

IV A Developing Theology

The epistolary literature of the New Testament was composed by the apostles of Christ for the missionary churches which they had founded or in which they had ministered. The correspondence was evoked by the problems which Christians encountered in coping with legalistic Judaism and eclectic paganism. Converts drawn from both of these backgrounds sought answers to the theological and ethical questions raised by the conflict of the gospel with their former religions, and expected the preachers to resolve their difficulties. For this reason the preponderance of apostolic writing is directed toward specific problems rather than toward a systematic presentation of Christian theology. With few exceptions the Epistles resemble dialogues rather than lectures. They reveal the pattern of Christian thought by the presuppositions which were taken for granted both by the writer and the readers.

The Epistles mark an advanced stage of Christian faith, for they contain the application of the basic principles of the gospel to the needs of a living and growing church. Their authors assume a knowledge of the deeds and teachings of Christ recounted in the Gospel narratives, since these facts had been widely disseminated through the initial preaching. Upon this current knowledge the apostolic teachers built Christian ethics and apologetics.

In literary sequence, the Epistles antedated the Gospels. As long as the eyewitnesses lived, the church depended more upon oral testimony than upon written record for its knowledge of Jesus' life and teachings. Emergencies in the Christian communities, however, necessitated immediate instruction, evoking the intervention by letter that created the apostolic writings. These documents, therefore, explain the implications of the fundamental facts of Christian truth and apply them to the creed and conduct of the church. They embody the authoritative statement of the significance of Christ for the believer and for the world.

Chief among the facts about Christ is the resurrection. Numerous allusions reveal how thoroughly the concept became integrated with Christian theology, for almost every aspect of spiritual life is defined by its relationship to the crowning event of the Saviour's life.

The Pauline Epistles

Among the preachers of the apostolic age, Paul was the most influential. Although Peter, James, John, and others proclaimed the same message concerning Christ and created a literature of their own, Paul excelled them as a thinker and a preacher, so that the theological structure of the Christian faith originated primarily with him. The thirteen extant Epistles attributed to Paul comprise his total writing. Since most of them deal with theological or moral exigencies, no one of them presents a complete picture of his theology. It is impossible to reconstruct the entirety of the apostle's original Christian preaching from any single Epistle, but one can recover its general content from a combination of the main ideas given by the group. The cardinal tenets of Christian doctrine which Paul himself illustrated or stressed belonged to the comprehensive body of truth which the church proclaimed. His letters include occasional references to the substance of the message which he preached in pioneer territory. Paul epitomized the substance of his message in his first letter to the Corinthian church. "For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he has been raised on the third day according to the scriptures; and that he

appeared . . . " (I Cor. 15:3-5a). He concluded this capsule statement with the words "So we preach, and so ye believed" (15:11). He claimed that his gospel was accepted by the entire church (Gal. 2:6-10) and that there was no distinction between him and the other preachers, except that his ministry was directed chiefly to the Gentiles, whereas theirs was for the Jews.

The period of Paul's literary activity covers nearly twenty years, beginning with the expansion of the missionary movement from the Gentile city of Syrian Antioch in A.D. 48, and extending to his final imprisonment and execution in Rome not later than A.D. 68. In these two decades he completed an itinerant ministry that extended to southern Asia Minor, Macedonia, Achaia, Illyricum, and even Rome itself. He built a series of active churches in the heart of the Roman empire that established Gentile Christianity and created a pattern for its subsequent growth. The Epistles are an index of the content of his message and of the unfolding of theology based upon the revelation of Christ.

Among these writings Romans is perhaps the broadest in scope. Written as a substitute for a personal visit which was precluded by the necessity of taking a contribution to the church in Jerusalem, Paul made the epistle a comprehensive statement of the plan of salvation. He discussed the nature of man's sin, God's provision of redemption in Christ, and the steps by which man can be reconciled to God and can attain holiness and power.

In this soteriological scheme the resurrection occupies a prominent place. It is initially the mark of Christ's divine sonship, for he "was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead" (Rom. 1:4). Paul, in presenting Christ as a redeemer for men, was obligated to prove His authority, for without divine recognition He could not act as the mediator of God's revelation, nor could He make atonement for man before God. The genuineness of Jesus' humanity was demonstrated by His becoming subject to death; the power of His deity was manifested by His rising from the dead. The crowning miracle was the foundation of apostolic authority, because it gave to the Christian message a unique fusion of the historical and the supernatural in one event.

The same principle is involved in the introduction to Galatians, where Paul declared that he was "an apostle not from men, neither through man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead" (Gal. 1:1). Confidence in the verity of the gospel confirmed by the resurrection enabled him to face a hostile world with courage and zeal. He could begin the theological system with a concrete occurrence rather than with an abstract axiom. As Dr. J. G. Machen once remarked, "Christianity is not something that was invented, but something that happened."

