief and the

petition of the dying Stephen: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."⁵³

With impressive unanimity, . . . the New Testament presents communion with Christ after death as the specifically Christian view of the inter-mediate state.⁵⁴

Here is the dawning realization that Jesus himself is paradise, light, fresh water, the secure peace toward which human longing and hope are directed. Perhaps we may remind ourselves in this connection of the new use of the image of "bosom" which we find in John's Gospel. Jesus does not come from the bosom of Abraham, but from that of the Father himself.⁵⁵ The disciple who is to become the type of all faithful discipleship rests on the bosom of Jesus.⁵⁶ The Christian, in his faith and love, finds shelter on the breast of Jesus and so, in the end, on the breast of the Father. "I am the resurrection": what these words mean emerges here from a new angle.

Let us move on to the Pauline writings. It has become customary to distinguish two phases in the development of Paul's eschatological thought: an early phase, in which he expects to experience the resurrection and the parousia personally,⁵⁷ and a later phase, in which such expectations are gradually eliminated while the question of the intermediate state becomes all the more urgent and meaningful. There is much to be said in favor of such an evolution in Paul's thinking. However, Hoffmann has shown that Paul's ideas about the intermediate state and the resurrection were not affected by it, but remained the same throughout. Because the image of sleep which appears in these texts crops up time and again from Luther to the Dutch Catechism, Hoffman's analysis of the semantic field of the language of sleep is especially important. Sleep was a euphemism for dying, and for being dead. Found in both

the Jewish and the Hellenistic sphere, it was capacious enough a metaphor to find room for a variety of somewhat different contents. It comprised the idea of unconsciousness, as well as the more positive notion of the peace enjoyed by the just as distinct from sinners. So far as Paul is concerned, Hoffmann shows that his use of the word is uncommitted as between those various contents. So no inferences can be drawn about his views of the condition of the dead.⁵⁸

In his correspondence with the church at Thessalonica, the only eschatological issue Paul addresses is that of the future resurrection. In writing to Philippi, on the other hand, Paul, faced with imminent danger of death, looks steadily at his own destiny and at what will follow death. Yet Philippians is familiar with the same mode of thinking as that in First Thessalonians and, most importantly, both letters argue from the same foundational premise, namely, from Christ, who guarantees the life of those who belong to him. A careful examination of the formula "the dead in Christ," found in First Thessalonians 4, 16, leads Hoffman to the following judgment:

To me it seems by no means improbable that the idea of communion with Christ as the determining factor in the death of Christians, found in Philippians 1,23, is already adumbrated here.⁵⁹

Neither in Philippians nor in First Thessalonians are resurrection and intermediate state mutually exclusive. Judaism had bound both firmly together.⁶⁰ It seems to me that the profound link between these two Pauline letters in this regard is even clearer in First Thessalonians 5, 10 where the apostle refers to Christ as he who died for us so that "whether we wake or sleep we might live with him." Evidently, then, it is not "waking" or "sleeping," earthly "life" or "death" which make the decisive difference but life in communion with Christ or in separation from him.

The hardest nut to crack among the texts debated in this context is Second Corinthians 5, 1-10:

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling, so that by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety; not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage; we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith not by sight. We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body.

None of the numerous interpretations can be called satisfactory in every respect. However, although a number of detailed points will probably always remain controversial, the meticulous textual analysis found in both Hoffmann's work⁶¹ and in Bultmann's commentary on this Letter,⁶² agreeing as they do in all essentials, seems to offer a reliable guide to the general thrust of the text. These writers hold that Paul is not offering an express judgment of either a positive or a negative kind about the intermediate state. Rather is he emphasizing the Christian hope for salvation as such, a hope which lies in the Lord and has its focus in our own resurrection. The foil to Paul's remarks must be located in the "afflictions" suffered by the disciples and listed in chapter 4 of the Letter. What this means is that the text has nothing of direct relevance to contribute to our discussion. However, the scholars we are following also arrive at a second conclusion which is of indirect importance for us. Despite what a number of exegetes allege,

Paul does not say that he is afraid of dying—afraid of dying, that is, before the Parousia. It is true that he rejects the Gnostic idea that “nakedness” of soul is a salvific good, pushing it aside without a word of discussion as inhuman and untrue. But fear of the intermediate state as a time of nakedness is notable by its absence. As Bultmann puts it:

Tharrein means we face death with confidence, and *eudokoumen mallon* that we even welcome it! Nothing better could happen to us! . . . The intrepid zeal to serve the Lord not only knows no more fear of death; there is even a touch of longing for death.⁶³

How can such an attitude be explained without invoking Paul’s certitude, expressed in Philippians 1, 23, that, even now, to die means to “be with Christ.” A profound isomorphism unites Second Corinthians 5, 6–10 to Philippians 1, 21–26, something especially clear if one concentrates in particular on v. 8 of the Corinthian text and v. 21 of the Philippian. In both cases, the truly desirable thing is being at home with the Lord: already, now, as soon as possible. Yet in both cases, to speak in the accents of Bultmann, it is also clear that faith banishes not just fear of death, but its opposite, the growing yearning for death, as well. For faith can give even to the burden of “wasting away . . . daily”⁶⁴ the radiance that belongs to being allowed to “please him.”⁶⁵

What makes all these texts, but notably Second Corinthians, so opaque from our viewpoint today is the fact that Paul makes no attempt to develop an anthropology which might clarify this hope in its diverse stages but simply argues from the side of references to Christ. It is Christ who is life: both now and at any point in the future. In the presence of such a certainty, the anthropological “substrate” of Paul’s thinking lies necessarily outside his focus of

attention, in shadow. To Paul this must have been unproblematic, since he shared the common presuppositions of his fellow Jews. His task was simply that of formulating the novel element, the reality of Christ and relationship with him, in all its dramatic importance.

In consequence of these reflections, we can afford to be brief in dealing with Philippians 1, 23. For Paul, life in this world is “Christ,” but death is gain, since in the “dissolution” of all that is earthly, death means “being with Christ.” An inner freedom springs from this knowledge, a fearless openness in death’s regard and also an uncomplicating—no, more—a joyful readiness for further service. In an earlier generation of scholars, it was believed that this text was inexplicable save by the intrusion of “Hellenisation” into the apostle’s thought processes. Today we understand that there is no break whatsoever vis-à-vis Paul’s earlier affirmations.

