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The Christian Faith in the Resurrection of the Dead in the Approach of Gerhard Lohfink

SYLWESTER JAŚKIEWICZ
The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, sylwester.jaskiewicz@kul.pl

Abstract: The present article attempts to provide a synthetic approach to the issue of resurrection, particularly the "resurrection in death" model developed by the German exegete and theologian Gerhard Lohfink (1934–2024). The article's focus is strictly biblical and theological, and its structure begins by presenting the biblical foundations of the doctrine of resurrection, including the resurrection of all the dead. Next, it presents the fruit of Lohfink's reflections on resurrection, known in theology as the "resurrection in death" model. The final section of the article presents a Catholic assessment of the presented model and comprehensive conclusions. To achieve these goals, a comparative method was used to juxtapose and analyze the biblical sources on the resurrection, followed by a theological method treating the teaching of the Church and the Magisterium as one of its guiding principles. The analyses presented in this article lead to a conclusion that, on the one hand, highlights Lohfink's exegetical contribution in relation to the truth of the resurrection, and, on the other hand, demonstrates the incompatibility of the "resurrection in death" model with the Catholic doctrine.

Keywords: Gerhard Lohfink, eschatology, "resurrection in death," encounter, time

Has the last word already been said in the theological dispute on the human fate after death, which started in the late 1960s and early 1970s between supporters of the theory of resurrection in death, represented, among others, by Gisbert Greshake, Gerhard Lohfink, or Mario Pietrobelli, and critics thereof, including, above all, Joseph Ratzinger, Anton Ziegenaus, or Sebastian Greiner (Ratzinger 1988, 110; Smentek 2005, 174–94; Ancona 2007, 252; Piazza 2008, 179–80; Rychert 2008, 97–99; Jaśkiewicz 2013, 200; Bokwa 2017, 91; Yates 2017, 13–14; Cura Elena 2019, 325–27; Eckholt 2023, 50)? This dispute does not appear to be over, even if the earthly life of another of its participants, the Catholic exegete and theologian Gerhard Lohfink (1934–2024), has come to an end. The life message and extraordinary encouragement of this German exegete of the New Testament, who had also been a member of the Catholic Integrated Community (Katholische Integrierte Gemeinde) for almost half a century—as expressed convincingly in his last book, dedicated to reflection on death—was a call for courageous looking at the world "in light of the resurrection." (Lohfink 2018, 257)

The model of resurrection in death, as represented by Lohfink, is one of the five essential approaches in the ongoing discussion on the "interim state," or the fate of a human (referred to as the "separated soul") after death and the relation between

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the *novissima hominis* and the *novissima mundi* (Castellucci 1998, 176–94; 2010, 270–273). The connection between resurrection and death is not understood uniformly; consequently, apart from the approach to death as the beginning of resurrection or a coincidence of death and resurrection, a model has been developed, notably by Greshake and Lohfink, which posits that death, resurrection, and the Parousia occur simultaneously. Even if the proposals of "resurrection in death" by Greshake and Lohfink have common elements, they differ in the roads leading to it (Lohfink 2018, 183; cf. Castellucci 1998, 189). In order to show the originality of Lohfink's approach, its value, as well as its limitations, it is necessary to present the primary sense of the truth that he had extracted from the exegesis of biblical sources.

1. The Biblical Sources of Faith in Resurrection

The basic source for the truth of resurrection is the Bible. It may be surprising, as Lohfink (2018, 66–76) points out, that the oldest parts of the Old Testament are focused very strongly on temporality and offer no hope for the future. An anticipation of the later faith in resurrection, expressed with still insufficient terminology, cannot be found earlier than the supplications and thanksgivings of the Psalms (cf. Ps 49:14–16; 16; 22; 73; 36, 6–8; see Lohfink 2018, 76–80). A fragment of Isaiah (cf. chs. Isa 24–27), and particularly Isa 25:8, speaks clearly of the utter destruction of death to be fulfilled by God. Isa 26:19 says that the dead in Israel ("shades," those resting "in the dust") will be resurrected through God's creative power (the imagery of dew, light) "for life on a renewed earth." (Lohfink 2018, 83) Another important piece of evidence for the resurrection of the righteous (those who remained steadfast in their faith in spite of persecutions and oppression) for a new life in the earthly world renewed by God (they will be like the stars in the sky) is the apocalyptic passage of the Book of Daniel (Dan 12:1–3). A poignant vision of bones clothing themselves in flesh, i.e., returning to life through the Spirit of the Lord, symbolizing the enlivening and reconstruction of the people of Israel, is also conveyed in the Book of Ezekiel (cf. Ezek 37:1–14). Other important evidence of the faith in resurrection is found in the Second Book of Maccabees from the 2nd century BCE (cf. 2 Macc 7:9, 11, 14, 23, 29, 36; 14:37–46).[1]

