XIII. THE ORIGIN OF THE IDEA OF THE ESCHATOLOGICAL RESURRECTION AS A PARTICIPATION IN JESUS' RESURRECTION

(1) Paul viewed the future resurrection of those who are in Christ as something which would come about through the participation of the Christians in the resurrection of Christ. In the previous chapter it was shown that the presupposition of this concept of participation is the belief in the unity of Christ and the Christians. The belief that Christ and the Christians are one can indeed explain to a great extent how Paul could come to see Jesus’ resurrection as an event in which all Christians will share. In fact, if Christ has risen and the Christians are one with him, then the Christians will have to rise as well.

The question remains to be asked, however, how Paul came at all to extend the notion of the unity between Christ and the Christians to include Jesus’ resurrection and that of his followers.

The answer to this question should neither be sought in the character of the resurrection attributed to Jesus nor in the tradition from which this belief stems. Unlike his death, Jesus’ resurrection was not originally conceived as a vicarious event. The idea that Jesus has died for all and thus all have died (2 Cor. 5:14) has its roots in the tradition of the martyr whose death was subsequently interpreted as salutary for others and as an impulse of the atonement.1 However, the martyrological tradition does not comprise the idea that the martyr’s resurrection is a representative event in which others will participate. The resurrection of the martyr is seen as a vindication, a personal reward for his loyalty to God and his willingness to die for God’s cause. Paul’s idea that Christians will participate in Jesus’ resurrection cannot be explained, therefore, as a consequence of the tradition concerning the (martyrological) resurrection.2

Nor should the answer be sought in the character of the expected eschatological resurrection or the tradition from which the idea of the future resurrection stems. Nowhere in Jewish literature is the eschatological resurrection conceived as a participation in a previous resurrection, whether martyrological or of another type.

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1 See chapter XII, pp. 181-182.
2 Pace, for instance, R.J. Tannehill, Dying and Rising, pp. 123-126 and P. Siber, Mit Christus leben, p. 96; see the section on the history of earlier research, pp. 17-19.
Two passages in Jewish literature might seem at first sight to offer analogies to Paul’s idea, namely, 1 Enoch 49:3 and 2 Apoc. Bar. 30:1. In 1 Enoch the eschatological agent, called the Elect One, is said to have ‘the spirit of those who sleep in righteousness.’ The possession of this spirit does not signify, however, that there is a unity between the righteous ones who have passed away and the eschatological agent, in the sense that the eschatological agent represents them. Rather, the passage means to say that the eschatological agent will have the same spirit of righteousness as the righteous ones had in former times. Compare, for instance, the reference in the same verse (49:3) to the Elect One’s possession of the spirit of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and power.¹ In 2 Apoc. Bar. 30:1 it is said that, after the return of the eschatological agent to heaven, ‘all who sleep in hope of him (i.e., the eschatological agent) will rise.’ This passage does not intend to convey the idea that there is a unity between the righteous ones and the eschatological agent which might occasion the eschatological resurrection of the righteous ones. The author only intends to say that those righteous ones who will not live to experience the coming of the eschatological agent and the ensuing time of joy, but who did have the hope to witness that time, will eventually be rewarded in that they will be raised.

The conclusion has to remain that neither the belief in Jesus’ own resurrection nor the concept of the eschatological resurrection can have occasioned Paul to extend the idea of the unity between the Christians and Christ so that the risen Christ became the representative of the Christians and the one in whose resurrection the Christians would share.

(2) Only Paul’s view of the person of Jesus can explain why he extended the notion of the unity between Christ and the Christians to include their resurrection. Since Jesus was seen as the representative of a group—that is, as a person who, like Adam and Abraham, represented many people—his resurrection could also come to be seen as a representative event.

This process may have been stimulated by another development. As was previously set out in chapter IX, Jesus’ followers already viewed him as an eschatological figure. As a result, his resurrection also came to be viewed as an eschatological event. This view on Jesus’ resurrection may have been an extra stimulus for Paul to see the resurrection