What he says in Philippians 1 he could already have proclaimed in First Thessalonians, had he seen an opportunity for doing so.⁶⁶

What is happening before our very eyes is not that Hebrew “monism” is yielding to Greek “dualism,” but that a preexistent Jewish heritage is receiving its proper christological center. The transformation went so far that it already reached the idea which John would express so graphically: “I am the resurrection and the life.”⁶⁷

(c) *Conclusions and Implications*

The first point we can make by way of an attempt at a conclusion is that the decisively new element which permitted Christianity to emerge from Judaism was faith in the risen Lord and in the present actuality of his life. The presence of the risen Christ transforms faith into a realized claim on the future, filling it with the certitude of the

believer's own resurrection. More partial, individual aspects are taken over, without break of continuity, from Judaism, and assimilated piecemeal to this christological foundation. Through faith in the risen Lord, the intermediate state and the resurrection are linked to each other in a more thoroughgoing way than could have been the case before. Nevertheless, they remain distinct. In the New Testament and the fathers, all the images generated by Judaism for the intermediate state recur: Abraham's bosom, paradise, altar, the tree of life, water, light. We shall see in a moment how conservative the early Church was to be in this very area of eschatological representation. So far from undergoing the sea-change from "Semitism" to "Hellenism," the Church remained fully within the Semitic canon of images, as the art of the catacombs, the Liturgy and theology combine to show. It simply became ever more lucidly clear that these images do not describe places but transcribe Christ himself, who is true light and life, the very *arbor vitae*. In such a fashion, these images lost their more-or-less cosmological status and became the vehicles of assertions about God in Christ. In thus floating free, they took on new depth.

In the light of these insights, it should be evident that the Bible did not turn a particular anthropology into dogma. Rather did it offer the christology which flows from the resurrection as the one foundation for eschatology truly appropriate to faith. This foundation confers on thought the right and duty to draw on its own potential in order to illuminate the anthropological presuppositions and implications contained in the foundation itself. Starting out from this perception, the patristic age haltingly and the Middle Ages more self-confidently used the instruments provided by Greek thinkers so as to grasp the meaning of the statement that we will not be stored up after death in

caves and chambers like chattels, but clasped by that person whose love embraces us all.

From these mullings, we can extract four implications which sum up the significance of our reflections hitherto for systematic theology, and give us an idea of the task which lies ahead.

1. First, the idea of a sleep of death, in the sense of an unconscious state spanning the period between death and the end of the world is an unfounded piece of archaizing which no New Testament text warrants. Paul's thinking always proceeds on the basis of the Pharisaic and Rabbinical teaching to which he gives a christological heart and depth without ever rejecting it. That those who have died in Christ are alive: this is the fundamental certitude which was able to exploit contemporary Jewish conceptions for its own purposes.

2. Secondly, not only in the New Testament period but throughout the life-span of the early Church, this fundamental certitude was expressed in images made available by Judaism—and, naturally enough, by closely related images from the treasury of forms that was Mediterranean culture. The mediaevals tried to throw fresh light on the essential claim found in the ground-conception of a life deriving from the presence of Christ. It is obvious, I suppose, that the status of a pictorial representation or a conceptual expression is not to be judged by its antiquity but in terms of its correspondence with the thought which it embodies. A later analysis, such as that undertaken in the Middle Ages, may do more justice to some fundamental idea than any of its predecessors.

3. Thirdly, whilst on the one hand a host of images underwent a kind of christological simplification and integration, it must be recognized that human beings, in their need for an object to contemplate, felt compelled to

unfold images once again. There is nothing perverse in such a re-creation of iconic forms. Indeed, it would be foolish to strive for a completely imageless piety, in blatant contradiction of human nature. However, precisely this consideration makes it all the more important to evaluate images in terms of their true measure, to keep them faithful to this measure, and to prevent them from shooting off into the realms of mythology. Here there are certainly legitimate grounds for criticizing the history of spirituality in which such measuring against the authentic standard was hardly ever carried out with the requisite degree of thoroughness. It is not the business of those entrusted with preaching the faith to expel the images from the Church. But it is very much their business to purify them again and again.

4. Fourthly and finally, to the degree that christology's full significance was realized, the individual eschatological images became filled with christological meaning. The importance of their temporal constituents, including those concerned with the history of the cosmos, quite naturally shrank accordingly. But then the question which gained in urgency, and which in our time is once again a central feature in discussion of the problem of eschatology, became this: to what extent can that temporal and cosmic aspect be excluded, and rightly excluded, without abolishing the realistic and universal content of the Gospel promise? It is to this dilemma that we will be devoting special attention in the pages that follow.

3. THE DOCUMENTS OF THE CHURCH'S MAGISTERIUM

Three stages can be discerned in the formation of the Church's doctrine. Characteristically enough, the early

Church formulated no dogma about the immortality of the soul. There was no occasion for such a formulation. On the one hand, the Jewish matrix of Christianity provided the Church with a tradition which held it to be self-evidently certain that the dead do not return to nothingness but await the resurrection in "Hades," in a manner appropriate to their form of life. On the other hand, since Christian faith had made no specific statement about immortality, there was no reason to give it its own special slot in the Church's rule of faith, wherein only the chief articles of Christianity in its particularity and novelty were set forth. Historians of doctrine have shown that in the Christian East Clement and Origen represent something of a turning point, the full extent of whose implications remain to be investigated.⁶⁸ Yet even for these two Alexandrians and their intellectual posterity, the condition of the dead remains an intermediate state. Although they shook up the kaleidoscope, they by no means obliterated the fundamental pattern, Jewish-oriented as that was, of the community's faith. In the West, even a modest caesura of this kind was lacking, though, this said, more work needs to be done on developments from the fourth century onwards. In accordance with Jewish tradition, it was customary to distinguish the destiny of the martyrs from that of the rest of the dead. The martyrs alone enjoyed the final and definitive glory. The influence of Hellenistic symbolism on funereal art and in the libation rituals for the dead did not wipe out this state of things but rather gave it more solid, if coarse-grained, form. While the theological thinking of the great patristic divines began to modify the concept of Hades under the pressure of the architectonic connections between christology and anthropology, this movement of ideas remained fairly fluid. As yet there was no development sufficient to render new

dogmatic formulations possible. Nor did the theological enterprise affect the general consciousness of the faithful so nearly that such formulations could be thought of as necessary.