1 Since this book is not part of the Hebrew Bible but only of the canon of the Septuagint and of the Catholic Church, Lohfink does not devote more time to it. Instead, to confirm the Jewish faith in resurrection of the dead, he cites a passage from the *Book of Biblical Antiquities*, attributed to the Jewish philosopher and theologian Philo, likely dating to the period after the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem in 70 CE. The piety of Israel is strongly focused on temporality. Of Jewish prayers, only the *Prayer of Eighteen Blessings* mentions God who resurrects the dead, and only marginally. Cf. Lohfink 2018, 85–89.

In the New Testament, the subject matter of the raising of the dead from death, as well as the marginal use of the word "resurrection" by Jesus, comprises an inseparable part of a much more central theme of "the Reign of God," the preaching of which is known as "gospel" (*evangelium*) or "good news." (Lohfink 2018, 99) The entire teaching of Jesus and his deeds full of power (cf. Mark 1:22, 27; 5:21–43; 6:2, 5; Luke 7:11–17) speak about the kingdom of God having already come to this world, about "God's royal rule" (Lohfink 2012, 170–175; Machinek 2021, 1343) that will renew the world and, destroying death, will reveal the entire extraordinariness of eternal life with God (Lohfink 2018, 103). The Reign of God has both its own *kairos*, its specific time—"the exact hour"—and its own *topos*, or its place, which is God's people (Lohfink 2012, 39–40). To a human, death becomes an event comprising the end of their history, through which the kingdom of God comes and the final and universal Reign of God materializes (Reményi 2006, 80; Rychert 2009, 63). A term directly related to the kingdom of God, but also finding reference to other objects of expectation, is "near expectation" (*Naherwartung*), understood by Lohfink literally, in spite of different concepts thereof in the history of theology, as the reality of the kingdom of God already being somehow present or about to be revealed in a very short time (Dańczak 2008, 56–58).

The resurrection of Jesus was not his return to life in a manner similar to the raising of the young man from Nain, but, as Lohfink argues in one of his very first studies (1968, 37), it was an eschatological event already setting in motion the events of the end.

The Paschal experience and message comprise the basis of the Christian faith. From specific encounters with the resurrected Jesus, as narrated in the Gospels, Lohfink cites a fragment of the account of the disciples from Emmaus (cf. Luke 24:19–21), the kerygmatic formula speaking of the resurrection of Jesus as present in many passages of the New Testament (cf. Acts 3:15; 4:10; 13:30, 34; 17:31; Rom 4:24; 8:11; 10:9; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:20; Col 2:12; 1 Thess 1:10; 1 Pet 1:21; see Lohfink 1987, 24; 2018, 113–15) and also the testimony of Saul's conversion (cf. 1 Cor 15:3–9; Lohfink 1976a, 26–27). In the context of the incorporeal images of life after death, which were popular at the time, the accounts of encounters with the Resurrected put a very strong emphasis on the experience of his actual corporeality: He wanders (cf. Luke 24:15), breaks bread (cf. Luke 24:30), gives fishing instructions (cf. John 21:6), prepares fish in the fire to be eaten (cf. John 21:10), shows his wounds (cf. John 20:20), and encourages one to put a finger into them (cf. John 20:27) (Lohfink 2018, 116–17). Due to different image schemas known at the time, Lohfink's deliberations on resurrection do not omit the form in which the first witnesses experienced the Paschal event. It is fully expressed by the oldest Paschal creed formula: "God raised Jesus from the dead," which "contains the statement that with *his* resurrection the end has already begun; indeed, with his resurrection the general resurrection of the dead has commenced." (Lohfink 2018, 122)

