The religio-historical context of the resurrection of Jesus and resurrection faith in the New Testament

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ABSTRACT
In this essay the resurrection of Jesus and resurrection faith in the New Testament are investigated from a religio-historical perspective. The views early investigators had of the origins of New Testament beliefs are first discussed. Texts and views about resurrection beliefs before the New Testament and during the first century of the Christian era are then considered in the next two sections, and finally New Testament beliefs are placed in religio-historical contexts set out in the previous sections.

1 RESURRECTION AND HISTORY OF RELIGION: EARLY BEGINNINGS AND CURRENT AIMS
At the turn of the century, religio-historical study of the New Testament was stimulated by a series of studies by members of the so-called Religionsgeschichtliche Schule of Göttingen (see Lüdemann & Schröder 1987). In his seminal publication Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis des Neuen Testaments, Herman Gunkel (1910:77) argues that the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, which belong together, are the opposite of the descent into hell, and that both conceptions are mythological. Jesus Christ, he maintains, was not the first and only being of divine character who was believed to have risen from the dead. On the contrary, faith in the dying and rising of gods was common in the Near East. This phenomenon was known in Egypt in the first instance, where it was a common belief, as well as in Babylonia, Syria, and Phoenicia. In Crete the grave of Zeus of Crete can be visited to this day; obviously the grave is empty (Gunkel 1910:77).

Gunkel (1910:77ff) maintains that the disciples' belief in the resurrection of Jesus was influenced by conceptions, from religions other than mainstream official Judaism, about the rising of gods after death. It is of importance for the purpose of our study to give a short summary of Gunkel's argument, both from the perspective of methodology and with regard to the relevance of religio-historical material for the understanding of resurrection and resurrection faith.

The hypothesis that the "religion of the New Testament" was influenced in its origin and development by foreign religions and that these influences were transmitted into early Christian religion through Judaism is of paramount importance for the understanding of Gunkel's views (1910:1). With regard to
resurrection, he asserts (1910:78) that the Jewish ideas about resurrection, (see 4 Ezr 7:29) with which the disciples were acquainted should be understood against the background of dying and rising gods in non-Jewish religions and their influence upon Judaism. With this in mind he investigates the background of resurrection motifs in the New Testament.

First there is the date of the discovery and announcement of the resurrection of Jesus. According to our sources, it happened on Easter Sunday at the rising of the sun (see Mk 16:8parr). The fact that this date coincides with the important Sunday on which the sun rises after winter, which was most probably regarded as the day of the rising of the gods, is probably an indication that early Christians borrowed the date of the "day of the resurrection" from ancient Near Eastern beliefs (Gunkel 1910:79).

Even more important is the motif of "after three days" or its variant "on the third day". The value attached to this motif is seen in its repetition in early Christian sources and its inclusion in the Apostolic Creed. Gunkel (1910:79ff) regards it as one of the first dogmas which the early Christians derived from other religions. He traces it back through the story of Jonah in the fish, the motif of three and a half periods in Daniel, to similar and parallel motifs and ideas in the history of other religions (see also Leipoldt 1988:289ff). This material gives an explanation for the importance given to the three day motif in the resurrection of Jesus by early Christians. They borrowed the idea from other religions through their Jewish heritage. Gunkel (1910:82) concludes that the material not only explains the importance of the motif with regard to the resurrection of Jesus, but also that there was a belief in the death and resurrection of the messiah in Jewish-syncretistic circles before Jesus. After the death of Jesus, his disciples made use of extant conceptions about death and resurrection to interpret his death.

Paul's teaching on baptism (Rm 6) is also clearly based on the idea of dying and rising: from death to resurrection. Baptism is a symbol of the Christian's dying and rising with Christ. Gunkel (1910:84) compares this to the myth of the Egyptian god Osiris who was killed and rose from death, and he considers that this gave rise to resurrection hope. By being united with his/her god, the believer can be assured that it is possible to obtain eternal life through death.