Against a background of imperfectly clarified convictions, distinct enough, however (thanks notably to the story of Lazarus), to constitute genuine convictions of faith, there shone that central star in the firmament of Christian confession: belief in the resurrection of the body. All the creeds and *regulae fidei* speak of it, with pride of place among them the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople. (But note also, for instance, the *Quicumque vult* or Pseudo-Athanasian Creed.)⁶⁹ In the West, as distinct from both the Greek East and Egypt, the churches confessed the resurrection of the *flesh*, rather than of the dead. It has been shown that what we have here is a continuation of the Jewish terminology for the resurrection, which by means of the venerable formula "all flesh" denoted mankind as a whole.⁷⁰ At the same time, the phrase was indebted to Johannine theology with which, in early patristic times, Justin and Irenaeus had a special affinity. The idiom expresses, therefore, a concern not, in the first place, with corporeality, but with the universality of the resurrection hope. However, in the second place, since "all flesh" signifies the entire creature, called "flesh" in contrast to the divine Creator, the phrase also connotes the bodiliness of the creature, understanding it, we may be sure, by reference to that life-giving "flesh" of the Lord of which John had spoken.

During the first few centuries of the Church's existence, what was needed was the sheer confrontation of the Christian creed and its basic truth-claims with the *Lebensgefühl* of the world of that time and its scientific consciousness—not forgetting those aberrant reinterpretations of

Christianity which had let themselves be absorbed by such ideas. Towards the end of the late antique period, when the nettle of Origenist theology had to be grasped, the going got somewhat rougher. A controversy broke out as to the kind of materiality which the risen body possessed and its relation to the earthly body. We shall have to return to this later, in connection with some present-day controversies. Here it must suffice to draw attention to the later credal formularies with their distinctly uncompromising language. The *Fides Damasi*, originating probably in the southern Gaul of the late fifth century, has this to say:

We believe that we who have been purified in his death, and in his blood, will be raised on the Last Day in that flesh in which we now live.⁷¹

Or again, the Council of Toledo of 675 declared:

The true resurrection of all the departed will take place after the example of our Head. Not in an ethereal or in any other widely different flesh, as some assert in their foolishness, will we rise again, but, as our faith teaches, in this self-same flesh in which we live, exist and move.⁷²

Fifth century Gaul also bequeathed us the *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua* which laid down rules for an examination of faith prior to the consecration of a new bishop. The candidate must be asked "whether he believes in the resurrection of that flesh in which we now live, and of no other: *quam gestamus et non alterius*."⁷³ Pope Leo IX made use of this text in 1053 when he was asked for his confession of faith by the Antiochene patriarch Peter: "I believe in the true resurrection of precisely that flesh which is now mine, *quam nunc gesto*, and in the life everlasting."⁷⁴ The same dogmatic tradition was confirmed by the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 in its repudiation of the teaching of

the Albigensians and Cathars: "All will rise with their own bodies, the bodies which they bear here. . . ." ⁷⁵

Whereas these earliest doctrinal statements of the mediæval Church in the area of eschatology remain fully within the problematic of patristic Christendom, a new stage of development in the Church's teaching was brought about by the dogmatic bull *Benedictus Deus* which Pope Benedict XII promulgated on 29 January 1336. In this bull the Pope taught that, in the time after Christ's passion, death and ascension into heaven, the souls of those departed persons who stand in no further need of purification do not have to linger in an intermediate state. Rather, "even before their reunification with their bodies and the general judgment . . . they are and will be in heaven," so that they "see the divine nature in an immediate vision, face-to-face, without the mediation of any creature." ⁷⁶ What was the occasion of this definition, and what is its relation to the heritage of the early Church? As regards the public events which prepared the way for the papal bull, it should be noticed that as early as 1241 the University of Paris—then acting as a kind of magisterial mouthpiece for the Church—had made a similar determination of doctrine. Moreover, the kernel of the teaching had been incorporated into the confession of faith drawn up in 1274 by the Second Council of Lyons for the reception into Catholic communion of the Byzantine emperor Michael Palaeologus. ⁷⁷ Pope John XXII, who reigned from 1316 to 1334, had himself early regarded such formulæ as self-evidently right and proper. But in his later years, as a result of extensive study of the fathers, he came to doubt their validity. In the texts of the fathers he discovered the doctrine of waiting for heaven which, as we have seen, dominated the entire patristic period and could still be found, in living continuity with that period, at more than one point in the works

of Bernard of Clairvaux (c. 1090–1153). ⁷⁸ This led the Pope to present, in a series of sermons, his newly formed conviction that there is a strictly christological intermediate phase in the destiny of the dead. Only after the final judgment and the resurrection is this intermediate state replaced by a definitive Trinitarian condition. Until the Last Day, the saints lie, as the Book of the Apocalypse suggests, "beneath the altar" ⁷⁹; that is, under the consoling protection of Jesus' humanity. Not till the final judgment will they come from beneath the cover of that humanity to receive the direct vision, "over the altar," of God himself. The transition from one state to the other is the event whereby Jesus hands over the Kingdom to the Father, as announced by St. Paul in First Corinthians 15, 24.

Such an archaizing conception of the life beyond proved a tremendous scandal to the faith-consciousness of believers at large, since that consciousness had meanwhile been formed in a very different manner. The scandal was exploited for political ends in the accusation of heresy brought by the Pope's Franciscan opponents in the circle of William of Ockham at the court of the emperor Louis of Bavaria. On his deathbed, the Pope issued a carefully formulated recantation. His Franciscan successor, who had come to the papal chair from life in academe, decided some few years after his accession to put an end to the uncertainty by giving the Church's current faith-consciousness binding expression in the bull mentioned above. When we look more closely at the nature of the theological developments involved in all this, we shall have to return to the question of the inner logic contained in this process. But even at this stage, we can say that the papal text of 1336 implies in its teaching a certain distancing from the fathers. Yet in our evaluation we must not overlook the fact that its core assertion derives from christology, being in

the last resort an interpretation of the meaning of Christ's ascension in all its objectivity with a view to determining at the same time the meaning of Christ's passion, disclosed in the ascension. According to this text, then, the Lord's ascension is essentially an event of a kind which may be called "anthropological-historical." It signifies that now, after Christ, there is no longer a closed heaven. Christ is in heaven: that is, God has opened himself to man, and man, when he passes through the gate of death as one justified, as someone who belongs to Christ and has been received by him, enters into the openness of God. Thus the difference between John XXII and Benedict XII lies above all in their varying estimates of christology. This suggests how inadequate a mere material comparison with the patristic formulae would be in guiding our judgment in this area. As we saw, the ideas of the New Testament and the Fathers about the life of the dead between death and resurrection were borrowed from the variegated conception of Sheol in early Judaism. The Christian authors placed such ideas in a relationship with the christological center, through which step they underwent a process of "christologizing." At first, this process took second place behind the more urgent task of clarifying and defending the message of the resurrection. The ideas inherited from Judaism could not, however, remain permanently self-enclosed and self-sufficient. They were subject to a process of christianization, of being drawn into the sphere of christology, along a trajectory whose basic direction was already visible in the patristic age but whose journey was far from completed then.