The experience of the encounter with the Resurrected leads the Apostles to bear witness to the resurrection and to being aware of the inclusion of everyone in this process (Lohfink 2018, 123). The conclusion of Jesus' earthly service is his ascension, which is also an "image of Parousia" (Hahn 1974, 421). Already in the early community in Jerusalem, the expectation of the second coming of the Resurrected and of the end of the world was coupled with bearing witness to Jesus on earth and with the attempt to gather up and convert Israel (Lohfink 2012, 305).

2. The Image of the Universal Resurrection of the Dead

The belief in the universal resurrection of the dead has its source in the Paschal faith. It originates from the fact of the resurrection of Christ, which took place after his death, in complete trust in God (Lohfink 1984, 61–63). With great inquisitiveness, befitting a researcher of the Holy Scriptures, Lohfink asks a question about the origin of the Paschal faith in the first place, and particularly about what had existed in the imaginary and linguistic form in Judaism of the era, allowing the early Church to express it (Lohfink 2012, 295). Thus, the exegete points out the factual presence in the New Testament of the following three different image schemas concerning the "exaltation" of Jesus by God (John 12:32; Acts 2:33; 5:31; Rom 1:4; Eph 1:20–21; Phil 2:9; Heb 1:3; 2:9; 5:5–6; 8:1; 10:12–13), Jesus being taken up by God to heaven (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9; 3:21; 1 Tim 3:16), and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead by God (Luke 24:34; Acts 10:40; Rom 4:24–25; 8:11; 10:9; 1 Cor 6:14; 15:4; Gal 1:1; 1 Thess 1:10; 1 Pet 1:21) (Lohfink 2012, 296; 2018, 119–23). The last schema is the original image schema expressing the Paschal faith and a clear eschatological awareness that the resurrection of Jesus marked the beginning of the universal resurrection of the dead at the end of times (cf. 1 Cor 15:20; Col 1:18; Rev 1:5) (Lohfink 2012, 296–97; 2018, 122–23).

Lohfink devotes much attention to the atmosphere of Paschal experiences, which, in his opinion, was an atmosphere of end times. It consisted of interrelated events and facts: the tidings of the empty grave, the appearances of the Resurrected, the addition of Matthias to the group of the Twelve (Acts 1:15–26), or the descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1–4) (Lohfink 2012, 302–3). Just as the experience of the Spirit was sudden for the original Jerusalem community, the sacrament of baptism also appeared in it suddenly, as Lohfink points out, as an "eschatological sacrament, as a salutary sealing in the face of a near end." (Lohfink 2012, 304; see Lohfink 1976b, 48) The expectation of a near end is finally expressed by the joyful celebration of the Lord's Supper with the exclamation resounding in it, "*marana tha* = 'Our Lord, come!' (cf. 1 Cor 16:22)." (Lohfink 2012, 304)