The next stage of reasoning carried Paul into the realm of objective theology. "[We] believe on him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:24-25).

The doctrine of justification by faith is central to Christian theology. Man, the sinner, possesses no assets by which he can merit or purchase salvation. He stands condemned by his deeds, by his conscience, and by the law, which cannot consistently demand less than perfection of those who attempt to keep it. Even if he desired to obey the law of God, he would not be capable of doing so, for he would be hopelessly handicapped by his past and would be weakened by the habit and presence of sin. In order to attain a satisfactory status with God he must have his record cleared, and he must possess a dynamic empowering him to maintain a holy life.

By the sufferings of Christ these requirements are satisfied. He was "delivered up for our trespasses" (Rom. 4:25), as the final sacrifice sufficient to expiate all human sin. Clearing the charges against man, however, is insufficient, for the sacrifice would not itself guarantee immunity from further sinning. "[He] was raised for our justification" (4:25) in order that He might insure the efficacy of His sacrifice by constant contact with the lives He had redeemed. For this reason Paul adds, "For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life" (5:10). The resurrection thus becomes the pledge and dynamic of eternal life.

Baptism, according to Romans, took its meaning from the resurrection rather than from simple purification by washing. "Are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life" (6:3-4). From the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41) to the present, baptism has been the normal method of confessing faith in Christ and of entering the ranks of the visible church. The believer who accepts baptism acknowledges through its symbolism that he has died to sin and has been buried, thereby severing permanently his connection with evil and with the habits and commitments of his former life. Emerging from the engulfing water he enters upon a completely new existence. "Newness of life" (Rom. 6:4), not just redirection, is predicated by this ordinance. The word "newness" (Greek, *kainotes*) implies freshness, a different kind of life from that which was previously known.

The reality and permanence of the new state are guaranteed by the historical experience of Christ. "For the death that he died, he died unto sin once: but the life that he lives, he lives unto God. Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus" (6:10-11). The resurrection is therefore the *basis* of Christian life, not simply the illustration of it. Faith involves not only the acknowledgment of the event but the appropriation of its meaning. The entire concept of sanctification, or progress in the attainment of personal righteousness, is founded upon the assumption that the Christian has been raised out of death and is therefore permanently severed from sin and dedicated to holiness: "present yourselves unto God, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (6:13).

Both the ideal and the practical aspects of sanctification are thus linked with Christ's resurrection. The ideal aspect is depicted in the historical pattern; the practical aspect emerges from personal experience. According to the autobiographical data in Romans, Paul had suffered a serious inner conflict resulting from his relationship to the law. Like any other devout Jew, he revered it as the revelation of God's righteousness, and he endeavored sincerely to keep it. Instead of a sense of security, engendered by his close approximation of its requirements, he experienced a tormenting frustration because his impulses defied his resolutions and constantly rebelled against his avowed purpose of righteousness. His inner mind became the battlefield of his religious duty and his personal desires. Far from correcting this condition, the law could only aggravate the conflict because it increased his sense of guilt. The more he strove to overcome evil tendencies, the more powerful they became. "I find then," he said, "that, to me who would do good, evil is present" (7:21). He was caught in a deadlock between the ideals that he could not conscientiously abandon, because he knew that they were the revelation of God, and the inward trend to evil that he could neither quell nor eradicate.

The only escape from this dilemma would be the intervention of an external power to tip the

scale one way or the other. Paul found the solution in Christ, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made [him] free from the law of sin and of death" (8:2). The "law of mind" (7:23), which consented to the law of God, and "the law of sin," which perpetually led him astray, kept him in uncertain suspense between good and evil. The "law of the Spirit" could prevail in favor of righteousness and so assure victory.

The victory of the Spirit, however, is founded on the resurrection. He is called "the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead" (8:11), who expresses in active operation among men the same kind of power that brought Jesus back to life. True Christianity is, therefore, more than religion to be adopted; it is a moral and spiritual dynamic that re-creates the inner life of man and that transforms his character.

In order to describe adequately the potency of this new life for the Ephesian Christians, Paul exhausted the resources of his vocabulary in his prayer. ". . . That ye may know what is . . . the *exceeding greatness* of his *power* to us who believe, according to that *working* of the *strength* of his *might* which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead . . ." (Eph. 1:18-20).