In this perspective, the dogmatic texts which have come down to us from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries mean that the still indeterminate connection between intertestamental Judaic conceptions and Christian confes-

sion is at last receiving a more sharply etched form. Only one picture of the intermediate state survives this transformation, and that is purgatory. After the various Jewish accounts of Sheol had been thrown into the melting-pot, purgatory was grasped as a distinct theological quantity in its own right, being defined with the assistance of the idea of purification. Because this development took place after the separation from the churches of the East it was ever afterwards impossible to reach a common view on the matter in both East and West. The traditional view, for which the righteous and the sinners had their respective abodes, collapsed and was replaced by a scheme of preliminary and final states, itself indebted to a christological reflection on the ascension. According to this scheme, hell's portals are now open for the sinner, just as heaven's gate is for the just.⁸⁰ Confronted with the ascension of Christ in all its definitive quality, the notion of a preliminary stage in the attainment of eternal destiny loses something of its importance yet is by no means abandoned altogether. According to *Benedictus Deus*, there is still something provisional about the state of the separated soul inasmuch as the *resumptio corporis*, reunification with the body, and the final judgment are still to come. What existence under these conditions might consist in is not, however, further clarified. Luther, on the other hand, in his swing away from the idea of the immortality of the soul towards that of resurrection, adopted a thoroughly antagonistic posture vis-à-vis the notion of a preliminary stage. In the context of the story of Lazarus he stresses, against the Scholastics, in a text we have already touched on:

Totus Abraham: the whole man shall live! What you do is to tear me off a bit of Abraham and say, 'This is what shall live.' . . . A soul which is in heaven and desires the body: it must be a crazy soul we are talking about.⁸¹

The mediaeval dogmatic text we have been considering, by contrast, maintained the idea of an intermediate state by distinguishing between the personal and the cosmic-historical definitiveness of christology (and so, in christology, of human destiny). In this sense, it can be seen, in fact, as a synthetic statement of the spiritual and intellectual movement of the patristic age.

A rather different controversy has left its mark on the last text to be treated here, the bull *Apostolici regiminis* which came out of the eighth session of the fifth Lateran Council (19 December, 1513). Over against the Renaissance Aristotelianism of Pietro Pomponazzi (1464–1525), this document affirms that one cannot call the spiritual soul mortal, or assert that it is something non-individual, impersonal, a collective reality in which the single human being merely participates. This is an instructive text, since it highlights the confrontation between, on the one hand, the patristic and mediaeval synthesis of Greek and Christian elements, and, on the other, the spirit of the Renaissance which rejected this synthesis, seeking Greek thought in its pre-Christian purity and in that way pointing on towards the modern age. It is significant that Pomponazzi's reconstruction of Greek thought in its historical originality did not lead to a stress on the immortal soul as opposed to the resurrection of the body. Rather did it produce a very un-Greek denial of the Christian doctrine of the soul and the soul's hope.

4. THEOLOGICAL UNFOLDING

(a) *The Heritage of Antiquity*

Were we to take as our unquestioned starting point currently fashionable views in the history of theology, we should be obliged to say that *Benedictus Deus* marks the

triumph of Hellenic body-soul dualism—even if the fathers may be judged more leniently. Yet, given the considerable distance in both time and spiritual experience which separates the fourteenth century from the Hellenic world, we have the right to ask whether such a diagnosis can lay claim to any probability, especially after noting the distorting effect of fresh encounter with the original Greek heritage during the Renaissance. To assess the real significance of Greek influence on Christianity, and so to describe justly the development which Christianity underwent, we must carry out some reflection of our own on the attitudes of the Greeks to the body and the soul.

In looking at the history of thought about death, we already had occasion to mention the turning point which lies between the archaic world of Homer, where body and person coincide, and the thought of Plato. The new view is generally held to have originated in the Orphic mystery religion, crucial for the life of the Greek spirit through the mediation of such figures as Pythagoras and Empedocles. Here it is that one comes across the separation of body and soul and the concept of the body as the soul's tomb or prison. The soul appears as the locus of the knowledge of truth while such ideas as guilt, purification and judgment play an important ancillary role.

There can be no doubt that this religious tradition was important for Plato in his attempt to rebuild the Greek polis. But at the same time, it is equally certain that the Orphic tradition remained more or less esoteric and cannot simply be identified with what is "Greek" *tout court*.⁸² By origin, it was far from Greek. Moreover, Plato transformed this religious tradition philosophically, directing it to his own principal *Leitmotiv*, justice. This is especially clear in the form which little by little his doctrine of the soul took on. Plato saw a threefoldness at work in man: there is

something multiply animal-like in us with the many heads of beasts both wild and tame; there is also something more specifically lion-like; and finally, there is something distinctively human. The last aspect he calls the "inner man,"⁸³ thus coining an expression which will recur in the writings of St. Paul.⁸⁴ This threefold division is a projection into the individual of the three estates of Aryan society: priests and scholars; warriors; peasants and merchants.⁸⁵ The human being is thus interpreted in political terms, by reference to the life of the polis. At the same time, these three aspects of man coincide with the three fundamental virtues: wisdom, courage, temperance. As determinations of the individual person in his concreteness they are also related to ancient medical traditions which sought to localize the active centers of the human totality, body together with soul. For Plato, the human task consists in drawing these three into a unity. The result is the fourth cardinal virtue, justice. At this key point, therefore, anthropology points once more in the direction of political philosophy from which it can indeed hardly be separated. Simultaneously, we also become aware that Plato knows no primordial dualism among the powers of the human soul. His goal is, rather, the inner unity of man, the gathering together and purification of all our powers in "justice." His goal is to breed and ennoble the stock of the tame animals, to hinder the development of their savage counterparts and to make the lion in us use his strength in the struggle for unity. Similarly, in the context of the interrelation of body and soul, Plato's supreme aim is the "integration of dualistic elements in a unity-in-multiplicity."⁸⁶

Moreover, Plato consciously acknowledged the element of mystery in all this. From the fruitful ground of this mystery he was able to gather numerous insights for anthropology. Yet he always respected the metaphorical na-

ture of its characteristic discourse wherein the aspect of mystery is faithfully retained, since it cannot be decanted into some purely philosophical position. Typical here is the conclusion of that section of the *Phaedo* which deals with our theme: There Plato wrote:

A man of sense ought not to say, nor will I be very confident, that the description which I have given of the soul and her mansions is exactly true. But I do say that, inasmuch as the soul is shown to be immortal, he may venture to think, not improperly or unworthily, that something of the kind is true. The venture is a glorious one, and he ought to comfort himself with words like these.⁸⁷

Accordingly, Plato time and again shifts his register of images,⁸⁸ accentuating them differently in dependence on the different occasions when they are brought into play. We cannot pursue here the complex questions which exegesis of the Platonic corpus demands. Nevertheless, certain things of importance for our investigation have already become clear. First, immortality is never a purely philosophical doctrine. It could be asserted only where a religious tradition with its own due authority entered onto the scene, was suitably acknowledged and subsequently given philosophical interpretation. In Plato, the doctrine of immortality belongs to a religious context that is at the same time a departure point for a philosophy of justice, itself, in the perspective of his political thought, his principal concern. Dualistic elements inherited from tradition are placed at the service of a positive mode of thinking whose lodestars are the cosmos and the polis, and in this way those elements lose their dualistic edge. So far as we can tell, Plato did not develop, however, a unified philosophical account of the nature of the soul both in itself and in its relation to the body. His successors thus found themselves wandering in the philosophical landscape pitted with problems. Plato left no "Hellenic schematization"

just lying at the wayside for any interested passer-by to pick up.