The expectation of the second coming of the Resurrected and of the end of the world does not fill the early Jerusalem community with dread, nor does it put an end to its efforts to gather up Israel and bring it to God through conversion. After Easter, that original community is characterized by two fundamental constants: the eschatological constant as expectation of an imminent end and the ecclesiological constant as an aspiration for gathering up true Israel before the coming of the end (Lohfink 1976b, 47; 2012, 497). Its most intense expectation of the end of the world "was constantly being fulfilled 'today.' … because it is about 'now.'" (Lohfink 2012, 305) Among the Evangelists, it is particularly St. John who conveys the "eschatology of the present." (Lohfink 2012, 34) Fulfilling the work entrusted to him by the Father (cf. John 19:30), Jesus gives rise already "now," "today," to what is decisive (Lohfink 1984, 62; 2012, 62). This causes perception of him as "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20, 23), "the firstborn among many brothers and sisters" (Rom 8:29), and "the author of life" (Acts 3:15). Other passages, in turn, emphasize the truth resulting from the fact of the resurrection of Jesus, that "God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him" (1 Thess 4:14), or that "we were dead in transgressions …. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:5–6; see Lohfink 2018, 123). Everything that has already begun with the resurrection of Jesus is neither some natural phenomenon inherent to humans due to their nature nor the crowning of the natural evolution of living beings nor any effect of constantly improved synthetic biology, but, as Lohfink strongly stresses, "It is God's saving action, undeserved, pure gift. The word 'new' in the phrase 'new creation' indicates that." (Lohfink 2018, 124; see Rychert 2009, 64) "Being in Christ" as a "new creation" is mentioned by Paul the Apostle (cf. 2 Cor 5:17). In reality, the term "new creation" is nothing new because, as Lohfink notes, it already appears in the Book of Isaiah (chs. Isa 40–45) and is contained in its conclusion (Isa 65:17–18), as well as mentioned in non-biblical Jewish texts (Lohfink 2018, 124–28). It should be attributed in particular to Luke the Evangelist that he understood the time between Pascha and the Parousia as the time of the Church (Lohfink 1987, 24). What sets the early Church apart can be seen best in the teaching of St. Paul, who claims that everybody who comprises it by virtue of "clothing oneself" in Christ (cf. Rom 13:14) in the sacrament of baptism has become a "new creation" and belongs to a new world of the Resurrected (Lohfink 2018, 127). Full of astonishment for God's creative love encompassing both the world in which the human lives currently and the imminent world of resurrection, Lohfink concludes that the resurrection "is giving form to that for which creation was intended from the beginning: to be a world before God." (Lohfink 2018, 128)

3. Resurrection in Death—Images and Image Models

As a point of departure in the demonstration of the fate of a human in death, Lohfink assumes the category, image, and notion of an "encounter" with God. And although he uses the form of account as a basis when reading the evangelical contents (Lohfink 1984, 74), he is nevertheless aware of the inadequacy of human concepts in speaking about God (2018, 157) and of the limitedness of "image speech." (2018, 163, 203–4) In his understanding of this encounter, he is inspired by the eschatology of the present (cf. Luke 11:20; John 5:24–25; Rom 6:1–14; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5, 17; 6:2; Eph 2:4–6; see Lohfink 2018, 250–253), and particularly by the statement from the Holy Scriptures "of the unending progress 'from glory to glory' (2 Cor 3:18 NAB)." (Lohfink 2018, 229). To a human,

> death will be an encounter with God, and it is God who be the human person's heaven or judgment. God will be everything for the person and there will be nothing else for anyone, really nothing else for anyone, really nothing else, except *in God*. (Lohfink 2018, 140; see Lohfink 1977, 27–29)

In order to specify closer whom a deceased person encounters in their death—God or any of the Divine Persons—he explains that,

> In God we will meet not only God but the risen and rising Jesus. … *he* will appear before us as the Crucified: indeed, the Crucified in power and glory. *He* will judge the world; *he* will separate good from evil; *he* will bestow eternal life: *he* will transform our mortal bodies into the form of his glorified body. (Lohfink 2018, 229)

For a human, the posthumous meeting of God in Jesus Christ (Lohfink 1977, 42–43) will become inclusion in the life of the Triune God.

Although in a closer presentation of the encounter with the living God, Lohfink does not speak of a chronological sequence of events (2018, 163), using, for instance, the adverb "first," the first act of this encounter is the judgment. It is then that

> When we encounter God in death we will for the first time recognize with full clarity who we really are. God has no need to sit in judgment on us …. There will be no judgment in that sense. In our encounter with the holy God our eyes will be opened to behold our own selves. We will know who we are. We ourselves will judge and condemn the evil in ourselves. (Lohfink 2018, 152)

In relation to a thus understood vision of judgment, Lohfink goes a step further, adding that passing the judgment by oneself as a result of learning the truth about God and about oneself also takes place in front of our "victims," i.e., those whom we

have wronged in any way, and "we will undergo all the sufferings we have caused them." (2018, 153) The confrontation of a human person with the history of their guilt also means "that, at the moment of our final encounter with God, divine mercy could become judgment—but a judgment that clarifies, purifies, and heals everything in us." (Lohfink 2018, 159) In death, a person stands before the absolutely holy God with their entire life history. The fact that a human is not holy is the most poignant Scriptures-based "piece of evidence" for purgatory, even if the Holy Scriptures do not use this term directly nor do they provide its definition (Lohfink 2018, 162).