The italicized words present four aspects of the divine power. "Power" (Gr. *dunamis*) is the latent potential which exists in water restrained behind a dam, or in electric current that can be trapped by turning a switch. When energy is needed to accomplish some task, the means is available. The greatness of God's power is constantly ready for the contact of faith. "Working" (Gr. *energeia*) is applied power, actually operative in a given situation. When latent power is utilized, its effects become visible. "Strength" (Gr. *kratos*) means power in control, as the current flows through the filament of a bulb and masters its elements, making it incandescent. "Might" (Gr. *ischus*) is the result of applied power, conveying to the object controlled a new vigor of its own. These different concepts have been demonstrated most perfectly in the resurrection of Christ. The latent power was apparent in the force that was sufficient to undo the lethal work of the cross, and to restore Jesus to the fellowship of His disciples. The applied energy opened the grave and renewed His physical life. God's mastery controlled His subsequent activity, enabling Him to appear and vanish at will as He entered upon a new stage of His incarnate existence. This dynamic, perfected in Him and germinal in the believer, is the acknowledged norm of spiritual life.

The correspondence of Christian experience to this pattern was unmistakably declared in the next chapter of Ephesians. "God . . . made us alive . . . with Christ . . . and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus" (2:4-6). Paul carried the metaphor one step farther by stressing its result. United with Christ, the believer shares with Him the permanent benefits of His victory. Obviously he has not yet attained the ultimate physical transformation, but he has been transferred to a position of spiritual triumph which provides a new outlook on the world. Resurrection is not merely an isolated physical event in the life of Christ which provides verification of His claims; it is also the total spiritual and physical effect produced by the application of the life of God to man's predicament. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is inwardly present and continuous; one day it will be outward and instantaneous. Both aspects constitute salvation by the grace of God.

The fact that Jesus triumphed over death was proof of His lordship. "Lord" (Gr. *kyrios*) in Graeco-Roman usage was a common title for a king or emperor. It denoted absolute sovereignty, like the rule of a master over a slave, and also connoted deity, for it was employed in the worship of the gods. A papyrus letter of the second century A.D. contains the report of a traveler who

had just concluded a perilous voyage from Rome to Alexandria. He expressed gratitude for his safe arrival by saying, "I thank the Lord Serapis that when I was in danger on the sea, he saved me."¹ The title "Lord" gave to Serapis the status of deity. The same word was generally used by the translators of the Septuagint to render the Hebrew *Jehovah* and has passed over into the King James Version of the Bible as LORD. Paul's reason for ascribing this title to Christ is that He "died, and lived again, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living" (Rom. 14:9). The conquest of man's last and most powerful enemy has confirmed His position as the unique Son of the Father, who manifests among men the unconquerable life of God.

A further extension of lordship is Christ's right to universal rulership. He has been exalted to the right hand of God, "far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:21). The seat on the right hand of an Oriental king was always reserved for his prime minister, who shared his authority and dignity. Jesus shares with the Father the sovereign rule over the universe because He has overcome sin and its accompanying consequence, death.

Paul applied the doctrine of lordship specifically to Christ's relations with men. Having described the humiliation of Christ through death, he added, "Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave to him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11). Because of Christ's exalted position believers are obligated to conduct themselves with humility, since ultimately all men will be compelled to acknowledge His supremacy. Although Paul does not dwell on the exaltation, it is clearly implied in the sudden transition of thought from the humiliation of Christ's death on the cross to the glory of the throne.

The doctrine of the lordship of Christ has far-reaching consequences. It is the deathblow to idolatry, for it extends to Christ the principle of the first commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:3). Paul had been nurtured in the rigidly monotheistic faith of Judaism, and there is no evidence that he ever abandoned it; yet the lordship of Christ did not controvert his concept of the unity and sole majesty of God. "For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth; as there are gods many, and lords many; yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him" (I Cor. 8:5-6). Coupled with the name of the Father, the sole source and end of all creation, is the name of Christ, the agent by whom creation came into being and is sustained. By this concept the whole world-view of the Christian was changed. Whereas he had formerly worshiped many gods indiscriminately, he could now bow only at the shrine of Christ. All the common cultic observances that filled the Gentile world were negated at one stroke. "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of demons; ye cannot partake of the table of the Lord, and of the table of demons" (I Cor. 10:21). Christianity became an exclusive faith, demanding that its adherents abandon the worship of all other gods.

The exclusiveness of Christ's lordship affected also the Christian's relation to the state. Conflict with government is not reflected strongly in the Pauline Epistles, since the political tension between the Christian Church and the pagan rulers had not become acute during Paul's writing career. The occasional friction with the Roman magistrates whom he encountered in various cities was produced more by local agitation than by any settled imperial policy. Only in the

¹ George Milligan, *Selections from the Greek Papyri* (Cambridge: University Press, 1910), pp. 90,91. Cf. also G. A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, [1911], pp. 353-359.

