"HOW CAN SOME OF YOU SAY THAT THERE IS NO RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD?"
SPIRITUAL ELITISM IN CORINTH

BY

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Why would some of the Corinthians have denied the resurrection of the dead? JAMES M. ROBINSON explains this as "the turgid fanaticism of those who have already risen and are living it up in glory". This interpretation, deriving from 2 Timothy ii 18 where Hymenaus and Philetus are attacked for teaching that "resurrection is past already", notes that the same word "already", although lacking in 1 Cor. xv 12, is found in 1 Cor. iv 8 "with all its heretical overtones". Thus, by approaching the Corinthian situation through 2 Tim. ii 18, ROBINSON and others find that what would appear to be a denial of the resurrection is instead a "fanatical form of belief in the resurrection". The other language and behavior of the Corinthians are then understood as manifestation of this "eschatological enthusiasm" or realized resurrection.

This approach, however, may involve some questionable assumptions. The word "already" in 1 Cor. iv 8 may not be the key to the Corinthians' situation. There is nothing in the text of 1 Cor. iv 8 to suggest that the "already" belongs to the language of the Corinthians. 1 Cor. iv 8 is a sarcastic formulation. The "already" surely represents Paul's perception of the Corinthians' position. It is generally agreed in Pauline scholarship now that Paul thinks in terms of an eschatological reservation, in terms of "already ... but not yet" (i.e., we have already died with Christ but are not yet raised with him, etc.) 2). There is, however, no reason outside of 2 Tim. ii 18

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2) KÄSEMANN, op. cit., 280-283; HANS-JOACHIM SCHOEPS, Paul (Philadelphia, 1961), ch. 3.
to think that the "already" belongs to the thinking of the Corinthians. Moreover, the Pastorals and the situation they address are fully two generations later than Paul's letter and the Corinthian situation he addressed. Hence it would make more sense to interpret the later text, 2 Tim. ii 18, in the light of the earlier text, 1 Cor. xv 12 (and iv 8) 3). The interpretation of the Corinthian denial of the resurrection of the dead as an expression of an eschatological fanaticism may, therefore, merit some scepticism, such as that shown by CONZELMANN in the most recent major commentary 4).

We have a good deal of information, however, about the Corinthian situation and the religious language and doctrines of some of the Corinthians precisely through Paul's letter in response, 1 Corinthians 5). That there was some sort of conflict between Paul and at least some of the Corinthians is clearly indicated by his rejection of certain aspects of their statements and behavior. This is what enables us to reconstruct the Corinthians' position. Paul reacts partly by explicit rejection of, partly by ironic or sarcastic comment on their religious self-expressions. The particular language of these Corinthians can be delineated by noting those aspects to which Paul reacts negatively. The absence or relative insignificance of this language in Paul's other letters confirms that this language is that of the Corinthians—which Paul uses in his arguments against them.

1 Corinthians i-iv and xv have received the most scholarly attention and provide the best starting point for investigation of the Corinthians' positions. From Paul's argument in 1 Cor. i 10-iii 23 it is clear that the divisiveness with which Paul is so concerned is closely connected with an obsession with sophia 6). In the midst of his elaborate word-play rejecting both rhetorical wisdom and soteriological wisdom he opposes sophia as a means of salvation in no uncertain terms: "Since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not