In view of the inadequacy of the category of time in relation to the process of purification in death, Lohfink postulates the category of intensities, in essence,

> the event of purification in death will look different in the lives of those who have steadily practiced examination of conscience, sorrow over their own egoism, repentance, reconciliation, turning to God and the neighbor than it will in those who drifted through life. (Lohfink 2018, 163)

Lohfink opposes the view of God punishing and demanding atonement (2018, 166) and of purgatory as a place of torture (164). The eternal happiness to which the process of purification in death leads is not granted to a human in exchange for their efforts or merits but is a gift, the effect of the purifying, sanctifying, and healing grace (Lohfink 2018, 164). In this context, Lohfink does not share the popular hypothesis of "final decision" by Ladislaus Boros (Lohfink 2018, 164) nor such an understanding of the action of grace that would omit the purification and transfiguration of the creation. For a human person, the purification in death essentially means both the experience of profound pain due to one's own sinfulness and the infinite joy of reaching God's light (Lohfink 2018, 165).

Lohfink's eschatological deliberations also include statements of the Holy Scriptures concerning hell (the texts of "vengeance" and "repayment" in the Old Testament [cf. Ps 28:4; 31:24; 58:11; 69:28; 79; 91:8; 94:1–2; Matt 25:41; Rom 2:5; 2 Thess 1:9; Rev 20:15]), which, however, require proper understanding. In the first place, those statements do not provide information on hell, nor are they evidence of its existence, but are intended to illustrate to humans, as imitators of Jesus, their responsibility in relation to the coming of the kingdom of God, and thus the passages under consideration should be treated as admonitions and warnings (Lohfink 2018, 168). Furthermore, the understanding of the deeper meaning of the texts about hell also requires a broader context, which is God's universal saving will (1 Tim 2:4; cf. John 12:32; Rom 5:18; 11:32; Col 1:20; 1 Tim 2:6; Titus 2:11; see Lohfink 2018, 168–69). Apart from the biblical essentials, in his attempt at a closer explanation of the problem of hell, Lohfink uses the concept of a human's "fundamental choice." Although he demonstrates a great range of human attitudes toward God, as well as toward broadly understood good and evil, he concludes his revision with a statement

of its dreadful possibility, as unwanted by God but caused by a human's complete withdrawal into themselves (Lohfink 2018, 171).

A human in death, coming out to meet God, "'already' arrived at the resurrection of all the dead and the end of the world." (Lohfink 2018, 214) It is no coincidence that resurrection refers to the dead, i.e., it is not a purely individual event but one connected with all the others, "Hence divine judgment on the individual must coincide with judgment on all." (Lohfink 2018, 179) Moreover, Lohfink assumes

> that individual judgment in death and general judgment at the end of the world come together as one. They are not identical, but they cannot be separated, either in substance or in the sense of *earthly* time. And therefore the encounter with God in death is also an event that cannot be separated from the resurrection of all the dead. (Lohfink 2018, 182–83)

Resurrection in death also refers to a body, since souls contain "their whole histories and thus are also bodies, since the sum of a life's story cannot exist without a body." (Lohfink 2018, 235)

Along with the resurrection of the dead, to which resurrected Jesus has given rise, the whole cosmos will also achieve its ultimate goal as the foretold "new heaven and new earth" (cf. Isa 65:17; 66:22; Ps 146–50; Rom 8; Col 1:15–20; see Lohfink 1977, 37–41; 2018, 184–93). The vision of the radiant city from the last three chapters of Revelation serves Lohfink (2018, 194–202) as a point of departure for his deliberations about heaven. Ultimately, in God, "our existence will be pure astonishment, pure looking, pure praise, pure adoration—an unimaginable and unnameable happiness." (Lohfink 2018, 258)