Prison Epistles did he allude to his restraint in chains, and at the close of his life he made a veiled reference to the hostile power of the reigning Caesar when he spoke of being delivered "out of the mouth of the lion" (II Tim. 4:17). The apostle was a loyal citizen of Rome, who urged the Romans Christians to "be in subjection to the higher powers: for . . . the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1). The Christian attitude was not rebellion, but consistent testimony to the lordship of Christ through the manifestation of political integrity.

In event of a clash, however, loyalty to Christ took priority. The Caesars, though mighty, were only men, but Christ was the risen Lord. He became superior to all others and received "the name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:9), to which His followers rendered supreme allegiance and for which they willingly gave their lives under persecution. As Lord "of the living," He possesses the right to take precedence over man's political duties to the state.

Another consequence of Christ's restoration to life is His present ministry of intercession. Having effected a final deliverance from sin by His death, which canceled man's indebtedness to God and established a firm basis for forgiveness, Christ now lives to sustain in holiness those whom He has redeemed. He is able to plead their cause effectively and to defend them against all accusations. "Who is he that condemns? Shall Christ Jesus who died, yea rather, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us?" (Rom. 8:34, emended translation). The competence of Christ to provide salvation consists both in the completeness of reconciliation to God through the cross and in His contemporary work of nurture and protection.

Although Paul made only a single reference to this doctrine, the context is sufficient to validate it. The Roman church was probably small and weak. Repressive measures under Claudius (A.D. 49), who endeavored to keep Christianity out of the city, had prevented any rapid increase in members. It was largely an underground movement, which had not grown materially during the three years of Nero's reign following the death of Claudius in A.D. 54. The Roman Christians were still insecure and were wondering what new turn the imperial policy might take. Paul mentioned specifically the threatening perils of tribulation, anguish, persecution, famine, nakedness, and the sword (8:35). To encourage these trembling believers, he assured them that nothing could separate them from the love of Christ, but that His intercession for them guaranteed their persistence in faith and their safety. The Christ who has suffered all that man can endure is qualified to ask for all that man needs. He knows how to present their cause to God, and because he has been raised from the dead, He possesses God's pledge that His petitions will be granted.

The fulfillment of God's purpose for Christ's victory over the grave is the key to Pauline eschatology. If Romans is an example of Paul's usual method of presenting Christian truth, he did not elaborate the particulars of the Lord's coming. The eighth chapter of the Epistle contains several hints that the future of the Christians was an integral part of the message and must be included in its total scope. The "firstfruits of the Spirit" (8:23), by which the apostle meant the present operation of the Holy Spirit in daily life, is a precursor of the "redemption of the body," the physical renewal.

Detailed development of this subject appears in Paul's earlier letters to the Corinthians and Thessalonians. The dictum "there is no resurrection of the dead" (I Cor. 15:12), which Paul quoted from his theological adversaries, prompted the argument of the entire fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians. Beginning with the assured fact that Christ has risen, Paul proceeded to treat

three corollaries affecting the prospects of the Christian, namely, the program of the future, the nature of the life to come, and the method by which the perfection of redemption would be attained.

The resurrection of Christ was not only a proof that the dead can be raised but a promise that they would be raised. Christ was the first to demonstrate the redemptive exercise of divine power that reverses the trend beginning with the disobedience of Adam. The cumulative effects of sin have made death, both spiritual and physical, the supreme tragedy of the race. For redemption to be effective, the hope of resurrection must be extended to all mankind who are in Christ since God's program for the future requires this objective. The emergence of Christ from death is the beginning; next in order will be the raising of those to whom He has imparted life; and finally will come the perfection of the kingdom which will be the outward demonstration of the authority of Christ over Satan, and of life over death.

Neither the fine details of this program nor the dates for its fulfillment are supplied by Scripture, nor are they important. The main aspect of Paul's argument is that God has introduced a new dynamic into the course of human existence, capable of transforming it from a purposeless round of failure into a progressive march toward triumph. Through this decisive act God has revealed His intended destiny for man. Like a light in darkness it offers direction for bewildered travelers, although it may not yet have dispelled all the shadows.

The nature of the future hope is exemplified in Christ's permanent release from the bonds of humanity. "Christ being raised from the dead dies no more; death no more has dominion over him" (Rom. 6:9). The liberty of the gospel extends to freedom from the enslavement of sin and from the fear and hopelessness of death, for "the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God" (8:21). Just as Christ left the humiliation of death and the corruption of the grave to resume His place in the glory of the Father's presence, the believers in Him will share His experience.