Gunkel (1910:82f) maintains:

Die historische Frage ist demnach nicht, wie der Glaube und die Auferstehung überhaupt entstanden ist, ... sondern das eigentliche Problem ist das engere: wie es möglich gewesen ist, den Glauben an die Auferstehung auf die Person Jesus, des schimpflich am Kreuz hingerichteten Jesus zu übertragen.

These few remarks sufficiently illustrate the assumptions, presuppositions and approach of Gunkel in studying the resurrection of Jesus from a religio-
historical perspective. "Influence", "background", "motifs" and parallel thoughts and statements, are basic to Gunkel's approach. To explain resurrection and resurrection faith in the New Testament from a religio-historical perspective is to study the genesis of such beliefs by comparing parallel statements and motifs in different religions. Gunkel did not, however, speak the last word on this subject.

In an equally important study entitled Sterbende und auferstehende Götter, Leipoldt (1923; see also 1988) takes the issue of the myths of dying and rising gods a little further by drawing attention to both similarities and differences between these myths and the narratives about Jesus. Despite the similarities there are important differences, according to Leipoldt. Most important is the fact that Jesus is never understood in the New Testament in terms of the nature gods who die and rise like the plants of nature; secondly, he did not have a divine female partner; and thirdly, unlike the dying and rising gods, he was not raised by a miracle worker. This does not detract from the fact that Christian narratives about the empty tomb and the christophany narratives of Jesus contain motifs which also occur in narratives about dying and rising gods and resurrection stories of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Like Gunkel, Leipoldt (1988:290ff) draws attention to the three day motif, but adds a number of significant motifs in the New Testament narratives about Jesus which can be explained religio-historically.

Leipoldt proceeds from the assumption that the resurrection of Jesus as experienced by his disciples is totally foreign to Jewish thought and can only be explained from a non-Jewish religio-historical background. Since the days of Gunkel and Leipoldt and the many other studies on the possible influence of the mystery religions upon the development of New Testament thought (see Wedderburn 1987:90-163), the religio-historical investigation of the resurrection of Jesus has become much more complicated. While Gunkel argues that the influence of other religions on Christianity can be traced through Judaism, Leipoldt prefers to explain the differences and similarities without the mediation of Judaism, because in his view the resurrection of Jesus was totally incomprehensible for a Jew.

We have to remember that the days of Gunkel and Leipoldt were the childhood days of the religio-historical approach to the New Testament. This explains why after almost a century of scholarship most of Gunkel’s explanations and intuitions concerning the dying and rising motif as the context within which resurrection and resurrection faith in the New Testament are to be understood, have become problematic (see e.g. Wedderburn 1987). His assumptions on how phenomena such as resurrection should be studied from a religio-historical point of view have also been challenged (see Paulsen 1978; Müller 1985). On the other hand, it has become clear that Gunkel was correct in arguing that belief in resurrection is not a unique Christian phenomenon. Long before this phenomenon was related to Jesus, there were people who believed that death was not the end and that the body would be
revised after death. To understand resurrection and resurrection faith in the New Testament historically, one needs first to understand the religio-historical context in which these conceptions functioned. This implies more than noting correspondence between motifs in different religions and searching for the roots of the New Testament idea of resurrection, however important these might be. It also implies understanding the religio-historical context of phenomena and their explanation within such a possible context.

The question of whether the resurrection of Jesus and resurrection faith can be explained against the background of the dying and rising of gods will be dealt with below. A few words about the purpose of this study and the position taken will now be in order.

The purpose of a religio-historical investigation of phenomena such as the resurrection of Jesus and resurrection faith in the New Testament is to try to understand and explain historically what people thought and believed when they spoke about these phenomena. This essay is not concerned with the genesis of Easter faith in the first instance. It is also not a study in parallel statements and "events" in other religions just for the sake of parallels. Patterns of thought will be studied with a view to understanding the thought world of the New Testament; that is, the religio-historical context of New Testament thinking about the resurrection. Furthermore, it is not concerned with the influence of other religions on the formation of resurrection and resurrection faith in early Christianity as such. It is a study about the beliefs of people who lived in the times of the genesis of New Testament writings and about the distinctive elements, if any, in their thoughts on resurrection. To get a clearer picture of the religio-historical context of resurrection and resurrection faith in the New Testament, special attention will be paid to resurrection beliefs in the first century as well as before the New Testament. Since this material has been studied repeatedly in the past, I will limit my discussion to the possible religio-historical context of interpretation without detailed discussions of all the problems involved. Space does not allow this.