With Aristotle, as the heritage of mythopoeic ideas is stripped away, the portrait of the soul becomes rather two-dimensional. The definition of the soul which he bequeathed is that of the soul as "entelechy" or act, that is, "substance in the sense of the form of a natural body which has life through its own potentiality."⁸⁹ The soul is understood as an organic principle, bound as form to its matter, and likewise perishable along with it. The truly spiritual element in man resides in *nous*, "mind," regarded not as something individual and personal, but as a participation of man in a divine, transcendent principle.⁹⁰ Here we find ourselves confronted with a rigorously non-dualistic unity of the human being as a body-soul composite. At the same time, we are faced with an impersonal, spiritual principle whose irradiating power includes man, without belonging to him as a person.

It has already been mentioned above that the Stoics reverted to a materialistic view of the world. For them, the soul consisted of the lightest of the elements, namely fire. As such, it is able to give life to the "mixture" of body and soul which is man. After death, it returns into the great fire, in accordance with the law whereby every element returns to its own place. Individuality has no future beyond death.⁹¹

Finally, let us steal a glance at that great renovator of Platonist philosophy in the third century, Plotinus. Here too we find nothing that corresponds to the current textbook schematization of "Greek thought." For Plotinus, the whole world consists of three substances: the One, the *nous*, and soul. This doctrine of three substances is simultaneously his cosmology and his theology, the Neo-Platonist "Trinity." It constitutes the essential framework

of his anthropology. To the extent that the soul peers down into the recessive stream of the cosmic process it appears multiplied in the mirror of matter. The more it looks down, the more it forgets its own unity. But the more it turns back, the more it returns from the ephemeral appearances of the play of images into unity, and so into both reality and divinity. Plotinus' doctrine of three substances is at the same time, and indeed first and foremost, a spiritual doctrine which, by situating the contrasting movements of descent and ascent within man himself, bids him withdraw his being from its dissipation by looking towards unity. Plotinus calls on man to re-climb the ladder of reality whose top rests in the unitary divine origin. In that crucible the appearance of individuality simply melts away.

These few hints may suffice to show that the frequently encountered notion of a Hellenic-Platonic dualism of soul and body, with its corollary in the idea of the soul's immortality, is something of a theologian's fantasy. Certainly, there were mystery cults which held out to their initiates the promise of immortality. But some supposed universal Greek conviction of this kind is a will-o'-the-wisp. If anything, the fundamental mood of antiquity at the time when Christianity was spreading could be described as stamped by despair.

It is above all the burial inscriptions of that age which testify so vividly to the hopelessness of pagan people. Either they believed in no after-life, or they thought of it as a sepulchral shadow-existence in Hades.⁹²

By way of postscript, a text from Origen of Alexandria's commentary on the Song of Songs may bring out the conclusion which reigned amid the welter of opinions about the soul:

For the soul (appropriate understanding) will include a certain self-perception, by which she ought to know how she is constituted in herself, whether her being is corporeal or incorporeal, and whether it is simple, or consists of two, three or several elements; also, as some would enquire, whether the substance of the soul has been made, or has definitely not been made, by anyone; and, if it has been made, how it was made; whether, as some opine, its substance is contained in the bodily seed and originates together with the first beginning of the body; or whether it is introduced from the outside into the womb of a woman, and there united, as a perfect thing, to the body already prepared and formed for it. And, if this be the case, whether it comes as a new creation that has only just been made when the body is seen to have been formed; . . . or whether we should think that, having been created some time earlier, it comes for some reason to assume a body. . . . And there is the further question whether the soul puts on a body only once and, having laid it down, seeks for it no more; or whether, when it once has laid aside what it took, it takes it yet again; and, if it does so a second time, whether it keeps what it has taken always, or some day puts it off once more.²³

(b) *The New Concept of Soul*

The ancients did not communicate to their successors any clear concept of human destiny beyond the grave. The early Church could not derive its answers from this source. On the basis of the results our enquiry has produced so far, we can formulate with some confidence our principal thesis on this question. The view of the afterlife, the span of time between death and resurrection which developed in the early Church, is based on Jewish traditions of the life of the dead in Sheol, traditions transmitted and given christological focus by the New Testament. Any other position than this is in conflict with the historical facts. The doctrine of immortality in the early Church had two sides to it. First, it was determined by the christological center, whence the indestructibility of the life gained through faith was guaranteed. Second, it linked this theo-

logical insight to the idea of Sheol, utilizing that idea as an anthropological foundation, and in this way it found anchorage in a basic belief which is, as we have seen, of a universal human kind. This fundamental belief had certainly developed beyond the archaic, yet its anthropological implications had not been worked out in any consistent or precise manner. This explains why the early Church lacked a unified terminology in this realm. In the Jewish tradition, that being of the human person which survives death, and thus, in the Christian perspective, the bearer of existence with Christ, is most frequently called the soul or spirit. (The terms stand side by side in, for example, the Ethiopian book of Enoch.²⁴) Unfortunately, both concepts were obscured by the fast spreading Gnostic systems in which *psyche*, soul, is classified as the lowest rung of human existence, by contrast with the more elevated condition of the men of spirit, the "pneumatics." The ballast thus taken aboard by these terms had its effect far beyond the ambit of those sympathetic to Gnostic thought.