Perfection will be attained when He returns to complete the work of salvation. The reign of death will be terminated by the appearance of Christ. "We all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed . . . for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. . . . But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (I Cor. 15:51-54). The translation from imperfection to completeness and from mortality to immortality will be instantaneous and will commence the eternal state which is the goal and fulfillment of salvation.

The final concept of the resurrection in Pauline preaching is its evangelistic appeal. Repeatedly in his Epistles Paul summons his readers to profess faith in Christ. The profession must necessarily be simple, for few believers begin their Christian life with an elaborate creed, and yet it must be inclusive enough to insure a complete foundation for faith. Confession of Christ's lordship is contingent on acceptance of the fact of the resurrection and on the experience of the life of God in Christ exhibited in His triumph over death. "If you shall confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and shall believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved: for with the heart man believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:9-10). It is a leap from the visible to the invisible, from evidence to promise, and from pessimism to hope.

When at the close of his life Paul was about to relinquish his position of missionary leadership, he was concerned that the theme of the gospel might continue to be proclaimed with undiminished fervor. Some teachers had appeared who maintained that "the resurrection is past already" (II Tim. 2:18). In farewell instructions to his understudy, Timothy, Paul included numerous directions for church administration, but the central message was "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, of the seed of David, according to my gospel" (II Tim. 2:8).

The Pauline teaching shows that an articulated theology based on Jesus' return from death had been accepted in the church before the end of the first century. Springing from the principle of life in Christ, and demonstrated in the personal life of the apostle, it became the core of Christian doctrine and the motive of its evangelistic mission.

The Petrine Epistles

The genuineness of I and II Peter has been disputed and frequently denied, but the negative evidence is not strong enough to warrant excluding them from consideration. Both claim to have been written by Peter himself or with the aid of an amanuensis, and both professedly reflect his life and teaching. Although Peter occupied a less prominent place in the New Testament than Paul, he was important, for his priority in time compensates for the paucity of his literary contributions. According to Luke's account of the early church (Acts 15:6-21), both attended the Council of Jerusalem, probably A.D. 48, and both defended Gentile freedom of conscience against the Judaizing party that insisted on circumcision. After the council Peter vanished from the narrative, while Paul began his second missionary journey and became the protagonist of the gospel along the northern shores of the Mediterranean Sea from Antioch to Asia Minor.

Insofar as the effects of Peter's preaching are traceable, they indicate a high concept of the importance of the resurrection. Both Peter and Paul were eyewitnesses of the risen Christ (I Cor. 15:5,8), and both made the doctrine prominent in their ministry. Of the two, however, Peter was more pragmatic in his apologetic and evangelistic approach, while Paul was more speculative. The speeches and writings attributed to Peter say little about the nature of the resurrection body, or about the theological significance of the victory over death.

For Peter, Jesus' reappearance was primarily the vindication of a cause. Perhaps this difference of emphasis resulted from personal experience. Having expected that Jesus would establish a visible kingdom in which he might hold office, and having suffered the disappointment and frustration occasioned by the crucifixion, Peter was tempted to abandon the entire enterprise as hopeless. The Master's return confirmed His promises, so inadequately understood by the disciples, and revitalized the positive teaching apparently vitiated by His death. Peter regained courage and undertook to follow Christ with new zeal and devotion when he realized that his Lord was alive.

Peter's approach is more personal than that of Paul, perhaps because he had more ample opportunity to maintain contact with Jesus in His human relationships. Before Paul's conversion, Jesus was to him a public figure known only by reputation, but Peter had claimed Jesus as a close friend. Paul initially regarded the death of Christ as the salutary removal of a dangerous heretic; Peter had mourned His loss as a personal tragedy. His sudden transition from despair to delight is reflected in the opening words of his letter, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living

hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead . . ." (I Pet. 1:3). So revolutionary was this experience that Peter calls it a new birth, effected by "the word of God, which lives and abides" (1:23). In contrast to the transiency of the flesh, which withers like grass, the new life remains permanently.

Without minimizing the literal, historical, and eschatological aspects of the resurrection, Peter stressed its moral effect. Hope was the watchword of the new faith, contrasting sharply with his preceding pessimism. He opposed a cynical skepticism with a positive optimism based on the reality of God, who had intervened in his experience and who could transform the lives of others also.

The trust in a sovereign God was grounded in the historic fact. "Through him [Christ, ye] are believers in God, who raised him from the dead, and gave him glory; so that your faith and hope might be in God" (1:21). Peter's words parallel Paul's in Galatians 1:1 both in literal statement and in the implication that the essential character of God is defined by His vivifying act. Life is God's nature; it is irrepressible, and He cannot exist without acting creatively. The supreme manifestation of this life is both the object and the incentive of faith.

