

NOTE

PAUL AND THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

Since completing my article "Did Paul's View of the Resurrection of the Dead Undergo Development?" (*TS* 47 [1986] 363–87), I have read the study by Joseph Plevnik, "The Taking Up of the Faithful and the Resurrection of the Dead in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18" (*Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46 [1984] 274–83). Here Fr. Plevnik names three problems: (1) Did Paul in his original missionary encounter with the Thessalonians speak to them of the resurrection of the dead? (2) Did he register a change of view on the matter between 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians? (3) What is to be made of the distinctive "translation" motif in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18?

With an assist from Béda Rigaux, Plevnik solves the first problem in the affirmative. Entertaining a possibility overlooked by Rigaux, he takes his own route in solving the second problem in the negative. But, above all, he understands the final solution of both to hinge on resolution of the third problem: What are the implications of the translation motif in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18?

The most important single point Plevnik makes is that the words "and thus we shall be with the Lord always" (1 Thess 4:17b) indicate entry into a new mode of existence. This suggests that the translation or assumption is itself understood as transformative. It is the functional equivalent of "we shall all be changed" in 1 Corinthians 15:51. Plevnik accordingly remarks that "we need not postulate a development of eschatology between 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians" (282).

On every important point Plevnik's view is markedly removed from the mentality of Ernst Teichmann et al. Nevertheless, it seems that Plevnik's exegesis does, in fact, posit a new, post-1 Thessalonians Pauline conceptualization of resurrection as intrinsically transformative.

There are at least two ways of explaining why Paul introduced the motif of the transformation of the living at the Parousia as an eschatological "secret" (1 Cor 15:51). If we adopt Plevnik's reading of 1 Thessalonians 4, the idea of resurrection as intrinsically transformative is a new development taking place between 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians. Paul may always have acknowledged that a prior transformation universally conditioned entry into the life of the age to come. In 1 Thessalonians this requisite was met by the common assumption of the living and the dead. But when transformation was fused with resurrec-

tion, a new issue emerged: What of the transformation of the living? Paul met the question with the "secret" of 1 Corinthians 15:51.

If we suppose, on the contrary, that already in 1 Thessalonians Paul had understood resurrection as intrinsically transformative, the only development between 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians bore not on the resurrection of the dead but on the transformation that universally conditioned entry into the age to come. This development called for the transformation of the living at the Parousia as the counterpart of the resurrection of the dead. Paul accordingly presented this new theme as an eschatological secret.

Both views seem viable. In writing my article, I held the second view, and I still tend to prefer it. But Plevnik has pioneered a well-focused and solid alternative which, it seems to me, should be acknowledged as such.

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