4. The Key Significance of the Category of Time

Lohfink recalls two different approaches to the image schema of the resurrection in death. The first one, represented by Greshake, who gave it a broader formula and shape (Cura Elena 2019, 325), focuses on the concept of the soul and challenges the traditional concept of the interim state (Castellucci 1998, 189; Lohfink 2018, 183). Developing the foundations of his thesis in 1969–1975, Greshake works on the assumption that the resurrection of the body is not an issue of physicality and materiality or corporeality of a human, but of historicity and relationality. In other words, this is about a soul's encounter with God in death, which does not mean a disembodied soul but a person, a human being in their entirety and in their corporeality, built of their relation to the world and to history. Over time, the German dogmatist went one step further: He emphasized the processual nature of resurrection, i.e., that the event of resurrection in death, signifying corporeality resurrected as the history

of an entity or a personality formed in the process of numerous interactions with the world, has not been completed yet to its full extent and remains in expectation for the fulfillment of the end of history, the resurrection on the last day (cf. Colzani 2009, 255–56; Cura Elena 2019, 325; Gibellini 2018, 35–41; Prusak 2000, 82–84).

What Greshake still expresses in hypothetical categories becomes Lohfink's ultimate thesis. For Lohfink, the concept of "time" is central (Lohfink 2018, 183; cf. Castellucci 1998, 187–88; Cura Elena 2019, 326; Eckholt 2023, 59; Rychert 2009, 75), and his eschatological model is referred to as "present" eschatology or as eschatology of "the presence" (Rychert 2009, 58–96). Lohfink's understanding of time was largely influenced by the "two aeons concept" present in the Jewish apocalyptic literature in the 1st century CE. Through this scheme, the German exegete looks at the New Testament, which, despite not following such a clear distinction between the old aeon and the new one, still sees the beginning of God's new creation as the fruit of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, in which each of his disciples already partakes now through baptism. Linear time finds its end in Christ, although it keeps running in history. In Christ, the resurrection of the dead has already begun. The notion intended to help express the belief that the Parousia and the resurrection take place in death is the concept of *aevum* (Rychert 2009, 77). The category of *aevum* comes from the Middle Ages, when it was related to angels, and as such, it is regarded as a dimension between time (*tempus*) and eternity (*aeternitas*). Although it does not encompass any chronological line, it can nevertheless be related to time (Castellucci 1998, 188). The counterpart of the medieval *aevum* for description of the dimension a human person enters at the moment of death is the "transfigured time" or "transfigured temporality" ("verklärte Zeit," "verklärte Zeitlichkeit") (Dańczak 2008, 60–61). Throughout Lohfink's eschatology, the most common terms are "presence" and "closeness" (Rychert 2009, 77).

Lohfink's essential assumption is the belief that the category of time cannot be used to describe life after death, since "Time, like space, is a way of looking at things, a means we use to understand the world." (Lohfink 2018, 204) Each time this concept is related to life on the other side of death, "in an analogous sense, that is, that the dissimilarity to earthly time is unimaginably greater than the similarity." (Lohfink 2018, 205) Even if Lohfink calls the existence with God "a single and final 'now,'" it still remains related to time: "Our transfigured existence with God is 'gathered time.'" (Lohfink 2018, 207)

Another very important property of the resurrection taking place in death, transcending the earthly images of time, is the connection of what is happening with what its effect is. Lohfink stresses that

> existence with God after death can only be described in words not only as having been awakened (or raised) but just as properly as being awakened in a continuous sense—not only as definitive being-with-God but also as a "constant" coming to God, not only

> the *fruit* of the time lived on earth but also the *process* of being drawn into existence with God. (Lohfink 2018, 208)

Although resurrection at the moment of death takes place for every human separately, it nevertheless takes place with the entire history and the world.

> For individuals this means that in death they experience not only their own "passing over" to God but "simultaneously" the "passing over" of the world and all of history. In "passing through" death, individuals experience not only the "gathering up" of their own individual histories before God but, simultaneously—linked by a thousand threads with the individual's history—the history of the world and all people. (Lohfink 2018, 209; see Lohfink 1977, 41–42)

A departure from the earthly categories of time also allows a better understanding of Christ's Parousia, since

> What faith in Christ's return intended to say will then be really and completely true, but *not* in the form of an apocalyptic spectacle before the eyes of the tiny group out of the whole population of the world who are living at Point X in time. It will be entirely different: a "coming" to all people, without exception, who encounter Christ in their deaths "together" and "simultaneously." (Lohfink 2018, 211)

Under Lohfink's comprehensive approach, time has no absolute value but a relative one (Lohfink 2018, 220).