Clearly, then, what the Church had to maintain was, on the one hand, the central certainty of a life with Christ that not even death can destroy, and, on the other hand, the incompleteness of that life in the time before the definitive "resurrection of the flesh." For this very reason, some clarification in the anthropological means of expression of this teaching was highly desirable. Moreover, the Christian faith itself made certain demands upon anthropology, and these demands were not met by any of the pre-existing ways of understanding what it is to be human. Nevertheless, the conceptual tools of such earlier anthropologies could and must be placed in the service of the Gospel by way of an appropriate transformation. What needed to be developed was an anthropology which in the first instance recognized that man is, in his unified total-

ity, the creature of God, conceived and willed by him. But at the same time, this anthropology was also obliged to distinguish within man between an element that perishes and an element that abides—though in such a way that the path towards the resurrection, the definitive reunification of man and creation, remained open. In sum, the anthropology desired should weld together Plato and Aristotle precisely at the points where their doctrines were mutually opposed. There was a need to take over Aristotle's teaching on the inseparable unity of body and soul, yet without interpreting the soul as an entelechy. For, in the latter case, the soul of man would be just as much bonded to matter as is organic life at large: dependent on matter for being what it is. Instead, the special, spiritual nature of the soul had to be highlighted, without letting the soul drop into some murky ocean of an *anima mundi*. Granted the inherent difficulty of such an undertaking, it is scarcely surprising that the synthesis was so long in the making.

It found its final and definitive form only in the work of Thomas Aquinas. Following Aristotle, Thomas defines the nature of the soul by means of the formula *anima forma corporis*: the soul is the "form" of the body. But in reality, this definition embodied a complete transformation of Aristotelianism. To Aristotle, this formula meant that the soul, just like the entelechy—the formative principle of material reality in general—is tied to matter. Matter and form for him are strict correlatives. Without "form," matter remains a mere potency, while form becomes reality only in its union with matter. If the soul is form, then it belongs to the world of bodies, marked by coming to be and passing away again. And this in turn means that the spirit, which does not belong to the world, cannot be individual or personal. Indeed, only as being neither is it immortal. Thomas' twofold affirmation that the

spirit is at once something personal and also the "form" of matter would simply have been unthinkable for Aristotle. Anton Pegis, whose researches contributed greatly to a correct understanding of the relation between Thomas and Aristotle, has this to say on just this topic:

From this point of view, the Thomistic doctrine of an intellectual substance as the substantial form of matter must be seen as a moment in history when an Aristotelean formula was deliberately used to express in philosophical terms a view of man that the world and tradition of Aristotelianism considered a metaphysical impossibility.⁹⁵

And so we come at last to a really tremendous idea: the human spirit is so utterly one with the body that the term "form" can be used of the body and retain its proper meaning. Conversely, the form of the body is spirit, and this is what makes the human being a person.

The soul is not two things: substance, and the form of the body. Rather, is it substance *as* the form of the body, just as it is the form of the body *as* substance. . . . The separation of the soul from its body goes against its nature and diminishes its likeness to God, its Creator. Being in the body is not an activity, but the self-realisation of the soul. The body is the visibility of the soul, because the soul is the actuality of the body.⁹⁶

What seemed philosophically impossible has thus been achieved. The apparently contradictory demands of the doctrine of creation and the christologically transformed belief in Sheol have been met. The soul belongs to the body as "form," but that which is the form of the body is still spirit. It makes man a person and opens him to immortality. Compared with all the conceptions of the soul available in antiquity, this notion of the soul is quite novel. It is a product of Christian faith, and of the exigencies of faith for human thought. Only the downright ignorance of history could find this contestable. Since this

point is so central, permit me to make it again in a different way. The idea of the soul as found in Catholic liturgy and theology up to the Second Vatican Council has as little to do with antiquity as has the idea of the resurrection. It is a strictly Christian idea, and could only be formulated on the basis of Christian faith whose vision of God, the world and human nature it expresses in the realm of anthropology. For this reason the Council of Vienne in its third session (May 6, 1312) was right to defend this definition of the soul as appropriate to the faith.

We reject . . . as erroneous . . . any teaching . . . which rashly . . . doubts that the substance of the rational . . . soul is truly and essentially the form of the human body.⁹⁷

The bull *Benedictus Deus* discussed above presupposed this anthropological clarification in its doctrine of the final vision of God. Once this insight had matured, the doctrine of Sheol had perforce to be seen in a new light. What had been meaningful before necessarily became dated and archaic.

(c) *The Dialogical Character of Immortality*

It might be objected against everything that has been said up to this point that the central issue of the contemporary debate has still not been confronted. What is at stake is not the defense or rejection of a particular anthropology, a given concept of the soul. The challenge to traditional theology today lies in the negation of an autonomous, "substantial" soul with a built-in immortality, in favor of that positive view which regards God's decision and activity as the real foundation of a continuing human existence. As Paul Althaus wrote:

Whether believers or not, it is God who makes us endure. He it is who enables us to persist, through all the reality of death in which we are lost to ourselves. He makes us endure and, in resur-

rection, gives us back to ourselves once more so that we may stand before his judgment-seat and live.⁹⁸

We have seen that, where the Christian concept of soul is concerned, the accusation of dualism is misplaced. Yet an objection to the soul might be raised in a somewhat different way. It might be said that, as soon as one begins to speak of a soul one renders immortality "substantialistic," grounding it upon the indivisibility of spiritual substance in a theologically inappropriate manner. It may indeed be the case that somewhat simplistic notions have gone the rounds in popular thinking. However, in none of the great theological teachers have I found a purely substantialist argument for immortality. Not even Plato argues on this basis.

Let me offer a classic example of the basic conception of both patristic and mediaeval theology, a homily by Gregory of Nyssa on the beatitudes. It is a magnificent witness to continuity with antiquity, but also to the transmutation of the thought of the ancient world. Gregory is commenting on a saying of the Lord preserved in St. Matthew's gospel: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."⁹⁹ Behind this beatitude, a favorite among the fathers, we can discern another saying of Jesus, this time from his high-priestly prayer: "This is eternal life, that they may know you. . . ."¹⁰⁰ The Greek longing for vision, the Greek awareness that vision is life—that knowledge, being wedded to the truth, is life—this mighty outreach of the Greek spirit towards the truth here finds its confirmation and final resting-place. Yet this word filled with hope and promise at first strikes man as we know him with a sense of despair, of the absurdity of his existence. Seeing God: *that* is life! But the ancient wisdom of the peoples, echoed by the Bible from the Pentateuch to Paul and John, tells us that no one can see God. He who would see God

dies. Man wants to see God, for only then can he live. But his strength cannot bear such a sight.

If God be Life, then anyone who does not see God does not see life. However, the prophets and the apostle testify: no one can see God. . . .