Another facet is its mystical relation to the believer's position in Christ. In a rather obscure passage in the third chapter of his first epistle, Peter speaks of baptism as ". . . the interrogation [marginal reading: inquiry] of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ; who is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him" (3:21-22). Peter, like Paul, connected the symbolism with the resurrection of Christ. His teaching was analogous to Paul's, but not identical, for he did not place the same emphasis on the concept of union with Christ (cf. Rom. 6:2-11). Having affirmed that Christ died to take away sins (I Pet. 3:18), he explained baptism as the response to God by the newly imparted life. The sequence of the following verses confirms this interpretation: "that ye no longer should live the rest of your time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God" (4:2). The trammels [shackles] of sin have been released, and a different sphere of liberty has been opened.

No definite teaching is contained in II Peter, but the allusion to Paul's Epistles (II Pet. 3:15,16) makes more plausible a connection of thought between Peter and Paul. Although Peter did not copy the Pauline application, his language shows an underlying agreement with it. Both accepted the historic fact, and both used it as a pattern for the personal experience of the believer.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Parallel to the Pauline and Petrine Epistles, the book of Hebrews contains a statement of Christian faith that was designed for broad application although addressed to a specific constituency. The exact identity of that group is one of the thorniest problems in New Testament scholarship, and its solution is debatable. Hebrews was written by a man well versed in the Greek Septuagint. The recipients, Jewish by ancestry and Christian by conviction, were facing the dilemma of renouncing their Christian faith for the sake of placating their relatives, or of continuing with Christ and suffering consequent persecution. Among the numerous Jewish Christian churches in the first century, the one addressed in this Epistle cannot be located with certainty. A plausible case can be constructed for identifying it with the church in Rome about

A.D. 68. At that time the persecution under Nero had ceased, but its renewal was always an imminent threat, and the memory of harassment and official pressure was still vivid (Heb. 10:42-34).

Whatever the local destination may have been, Hebrews was addressed to second-generation Christians who had not seen the Lord, but who were familiar with His teaching and who worshiped Him (2:3). The Epistle marked an interim stage in the development of the church between the disciplinary letters of Paul, directed largely to new churches, and the more contemplative Johannine writings designed for a settled institutional body.

The chief theme of Hebrews is the intercessory priestly ministry of Christ (8:3,4), mentioned by Paul in Romans but developed more fully to counteract the discouraging effects of persecution. The entire treatise assumes the resurrection of Christ and contains several unmistakable references to the doctrine. Unlike Paul, the author does not attempt an apologetic defense of the fact; he simply takes it for granted, dealing with the results rather than with the event itself.

The initial statement declares the Christology on which its entire argument is built. The Son, having revealed to men the glory of the Father and having removed sin by His incarnate ministry, has now "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (1:3). While the exaltation of Christ to the Father's throne should not be interpreted as a spiritualization of the physical fact, the two events were inseparably linked in the mind of the writer, who interpreted the cause in terms of the effect. The deliverance from death was axiomatic and undebatable; the result in the intercessory ministry was the application that he wished to develop.

The session of Christ on the right hand of God was, therefore, the guarantee of His effective contemporary ministry. Since He had passed through death He could understand the plight of those who are doomed to death, and could, by the exercise of the same power that restored Him to life, liberate them from fear of death (2:14,15). The entire doctrine of the priesthood of Christ, involving His representation of the people of God and His perpetual service to them, is founded on the unending life that enables Him to maintain His office without interruption. "Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them who draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them" (7:25).

The concept of resurrection was no novelty either to the author of Hebrews or to his readers, for it was enumerated among the basic teachings bequeathed to them from Judaism. "Resurrection of the dead" and "eternal judgment" were among the "first principles" of Messianic doctrine. "Leaving" these principles (6:1) did not denote repudiation, but rather a progress to the realization of the truths growing out of them. The Old Testament and the Apocrypha contained allusions to the doctrine, but the practical understanding of its significance came only through the work of Christ. For this reason the writer of Hebrews urged his readers to "press on unto perfection" (6:1).

The dual application of deliverance from fear (2:14,15) and the pledge of Christ's un failing intercessory ministry (7:25) had special value for a persecuted church. Since they were constantly haunted by the grim specter of death, they craved victory over fear and over the sense of futility that such a threat entailed. For that reason the doctrine of the resurrection was incorporated in the famous "faith chapter" (chap. 11). In reviewing various examples of faith, the writer recalled Abraham's readiness to sacrifice Isaac and remarked that the patriarch believed in God's power to raise the dead. Had Isaac actually died, all of God's promises and Abraham's

hopes would have perished; if Abraham did not obey God's command, his disobedience would preclude further divine revelation or favor. While Abraham probably did not have a well-defined concept of God's intention, he had unlimited confidence in the ability of God to validate His promise. His faith was justified in the restoration of Isaac, which was a picture of a greater reality.