Since the ancients, like ourselves, had many views about life after death, it is necessary to say at the outset what is meant by "resurrection" in this essay. "Resurrection" refers to the revival of the body of a human being, that is, man as a whole, into a new existence after a period of death. It is not concerned with any other ideas about life after death, such as immortality or reincarnation. It is only in Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam that this phenomenon is found; although some would argue that there are analogies to resurrection in Chinese Taoism and also in ancient Indian and Egyptian religions (see Ringgren 1987:344).

2 JEWISH BELIEFS ABOUT RESURRECTION BEFORE THE NEW TESTAMENT
Given the limits of this essay, it is impossible to do much more in this section than to give a survey of beliefs in resurrection in a few relevant texts from the period, and to explain where they come from and how they function.
2.1 Origins of resurrection faith in Israel

Although it is sometimes argued that there are indications of resurrection faith in Israel in documents as old as the ninth century BCE (see Greenspoon 1981), it is generally maintained that resurrection was a newcomer on the scene of Israelite religion (see Nickelsburg 1972). It would take too long to go into detailed arguments about the possible origins of the Israelite belief in resurrection. A few words about the matter will, nevertheless, be in order.

Greenspoon (1981) maintains that despite the absence of direct textual evidence, the origin of resurrection faith lies in the idea of YHWH as the Divine Warrior who rules over nature, chaos and death, and in the belief that his followers are incorporated into his kingship of victory over death. The three resurrection or resuscitation stories in the Elijah and Elisha cycles (ninth to eighth centuries), namely the stories of the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Ki 17:17-24), the son of the wealthy woman in Shunem near Megiddo (2 Ki 4:18-21; 32-37) and the story of the man who came into contact with the bones of Elisha (2 Ki 4:18-21, 32-37), are stories about resurrection set in this world. These resurrections resulted in the revival of the bodies of three persons after death and their reintroduction into the same human society. According to Greenspoon (1981:319), these stories are associated with YHWH as the Divine Warrior and are early indications of resurrection faith in the Northern Kingdom.

Greenspoon furthermore develops his argument about the association of the theme of YHWH as Divine Warrior and resurrection faith in Israel through the vision of Ezekiel 37 concerning the national resurrection of Israel, the apocalypse of Isaiah and material from Trito-Isaiah through Daniel. In Daniel, however, the scope of the process of resurrection is limited to the righteous who will awaken to be vindicated and rewarded.

Quite a different approach is taken by those scholars who find the origins of Judaic resurrection faith in Iranian Zoroastrianism (see Barr 1985). Zoroastrianism has a fully developed doctrine of the resurrection of all mankind (see Bundahisn 34). Resurrection is associated with judgement of the good and the evil deeds of man which will be revealed when all mankind is resurrected and gathered for judgement. The righteous will be rewarded with the bliss of entering paradise, while sinners will be punished (see Ringgren 1987:345). This is not the place to go into detail about the scholarly discussions of the Iranian influence on Judaism, and for that matter on Christianity, concerning resurrection faith. Suffice it to say that the development of conceptions such as angels, dualism, eschatology, and resurrection is commonly attributed to the influence of Iranian religion. "This would not be surprising, at least in theory; for the Jews lived about two centuries under the Pax Persica, and some of their most important books were written in that time" (Barr 1985:201).
A variety of other texts, the dating and origin of which are obscure, are often taken into account in discussions about the origin and development of resurrection faith in the Old Testament. I am referring here to texts such as Psalms 16, 49 and 73, as well to the apocalypse of Isaiah 25-26, which is probably a post-exilic text and appears to be one of the earliest texts of Israel to express the hope of the resurrection of the righteous. They will arise, while the oppressors will remain dead (Is 26:14-19. See Greenspoon 1981:284). The *locus classicus* is, however, a text from Daniel. Let us now turn to Daniel 12.