And so the human situation may be compared with that of Peter trying to walk upon the waters of Gennesareth. He wants to get across to the Lord, but he cannot. The philosopher, we might say, is Peter on the lake, wishing to step beyond mortality and glimpse life but not succeeding, indeed sinking beneath the waves. For all his capacity to speculate about immortality, in the end he cannot stand. The waters of mortality bear down his will to see. Only the Lord's outstretched hand can save sinking Peter, that is, humankind. That hand reaches out for us in the saying, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Philosophical understanding remains a walking on the waters: it yields no solid ground. Only God incarnate can draw us out of the waters by his power and hold us firm. Only he can make us stand up straight on the breakers of the sea of mortality. His promise is that we will attain the vision of God, which is life, not through speculative thinking but by the purity of an undivided heart, in the faith and love which take the Lord's hand and are led by it. Here, then, owing to a christological transformation, the Platonist notion of the life which flows from truth is rendered more profound, and made the vehicle of a "dialogical" concept of humanity: man is defined by his intercourse with God. At the same time, this new concept makes absolutely concrete claims about the things which will set us right on the path of immortality, and so changes a seemingly speculative theme into something eminently practical. The "purification" of the heart which comes

about in our daily lives, through the patience which faith and its offspring, love, engender, that purification finds its mainstay in the Lord who makes the paradoxical walking on the waters a possibility and so gives meaning to an otherwise absurd existence.¹⁰¹

This quite basic conception has remained characteristic of Christian thought in the tradition, though it may be presented with a variety of different nuances. In Thomas, it is integrated into an account of the dynamic movement of all creation towards God. The *anima*, as we have seen, belongs completely to the material world, yet also goes beyond this world in going beyond itself. It is in that movement that the material world, indeed, comes into its own, by stretching forth towards God in man. In man's turning to God "all the tributaries of finite being in all its variety of level and value, return to their Source."¹⁰² Man is conceived as a being "capable of the knowledge and love of God and called thereto."¹⁰³ In this way, the dialogical conception of humankind which emerged from the christological perspective is linked up with a resolution of the problem of matter, in terms of the dynamic unity of the entire created world. Anton Pegis put it beautifully when he described the fundamental continuity of Christian anthropological thought in these terms:

What St Augustine expressed with the help of Platonic elements was not a philosophical teaching about man. Quite directly, and first and foremost, he described a spiritual Odyssey . . . the story of the awakening of faith in a Christian man called to truth and blessedness. . . . St Thomas remained faithful to such a man. . . .¹⁰⁴

(d) *Immortality and Creation*

Up to this point we have taken it for granted that the "substantialistic" grounding of human immortality was to be rejected out of hand. Looking more closely, however,

a problem raises its head, and we must address ourselves to it. So far we have established that human life beyond the grave must be understood "dialogically," which means, in the concrete, in christological terms. But in saying as much, have we not committed ourselves to a supernaturalism which, when faced with the questionings of human beings at large is either dumb or, alternatively, finds itself having to extend the concept of christology so far that it becomes quite indeterminate, deprived of whatever makes it specific? When immortality is thought of simply as grace, or, indeed, as the special destiny of the pious, then it takes flight into the realm of the miraculous and loses its claim on the serious attention of thinking people. So we must face the question of just how the understanding of the issue we have gained up to now should be related to the God-made being of man at large. How far is what we are dealing with sheerly a matter of the affirmations of faith? And how far can faith make an impression on the rationality which all men share, and so on philosophical reflection?

In fact, the answer to these questions is already indicated in what we have covered. Being referred to God, to truth himself, is not, for man, some optional pleasurable diversion for the intellect. When man is understood in terms of the formula *anima forma corporis*, that relationship to God can be seen to express the core of his very essence. As a created being he is made for a relationship which entails indestructibility. Teilhard de Chardin once remarked that it is in the nature of evolution to produce ever better eyesight. If we take up this thought, we can describe man accordingly as that stage in the creation, that creature, then, for whom the vision of God is part and parcel of his very being. Because this is so, because man is capable of grasping truth in its most comprehensive mean-

ing, it also belongs intrinsically to his being to participate in life. We agreed earlier that it is not a relationless being oneself that makes a human being immortal, but precisely his relatedness, or capacity for relatedness, to God. We must now add that such an opening of one's existence is not a trimming, an addition to a being which really might subsist in an independent fashion. On the contrary, it constitutes what is deepest in man's being. It is nothing other than what we call "soul." We could also come at the same insight from another angle and say, A being is the more itself the more it is open, the more it is in relationship. And that in turn will lead us to realize that it is the man who makes himself open to all being, in its wholeness and in its Ground, and becomes thereby a "self," who is truly a person. Such openness is not a product of human achievement. It is given to man; man depends for it on Another. But it is given to man to be his very own possession. That is what is meant by creation, and what Thomas means when he says that immortality belongs to man by nature. The constant background here is Thomas' theology of creation: nature is only possible by virtue of a communication of the Creator's, yet such communication both establishes the creature in its own right and makes it a genuine participator in the being of the One communicated.¹⁰⁵

One naturally asks, then, how it is possible for human beings to live in a fashion that goes counter to their own essence: closed off from, rather than open to, the rest of being. How can they deny, or simply fail to perceive, their relationship to God? The foregoing gives us the basis of an answer, but following up the question will help us to see the true breadth and depth of the theology of creation, as well as to identify the point where the special, novel feature of christology enters into the picture. If we recall our reflections on the theology of death, we remember that

biblical thought spirals constantly around that question. Man as we know him wants to generate his own immortality. He would like to fabricate it out of his own stuff: *non omnis moriar*, not everything about me will perish. The *monumentum aere perennius*, the achievements I bequeath, these will immortalize a part of me. But in this attempt to manufacture eternity, the vessel of man must, at the last, founder. What endures after one is not oneself. Man falls headlong into the unreal, yielding up his life to unreality, to death. The intimate connection of sin and death is the content of the curse we read of in the book of Genesis:

You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.¹⁰⁶

An existence in which man tries to divinize himself, to become "like a god" in his autonomy, independence and self-sufficiency, turns into a Sheol-existence, a being in nothingness, a shadow-life on the fringe of real living. This does not mean, however, that man can cancel God's creative act or put it into reverse. The result of his sin is not pure nothingness. Like every other creature, man can only move within the ambit of creation. Just as he cannot bring forth being of himself, so neither can he hurl it back into sheer nothingness. What he can achieve in this regard is not the annulment of being, but lived self-contradiction, a self-negating possibility, namely "Sheol." The natural ordination towards the truth, towards God, which of itself excludes nothingness, still endures, even when it is denied or forgotten.