In the same chapter there is a second allusion to martyrs, probably Maccabeans, who refused deliverance "that they might obtain a better resurrection" (11:35). The writer conceived of it not simply as the inevitable consummation of a saving process uniformly applied to all believers, but as a reward for faithfulness. Status in the resurrection might be attained by self-sacrifice. The writer did not define his meaning, but he spoke of God's provision of "some better thing" (11:40), or of the joy set before Christ at the right hand of God (12:2), or of "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (12:22).

The closing benediction of the Epistle incorporates words which may have been taken from the form customarily recited at the close of a worship service. "Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep with the blood of an eternal covenant, even our Lord Jesus, make you perfect in every good thing to do his will . . ." (13:20-21). The import of the prayer is unmistakable. The assurance of preservation and of perfection promised to the persecuted Hebrew Christians was founded on the shepherd character of Christ revealed in the resurrection. It recalls the words of Jesus, "I am the good shepherd . . . and I lay down my life for the sheep. . . . No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:14,15,18). In the catacombs of Rome which sheltered the refugee church of the second and third centuries, one of the most common representations of Christ is the Good Shepherd, with a lamb on His shoulders. The use of this symbol reflected confidence in the protecting power of the Saviour, who had given His life for the salvation of His people and who rose again to guard them from their enemies. Even though they should pass through the valley of the shadow of death, He would be able to conduct them to the Father's house.

Hebrews marks a new stage in the development of the doctrine. Whereas the speeches of Acts stress the basic fact that "God raised him from the dead," this Epistle takes for granted the historical and apologetic aspect and applies the wider ramifications of the principle. The resurrection of Christ is the foundation of His present intercession, the source of freedom from fear of death, and the assurance of His continued guardianship through persecution.

The Johannine Writings

The Johannine Epistles and Revelation were the last canonical writings of the apostolic age, written within the decade between A.D. 85 and 95. The Fourth Gospel, though discussed previously in conjunction with the Synoptics, is a part of this body of literature and should be classed with it. The traditional authorship of Revelation, on the other hand, has been challenged by many scholars, who cannot reconcile its style and language with that of the Gospel and Epistles. While circumstances and subject matter may be sufficient to account for the disparity, the question of authorship need not disturb seriously the testimony of Revelation. A product of the first century, it reproduces accurately the spiritual climate of the closing years.

The Epistles contain no specific argument for the resurrection, nor does the word itself occur in

them; nevertheless they bear traces of its influence. The opening words of 1 John, which parallel those of the Gospel, summarize it in terms of life. "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal *life*, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us) . . ." (1 John 1:1-2).

The repetitiousness of these introductory verses emphasizes the material manifestation of eternal life, for it was not an abstract ideal but was visible, tangible, and audible. "Life," which occurs three times in the Greek text of the first two verses, is the opposite of death and expresses the essence of the revelation in Christ which the author proceeds to expound, and to apply to his readers. On the assumption that the First Epistle is a sequel to the Gospel of John, the principle of "life" is built on the presupposition that Christ is the resurrection and the life, and that subsequent to His death, to which the Epistle alludes (1:7, 4:10, 5:6), He arose to confirm His promise (5:11).

The parallel between the language of the introduction to I John and the resurrection narrative in the Gospel of John is obvious. The verb *see* (Gr. *heorakamen*) appears in the testimony of the disciples to Thomas (John 20:25). Thomas *heard* the voice of Jesus speaking to him and was given the opportunity to *handle* His body (20:27), whether he actually did so or not. The others likewise saw Him, heard Him, and touched Him. The doctrine of eternal life is a logical consequence of Jesus' demonstration that His vitality could not be extinguished, but that His power could transcend death.

The broad scope of the eternal life manifested in Christ is unfolded. His present intercessory ministry mentioned by Paul (Rom. 8:34) and expanded in Hebrews (7:25ff.) is included also in John's message. He calls Christ the "Advocate" who perpetually pleads His people's cause on the basis of His propitiatory sacrifice (I John 2:1,2). The promise "he who does the will of God abides forever" (2:17) recalls the word of the Saviour, who said, "I seek not mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 5:30), and proved later by rising from the tomb that He would "abide forever." The future transformation of the children of God at the Lord's appearing will be the open and visible proclamation of their sonship, as the resurrection declared Him to be the Son of God with power (Rom. 1:4). The exhortation to love one another (I John 4:7ff.) is an echo of Jesus' post-resurrection challenge to Peter, "Lovest thou me?" (John 22:15-17). The overcoming of the world (I John 5:4,5) is patterned on Jesus' triumph after death had done its worst (John 16:28,33).