2.2 Daniel 12:3

> Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will wake, some to everlasting life and some to the reproach of eternal abhorrence (NEB).

The wording of Daniel 12:2 closely parallels Isaiah 26:19 as Nickelsburg (1972:17) has clearly indicated. Chapters 26-27 of Isaiah deal with the restoration of Israel, and the reference to dead bodies which will rise should be taken figuratively. Daniel goes beyond this, however. Nickelsburg (1972:19) correctly observes:

> For Isaiah the resurrection of the righteous is *in itself* vindication for the righteous. For Daniel resurrection is a *means* by which both the righteous and the wicked dead are enabled to receive their respective vindication or condemnation.

The author of Daniel envisages a bodily resurrection of some (see many, some, some) of those who were dead. He is not thinking of a universal resurrection for judgement; many, not everybody, will rise. Interestingly the LXX translates the Hebrew word for "awake" by ἐναπτύσσονται (see Theodotion ἐξεγερθήσονται), a term which is also used in the New Testament for resurrection.

The Book of Daniel was written between 167 and 165 BCE, during the persecution of pious Jews and the destruction of the cult in Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes (see Schmidt 1982:287). Daniel 12:3 forms part of the apocalypse in chapters 10-12. The apocalypse describes the events in the history of Israel to the persecution by Antiochus and his end (10-11:45). It reaches its climax in a short description of the judgement in 12:1-3.

Daniel 12:1-3 is a response to the course of the events of the Maccabean revolt when the righteous suffered because they adhered to the law, while the unrighteous prospered, even at the cost of the righteous. It was a consolation for people who had suffered terribly. It is also the only clear reference to resurrection hope in the Hebrew canon, although there are other passages
from this canon which have been interpreted in the course of history from the perspective of resurrection (BerR 14 and WayyR 14. See also Lapide 1983:44ff).

2.3 2 Maccabees 7
The second Maccabean history was most probably written during the period from 125-63 BCE (see Attridge 1984:177). This book concerns the caring love of God for his people by rewarding the pious and punishing the impious. Antiochus Epiphanes and Nicanor are portrayed as the opponents of God and his people by their disregard for God and his law. The pious suffer at the hands of the adversaries of God. They are, however, encouraged by their belief in future resurrection.

In chapter 7, an interesting legend about the martyrdom of seven courageous young men and their mother is related. The young men and their mother are commanded by Antiochus to eat pork and thus to disobey the law of their God. On their refusal they are tortured in the most brutal way. In vivid language the torture and sufferings of the boys are described. Courageously they speak their minds and confess their hope of resurrection. The destruction of their bodies will simply lead to their resurrection by "... the King of the universe who will raise us up to a life everlastingly made new" (2 Mac 7:9). One after the other they are tortured. In answer to his own suffering, one of the boys' response is that there will be no resurrection to life for the torturer (verse 14). Instead there will be torment for the torturer and also for his descendants (verse 17). In the end, after all seven are killed, the mother says:

You appeared in my womb, I know not how; it was not I who gave you life and breath and set in order your bodily frames. It is the Creator of the universe who moulds man at his birth and plans the origin of all things. Therefore he, in his mercy, will give you back life and breath again, since now you put his laws above all thought of self (NEB).

The most striking thing about this legend is the fact that the youths are the suffering servants of the Lord, whose deeds will be vindicated. The theme of retaliation is characteristic of the thought structure of the book (Stemberger 1972b:17). The legend is a clear example of resurrection hope in Israel during the second century. The function of resurrection is to compensate for the lack of divine judgement in this world. It is also a reward for the deeds of the young martyrs in the legend who suffer for the sake of God!

2.4 Psalms of Solomon
Eschatological hope for the individual is also a theme in the Psalms of Solomon. These psalms are the product of a Jewish community of the first century (BCE) "bound together by persecution and hope for the future"
Eternal destruction is the fate of the sinner, whereas the righteous can hope for eternal life because God looks after the righteous in spite of their sufferings.

