

The First Resurrection: Another Interpretation

Philip Edgcumbe Hughes

The premillennarian has rightly objected, in my judgment, that, assuming that Revelation 20:5f. is speaking of two resurrections (as most Christians do: for the mention of quite naturally implies that there is a second resurrection, just as the mention of the *second* death quite naturally implies that there is a first death), it is inconsistent to explain (as amillermarians generally do) as spiritual and the second resurrection as bodily. On the other hand, the amillennarian rightly objects, in my judgment, that to place both resurrections in the eschatological future shows inadequate regard for all that the New Testament says about the fact that Christians even now, in this present age, have been raised with Christ. My purpose in this brief contribution is to propound what I believe to be a simple and straightforward solution to this conflict.

Let me declare, to begin with, my acceptance of the postulation that both first and second resurrections are *bodily* resurrections. In Scripture, resurrection has no proper meaning if it is not understood as *bodily* resurrection. Rising from the dead necessarily involves the resurrection of the body. If there is no resurrection of the body, there is no resurrection at all. This, of course, is the main point of Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 15. Gnostic notions of a mere continuity of the spirit are destructive of the Christian faith; and we should be quite clear that they are no more applicable to Christians than they are to Christ. Accordingly, we should be on our guard against introducing the unbiblical concept of non-bodily resurrection into our interpretation of Revelation 20 or of any other New Testament passage.

Scripture speaks plainly and particularly about two bodily resurrections which are of ultimate significance. One of these

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is the universal or general resurrection of all men at the end of this age. Because this is the *final* resurrection it obviously cannot be what is intended by "the first resurrection"; but it may with full appropriateness be described as the *second* resurrection. Thus our Lord has declared that "the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his [God's] voice and come forth, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment" (Jn. 5:28f.)—a statement reminiscent of the assertion of Daniel 12:2 t...

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