Revelation, the last book in the order of the New Testament canon and in time of writing, constitutes the bridge between the age of the apostles and the rise of the institutional church. Written to seven churches of Asia during the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-96), it depicted the emerging consciousness of antagonism between the gospel and paganism, between Christ and the Caesars. The repressive measures that later developed into wholesale persecution had already begun, although the hostility between Rome and the churches was not yet so acute as it became in the second century. Attacks upon Christians were sporadic, and persecution was probably more an evidence of local prejudice than a settled governmental policy. Nevertheless, the battle line was plainly drawn, and the Christians realized that they were involved in an irrepressible conflict. Since the pressure was increasing, they were concerned lest their movement fail.

The visions of the Apocalypse were granted to the seer to prepare the churches for the impending

struggle. By addressing seven representative communities, the divine author conveyed to the entire church His message concerning its weaknesses, perils, and destiny. The Apocalypse is prophecy cast in pictorial form so that the discerning Christian reader may understand its predictions, while the hostile pagan will dismiss it as a harmless dream. Although the details of its symbolism may not always be clear to the modern student, he can comprehend the main principles that it illustrates.

The opening paragraph of Revelation provides the key to the book by presenting the person of Christ, calling Him "the firstborn of the dead" (Rev. 1:5). "Firstborn" implies priority both in time and in position. He is the first of many who will rise from death and is consequently the originator and head of the eternal community of God's people. Having overcome death, He is able to cope with the destructive powers of evil and to abolish their dominion forever. As the drama of the Apocalypse progresses to its consummation in the City of God, the intervention of the risen Christ is apparent at every stage.

To the church at Smyrna the seer wrote: "These things says the first and the last, who was dead, and lived again . . . [or, *came to life*]" (2:8). He reiterated the self-identification of Christ in His initial appearance, "I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades" (1:18). This greeting to a suffering and persecuted church was particularly appropriate, for it offered the assurance that Christ had passed through the same conflict and that He had emerged triumphant. During the present age the church militant rests its hope in a living Lord who is already victorious over death.

The predictive section depicting the scene in heaven (4:1-16:21) centers its interest on the Lamb which had been slain (5:6). He bore the marks of death and yet was alive. By the return to life the Lamb prevailed "to open the book and the seven seals thereof" (5:5). He had earned the prerogative of introducing the judgments that clear corruption from the earth, and that prepare the way for the eternal kingdom.

In the exercise of this power the resurrection becomes the basis of His sovereignty. The action of Revelation is an extended exposition of the prophecy in Psalm 2.

I will tell of the decree:
Jehovah said unto me, Thou art my son;
This day have I begotten thee.
Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance,
And the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.
Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron;
Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel (Ps. 2:7-9).

The sequence of the predicted events indicates that Messiah's rulership over the nations is founded upon His right of sonship. Paul, in his address to the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia, declared the Psalm to be prophetic. "God has . . . raised up Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee" (Acts 13:33). If the judgments of Revelation are the result of Christ's exercise of His prerogatives of sonship, then the eschatology of this book is the outcome and conclusion of His unprecedented triumph over death.

Two aspects of resurrection are connected with the establishment of the millennial kingdom. One concerns the souls of the righteous that "lived, and reigned with Christ a thousand years"

(Rev. 20:4). The verb *lived* can equally well be rendered "came to life," implying a sudden event rather than a process. Since the subject is "those who had been beheaded," the verb cannot mean "they had lived and reigned," for their death occurred before the thousand years began. The sentence refers to the future and demands a restoration of the righteous dead who will share in the rule of Christ.

The second aspect relates to "the rest of the dead [who] lived not [did not come to life] until the thousand years should be finished" (20:5). Since the resurrection of the second group is manifestly an event, and not a process, a correct analogy demands that the resurrection of the first group also be an event. The righteous, then, will be summoned back to life in order that they may reign with Christ; the wicked, "the rest of the dead," will be haled to judgment. When they shall have been judged and their final status fixed, death itself will be destroyed (20:13,14). That which the resurrection of Christ began the resurrection of men will conclude.

The vision of the city of God (21:9-22:5), from which all evil is permanently excluded, previews the consummation. The "tree of life," the leaves of which are for the healing of the nations (22:2), is emblematic of the inexhaustible source of spiritual and physical vitality available in the age to come. The climax of the Apocalypse demonstrates that the manifestation of life which began in Joseph's garden will attain its full glory in the paradise of God.