The destruction of the sinner is forever, and he will not be remembered when (God) looks after the righteous.

This is the share of sinners forever, but those who fear the Lord shall rise up to eternal life, and their life shall be in the Lord's light, and it shall never end (PssSol 4:10; see 13:11; 14:10, Wright's translation).

In the Psalms of Solomon, resurrection functions as a recompense for the suffering of the righteous. They will be rewarded by eternal life after the "day of mercy", while sinners will be punished. Similar ideas about resurrection and judgement are also found in the Testaments of the twelve patriarchs (see TBenj 10:5-11) and in 1 Enoch (see 1 En 22-27; 92-105). It should however, be noted that in the Psalms of Solomon, unlike in Daniel, resurrection is only for the righteous. It is not a general resurrection for judgement (see Dn 12:2; 2 Mac 7:9; 2 Bar 30:1-5; 4 Ezr 7:32 etc).

Nickelsburg (1972:124) correctly observes that faith in resurrection has different functions in Jewish texts written before the Christian Era. In Daniel and in 2 Maccabees, God will raise the righteous because they suffer unjustly for his sake. This is not the case in 1 Enoch where God raises the dead simply because they suffer unjustly, not because they suffer for the sake of God. Resurrection is also not the answer to unjust death. "It speaks to the problem of suffering and oppression, even when it has not resulted in death" (Nickelsburg 1972:124). In the Testament of Benjamin 10:5-11, resurrection encompasses all, not only the persecuted righteous.

It is difficult to determine whether the Qumran community had specific views about resurrection. Scholars differ about the interpretation of the relevant texts. The fact that members of the community were buried in a north-south direction points to the belief that paradise is in the north and that the community believed in the resurrection of the dead (see Stemberger 1979:445).

Strikingly different from belief in resurrection of the body of the righteous martyrs is the development of the idea of the immortality of the soul in 4 Maccabees and in the Wisdom of Solomon. Both these books most probably come from the first century of the Christian Era (see Anderson 1985:533ff; Gilbert 1984:312). In 4 Maccabees, resurrection of the body is replaced by immortality and eternal life, beginning at the moment of death (see 7:3; 9:22; 13:17; 14:5-6; 15:3 etc). The Wisdom of Solomon also deals with immortality. It is God's gift to the righteous, already during their earthly life (see SapSol 1:12-16).
Although textual evidence for the belief in resurrection in Judaism before the birth of Christianity might seem scanty and perhaps even minimal, one should not disregard the entire context of religious thought about afterlife. It is during this period that there was an important development in messianism in Israel. Although there had been an expectation of a better future for Israel in the older prophets, messianic hope and hope about the future of the world, not only of Israel, underwent radical changes (see Schürer 1979:492ff). The socio-political and religious contexts of the period before the birth of Christianity gave rise to a totally new eschatology in which the individual and his/her life after death played an important role.

3 FIRST CENTURY BELIEFS IN RESURRECTION

3.1 Resurrection faith in first century Palestine

Both Jewish and other documents display a diversity in beliefs about life after death in first century Palestine, in spite of the similarities with the beliefs we discussed in Section 2 of this essay. This is apparent from what the New Testament and Josephus say about the beliefs of the Sadducees and the Pharisees, for example, concerning resurrection.

3.1.1 Pharisees and Sadducees on resurrection

The short controversy story in Mark 12:18-27, which in its present form is probably not original (e.g. verse 26. See Bultmann 1970:25; 1971:24; Gnilka 1979:156ff), tells of the conflict between Jesus and the Sadducees about resurrection. According to the narrative commentary of Mark in verse 18, the Sadducees are "those who argue that there is no resurrection". Mark uses the word ἀνάστασις for "resurrection". This view of the Sadducees is supported by Luke. He also maintains that the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection (Ac 4:1f; 23:6-8). According to Luke, Paul defended his position as a Pharisee in his defence before the council in Jerusalem. Luke's description of the beliefs of the Sadducees corresponds with that of Mark. He uses exactly the same words as Mark quoted above (Ac 23:8), but adds that they also say that there "... are no angels, or spirits, but the Pharisees believe in all three" (TEV). This addition of Luke is significant since in Mark 12:25 it is narrated that Jesus said: "For when the dead are raised, men and women will not marry, but they will be like angels in heaven". Apparently it was believed in some Jewish circles by the end of the first century that the resurrected become angels or angel like. This view is also found in 2 Baruch 51:10:

For they will live in the heights of that world and they will be like angels and be equal to the stars (Klijn 1983:638).
Josephus' description of the beliefs of the Sadducees and the Pharisees is different in some respects from that of the New Testament (BJ 2.162-66; Ant 18.13-17). According to him the Pharisees maintained that the soul is imperishable, and that only the souls of the good pass into another body, that is, to a new life. The souls of the wicked suffer eternal punishment. Reward or punishment await those who have led lives of virtue or of vice "under the earth" (Ant 18.14). The Sadducees on the other hand believed that the soul perishes with the body. Josephus (Ant 18.8) also asserts that the Essenes believed in the immortality of the soul. Unlike the New Testament, he does not mention resurrection directly. He discusses the beliefs of the different groups about life after death from the perspective of body/soul. Both the New Testament and Josephus agree that the Sadducees did not believe in life after death.

What the Pharisees actually believed in the time of Jesus is difficult to say because of the nature of our sources. Later sources claim that the chief Pharisaic schools of Hillel and Shammai believed in bodily resurrection at the beginning of the first century (see Strack & Billerbeck 1969:1172). It is clear from the Rabbinic literature that Rabbinic Judaism developed a complete doctrine of resurrection (see Sternberger 1979:446ff). In the end, the views of the Sadducees about life after death were totally rejected and replaced by the development of Pharisaic beliefs.

3.1.2 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra

By the end of the first century (CE) and the beginning of the second, different aspects of eschatological speculation had developed both in Judaism and in Christianity (see the Revelation of John). This is clearly illustrated in 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra. Although both books were probably written early in the second century (see Klijn 1983:616f; Metzger 1983:520) as responses to the fall of Jerusalem, I include them under the heading of first century beliefs because they illustrate the development in eschatological speculation during the first and second centuries.

The fall of Jerusalem played an important role in the development of eschatology in Judaism. The hope of a new world and a new heaven, based on Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22, is one of these beliefs (see Schürer 1979:537ff). Two views concerning the start of the new world were propagated. According to some it would begin at the start of the messianic age (see 1 En 45:4-5), while others maintained that it would start at the end of the messianic age (see 4 Ezr). In 2 Baruch the messianic age is placed between this world and the world to come (2 Bar 74:2-3; see Schürer 1979:537ff for detail). Speculation about the new world obviously also included speculation about what would happen in this new world. It is in this connection that resurrection plays a role.

According to 2 Baruch, the present corrupt age will be followed by the judgement of God after which there will be an everlasting incorruptible age.
The last judgement will be preceded by a general resurrection of the dead (see 2 Bar 30:1-5; 50:1). The souls of the dead are kept in "treasuries" in the realm of death (Sheol. See 2 Bar 21:23; 30:2-5). The dead will be raised in their original form so that those who knew them previously can recognise them (2 Bar 50:2-4). Then the judgement of the Lord will take place. The wicked will first see how the righteous are freed from the limitations of the corrupt age and receive the splendour of the incorruptible age before they themselves go away to be tormented (2 Bar 51:6). The righteous will enjoy the glory of paradise.

The views of the author of 4 Ezra on resurrection are closely related to those of the author of 2 Baruch. During the interval between death and resurrection the souls are kept in "chambers" or "dwellings" (4 Ezr 4:35) where the righteous experience a preliminary state of peace and blessedness, while the souls of the wicked are tormented in a place apart from those of the righteous (see 4 Ezr 7:75-107). Here "spirit" is used). There they will remain until the resurrection for the final judgement. The function of resurrection is also to reward or punish one's deeds. The righteous will enter the glory of paradise, while "Hell" is the place of torture for the wicked. In both books the purpose of resurrection is not participation in the messianic kingdom, but judgement, reward and punishment.