And this is where the affirmations of christology come into their own. What happened in Christ was that God overcame this self-contradiction from within—as distinct from destroying human freedom by an arbitrary act from

without. The living and dying of Christ tell us that God himself descends into the pit of Sheol, that in the land of absolute loneliness he makes relationship possible, healing the blind¹⁰⁷ and so giving life in the midst of death. The Christian teaching on eternal life takes on, once again, a thoroughly practical character at this point. Immortality is not something we achieve. Though it is a gift inherent in creation it is not something which just happens to occur in nature. Were it so, it would be merely a *fata morgana*. Immortality rests upon a relationship in which we are given a share, but by which, in sharing it, we are claimed in turn. It points to a *praxis* of receiving, to that model for living which is the self-emptying of Jesus,¹⁰⁸ as opposed to the vain promise of salvation contained in the words "Ye shall be as gods," the sham of total emancipation. If the human capacity for truth and for love is the place where eternal life can break forth, then eternal life can be consciously experienced in the present. It can become the *forma corporis*, not in the sense of estranging us from the world, but, rather, in that of saving us from the anarchy of formlessness, shaping us into a truly human form instead.

(e) Summary: The Principal Features of the Christian Faith in Eternal Life

At the conclusion of our analysis of the various aspects, both historical and doctrine, of Christian faith in the life everlasting, we are in a position to attempt a description of the proper or specific physiognomy which distinguishes the Christian view from other conceptions. It may be summed up in three key phrases:

Firstly, the determinative starting point of the Christian understanding of immortality is the concept of God, and from this it draws its dialogical character. Since God is the

God of the living, and calls his creature, man, by name, this creature cannot be annihilated. In Jesus Christ, God's action in accepting humanity into his own eternal life has, so to speak, taken flesh: Christ is the tree of life whence we receive the food of immortality. Immortality cannot be accounted for in terms of the isolated individual existent and its native capacities, but only by reference to that relatedness which is constitutive of human nature. This statement about man returns us once again to our image of God, throwing light as it does so on the Christian understanding of reality at its central point. God too possesses immortality, or, more correctly, he *is* immortality, being that actuality of relationship which is Trinitarian love. God is not "atomic": he is relationship, since he is love. It is for this reason that he is life. In this perspective, the relationship of two people which is human love shines with the radiance of the eternal mystery. The signal we derive from this view of being tells us: relation makes immortal, openness, not closure, is the end in which we find our beginning.

Secondly, from belief in creation there follows the integral character of Christian hope. What is saved is the one creature, man, in the wholeness and unity of his personhood as that appears in embodied life. "Even the hairs of your head are all numbered."¹⁰⁹ This does not mean that nothing in man is transient. But it does mean that in the transfiguration of the transient, what takes shape is the abiding. Matter as such cannot provide the underpinning for man's continuing identity. Even during our life on earth it is changing constantly. Thus a duality distinguishing the constant from the variable factors in the make-up of man is necessary, being demanded, quite simply, by the logic of the question. Hence the indispensability of the body-soul distinction. Nevertheless, the Christian tradition, with an ever increasing consistency of purpose, which reached its

climax, as we have seen, with the work of Thomas and the Council of Vienne, has conceived this duality in such a way that it is not dualistic but rather brings to light the worth and unity of the human being as a whole. Even in the continuous "wasting away" of the body, it is the whole man in his unity who moves towards eternity. It is in the life of the body that God's creature grows in maturity in expectation of seeing God's face.

Thirdly, part of the Christian idea of immortality is fellowship with other human beings. Man is not engaged in a solitary dialogue with God. He does not enter an eternity with God which belongs to him alone. The Christian dialogue with God is mediated by other human beings in a history where God speaks with men. It is expressed in the "We" form proper to the children of God. It takes place, therefore, within the "body of Christ," in that communion with the Son which makes it possible for us to call God "Father." One can take part in this dialogue only by becoming a son with the Son, and this must mean in turn by becoming one with all those others who seek the Father. Only in that reconciliation whose name is Christ is the tongue of man loosened and the dialogue which is our life's true spring initiated. In christology, then, theology and anthropology converge as two strains in a conversation, two forms of the search for love. In all human love there is an implicit appeal to eternity, even though love between two human beings can never satisfy that appeal. In Christ, God enters our search for love and its ultimate meaning, and does so in a human way. God's dialogue with us becomes truly human, since God conducts his part as man. Conversely, the dialogue of human beings with each other now becomes a vehicle for the life everlasting, since in the communion of saints it is drawn up into the dialogue of the Trinity itself. This is why the communion of

saints is the locus where eternity becomes accessible for us. Eternal life does not isolate a person, but leads him out of isolation into true unity with his brothers and sisters and the whole of God's creation.

All of these statements turn in the last analysis upon the insight which holds that the place where true life is found is the risen Christ. As Heinrich Schlier has beautifully shown, Christ brings time to its completion by leading it into the moment of love. When human life is lived with Jesus it steps into the "time of Jesus": that is, into love, which transforms time and opens up eternity.¹¹⁰

One important question remains. Over against the theories sketched out in the opening section of this chapter, we were able to show that the idea of a resurrection taking place in the moment of death is not well-founded, either in logic or in the Bible. We saw that the Church's own form of the doctrine of immortality was developed in a consistent manner from the resources of the biblical heritage, and is indispensable on grounds of both tradition and philosophy. But that leaves the other side of the question still unanswered: what, then, about the resurrection of the dead? Is there such a thing as resurrection understood as a material event? Is there something of this kind which is genuinely an *event*, which resists transposition into the timelessness of eternity, but is to be connected with the end of history instead. Is it asking too much of thought to make it cope with such ideas? Would it not be wiser to look for ways to render them redundant? Such questions make us realize that, despite their contrary starting points, the modern theories we have met seek to avoid not so much the immortality of the soul as the resurrection, now as always the real scandal to the intellectuals. To this extent, modern theology is closer to the Greeks than it cares to recognize.

In attempting to face these problems we move into what is, from a methodological viewpoint, a new field. So far, in dealing with the questions of death and resurrection we have been moving in an area where fundamental anthropological experience and insight are a great support, even if purely human knowledge is no adequate yardstick there. We found that, at any rate to some extent, we could extrapolate from the present life to the existence if not the character of the life to come. Yet the content of eternal life, its *Was* as distinct from its *Dass*, lies completely outside the scope of our experience, being quite simply unknowable from our perspective. And so, in the concluding chapter of this book, as we reflect on the hints which divine revelation offers about this *Was*, in its fundamental possibilities, we must be alert to the limitations of what we can say. The tradition of the faith is not given to us for the satisfying of idle curiosity. Where it exceeds the proper limits of human experience, its aim is to *direct* us, not to *divert*, that is, to entertain us. This is why it opens up what lies beyond only to the extent that this will be a helpful signpost for those in the here and now. We must bear this in mind as we turn now to the final theme of eschatology.