3.1.3 Summary

There was no uniform doctrine of afterlife in Palestinian Judaism during the first century. But resurrection was undoubtedly one of the important views among Jews. The dominant conception of resurrection in first century Judaism in Palestine was most probably a realistic one: a restitution of the body. After judgement there will be a general resurrection for judgement. The righteous will be rewarded for their deeds and the wicked will be punished. These ideas are on the one hand a continuation of those found in Daniel; but on the other hand they are also the development of speculation about the nature of resurrection which found its climax in the second century in both Judaism and Christianity. Spiritual or symbolic resurrection played no role (see Wedderburn 1987:173ff). The Sadducees rejected the idea of resurrection and so did the Samaritans (see Ferguson 1987:439), while Hellenistic Jews and those under their influence believed in the immortality of the soul (see 4 Mac; Jub; SapSol; Philo).
3.2 Resurrection faith in the Graeco-Roman world?
It is often said that the Graeco-Roman world was familiar with the phenomenon of resurrection from the "dying and rising gods", and that Christian resurrection faith was influenced by its environment (see Braun 1969:27, 154). Lack of space makes it impossible to go into detail, but a few remarks are nevertheless necessary.

Belief in the dying and rising of gods was probably widespread in the Mediterranean world of the first century. One has, however, to be very clear about definitions, and about the understanding of the resurrection of Jesus by people from the Graeco-Roman world. As to the definition of resurrection in terms of the dying and rising of gods, it seems that Jewish and Christian understanding of the revival of a body after death is not precisely the same as the revivification of Osiris to become the ruler of the dead or as the resuscitation of Adonis (see Wedderburn 1987:190ff). On the other hand, would people from the Graeco-Roman world not have understood the resurrection of Jesus in exactly the same way as the myths mentioned? This is most probable. It is good to remind ourselves that the church Fathers understood the fate of Tammuz and Adonis, for example, as death and resurrection (see Wedderburn 1987:200ff for detail).

Belief in the possibility of the revival of a dead person is illustrated by different narratives from the Graeco-Roman world about people who were resuscitated (see Leipoldt 1988:290ff). In this sense one can speak of resurrection faith. The function of these stories is to illustrate the miraculous. In the discussion of the New Testament below I will go into more detail.

The Graeco-Roman world had definite ideas about afterlife (see Ferguson 1987:195ff). At the death of a person, the soul left the body and departed to a cavity under the earth. It was believed that the soul was immortal, and this belief was later combined with resurrection faith in the Christian tradition: Immortality of the soul and resurrection are, however, not the same.

These few remarks are sufficient to indicate that I am not of the opinion that resurrection and resurrection faith in the New Testament can be understood or explained against the background of Graeco-Roman beliefs. This does not mean that beliefs from that world did not mediate the message of early Christians about the resurrection to non-Jews. That is, however, another matter.

4 CONCLUSION
It is now left to consider how resurrection and resurrection faith in the New Testament fit into the material discussed in the previous sections.

The whole of the New Testament was written from a post-resurrection perspective. In almost every writing there is an indication of the importance attached to the resurrection of Jesus and to resurrection faith, in spite of the fact that the New Testament clearly says that Nobody witnessed the resur-
rection of Jesus. The New Testament offers us a picture of resurrection faith and not of the event of the resurrection of Jesus (see however the story of Lazarus in Jn 11 and the raising miracles in Mk 5 and Lk 7). It was believed that Jesus was raised from the dead, and as a consequence that those who believe in him will also be raised after death to live a new life. The different versions of the empty tomb narrative; the christophanies; the belief in the fact that God can raise a body from death, that he raised Jesus from the dead, and that because of the resurrection of Jesus those who believe in Christ will also be raised, all form the backbone of what the New Testament has to say about resurrection and what early Christians believed. The major emphasis is on the conviction that in the resurrection of Jesus, God started the eschatological process. His resurrection is the guarantee that those who have died will also be raised.

The New Testament furthermore displays the same diversity in conceptions concerning resurrection and resurrection faith as Judaism (see 1 Th 4:16ff; Rv 20:5, 6). The same expectation of the renewal of the world which we found in Judaism is also present in early Christianity (see Mt 19:28; 2 Pt 3:13; Rv 21:1). There seems to be an expectation of the immediate transfer of the just to heaven (see Lk 23:43; 2 Cor 5:8; Phlp 1:23; Ac 7:59; Rv 6:9ff; 7:9ff). The New Testament also teaches the judgement of God, and in this respect these ideas can also be linked to those of Judaism (see Jn 5:29; Rm 2:16). The main emphasis in the New Testament is on the christological interpretation of resurrection. The death and resurrection of Jesus inaugurated the eschatological process (Ac 26:23; 1 Cor 15:20, 21; Col 1:18). This is God's vindication of the persecution of Jesus (see Rm 4:24; 8:11). Except for the link between baptism and resurrection (see Rm 6; Eph; Col), the idea of a "present resurrection" of the kind developed by the gnostics (see Wedderburn 1987:210ff for detail) is rejected (see 2 Tm 2:18). In short, the New Testament reveals the process of development of ideas about resurrection and is only the start of the resurrection speculation which reached its climax in the second century (see TertResCarn 3; OrCels; JustApol; AthenRes).

The christological interpretation of resurrection in the New Testament did not originate from the preaching of Jesus. Although he most probably shared the current Jewish views about resurrection held by his contemporaries (see Mk 12:18ff), Jesus did not interpret his life in terms of the inauguration of the eschatological process of resurrection. The passion and resurrection predictions in the gospel tradition (see Mk 8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34parr) are redactional and come from primitive Christianity (see Bultmann 1970:163; Strecker 1979:52-75).

Belief in resurrection and resurrection stories was made possible by the world in which Christian religion originated. The fact that the body of a person could disappear after death and not be found because it had been taken into heaven, or that a body could disappear from its grave and appear and
speak to those who knew the person in life, is not totally unknown to the world of the New Testament. The Testament of Job, a Jewish-Hellenistic writing from the first century prior to or after the coming of Christ, relates the story of the destruction of the house of Job by Satan and the disappearance of his childrens’ bodies after death because they were taken to heaven by their creator (TJob 39:8-40:4. See also the empty tomb story of Callirrhoe, the wife of Chariton. See Liepoldt 1988:290f). Furthermore the story which Plutarch (45-125 CE) relates about the appearance of Romulus after his death in his *Parallel Lives* 28, bears a close resemblance to the christophany narratives (see Berger & Colpe 1987:91; Mk 16:1-8parr; Lk 24:51ff; Jn 20:17; GPt 10:38-40; PlutVitPar 28). This simply goes to show that some people in the period of the genesis of the New Testament, in both the Jewish and the Hellenistic worlds, would not have had any problem with the telling or believing of stories about the afterlife of the dead. The story of the appearance of Romulus after his death would have been as credible as that of the empty tomb of Jesus among the “believers” in the circle from which these stories grew. Even Tertullian (Apol 21:23) found some similarity between the ascension of Jesus and that of Romulus. This gives us some indication of the reception of these stories in the ancient world.

To my mind, it is doubtful whether the resurrection of Jesus can be explained against the background of the dying and rising of gods. Although the myth of dying and rising gods was widespread in the Near East (see Frazer 1963; Wissmann 1979:443), it does not seem to have been the dominant belief in first century Palestine where Jesus was crucified and then believed to have been resurrected (see also Leipoldt 1988:287). The religio-historical context of resurrection and resurrection faith in the New Testament appears to be predominantly Jewish. "To define hope in terms of a return to ‘bodily’ existence was not what the educated pagan would have wanted" (Ferguson 1987:487). This probably also holds for the non-Jewish man in the street in first century Palestine. Paul used the natural cycle to illustrate the nature of resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:36-37. Whether in fact he had in mind the idea of dying and rising gods, is a totally different matter.

**WORKS CONSULTED**

Bertram, G 1950. s v "Auferstehung I (des Kultgottes)". *RAC*.


Oepke, A 1950. s v "Auferstehung II (des Menschen)". RAC.


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