5. Evaluation of Lohfink's Hypothesis from the Catholic Viewpoint

Lohfink represents the outstanding 20th-century thinkers who have contributed to the renewal of eschatology after the Second Vatican Council (Jaśkiewicz 2011, 35–36). In his search, he advocated the rebirth of the dynamism of the eschatological awareness of the first Christians, as well as the restoration of the meaning and firm foundations of biblical eschatology (Lohfink 2018, 220). As a basis for his deliberations, Lohfink chooses Christian faith, or rather Christian eschatology (Lohfink 2018, 250), seldom referencing the Catholic perspective.[2] Concerning the applied

[2] In the deliberations on purification in death, he speaks of entering a "slippery slope" of differences and debate between the Christian confessions (Catholic, Orthodox, and Lutheran). He criticizes this debate, without any detailed presentation of positions, for the lack of basis in realist anthropology (cf. Lohfink 2018, 160–161). He regards speaking in the Catholic Church of "the 'expiation' of the punishment for sin in purgatory" (Lohfink 2018, 163) as capable of causing misunderstandings. Similarly, he sees the term

method, he reaffirms that statements of resurrection from the dead are figurative and incomplete (Lohfink 2018, 131–32). As a skillful exegete, he fluently utilizes the category of an image and brings the truths contained in the Bible down to it (the act of creation, the persistence of a soul after death and its expectation of the last judgment, the universal resurrection, and the end of the world), while taking account of their usefulness and adequacy (Lohfink 2018, 219–20). He admits to making certain simplifications and brevity of formulations (Lohfink 2018, 229).

Lohfink is well-versed in the Catholic approach to eschatology, which he calls "the traditional complex of ideas" (Lohfink 2018, 181) and in which he sees the two essential problems: the devaluation of the human body and the identification of earthly time with the "time" with God (Lohfink 2018, 180–181). He references the Catholic teaching on the soul and opposition against it by Protestant theologians (Lohfink 2018, 214–18). He postulates correction of traditional terms or phrases, such as "the poor souls in purgatory" (Lohfink 2018, 163, 235) or "the indulgences" (Lohfink 2018, 239), as well as appreciation of the significance of prayers directed to the dead (Lohfink 2018, 236).

At the core of Lohfink's concept of resurrection in death, apart from biblical sources, an important role is played by a "time leap" present in the Protestant theology, according to which, even though time and history end for a human in death, that human still partakes in the reality encompassing all of history—the history of the world and all humankind (Dańczak 2008, 63).

The Catholic theology considers the hypothesis of resurrection in death as a controversial model of thinking (Eckholt 2023, 58–66), a manner of perception—a construct (Schumacher 2015, 482). The best-known criticism of the resurrection in death in the Lohfink–Greshake version was expressed in his book on eschatology (*Eschatologie: Tod und ewiges Leben*) by Ratzinger, who speaks of a "quirky theological patchwork, full of logical leaps and ruptures." (Ratzinger 1988, 112; cf. Castellucci 1998, 190–191; Yates 2017, 14) The essential objection against the resurrection in death is expressed by the fact that it is tantamount to a spiritualist vision of immortality through dematerialization of the resurrection. In fact, the resurrection is not real because it does not involve the body and the real matter (Ratzinger 1988, 252–53; cf. Eckholt 2023, 60). The rejection of the "intermediate state" ("interim state") strips the seriousness away from human history, the commensurability of time and eternity (Reményi 2006, 80), and disregards the idea of soul purification (Eckholt 2023, 61). The proposals of Lohfink and Greshake, especially the postulated breakdown of the end of history into the end of every individual, which would be a "privatization of the eschaton," were also criticized by the Spanish theologian Juan

"punishment for sin" as prone to misunderstanding and notices that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (no. 1472) defines it correctly (Lohfink 2018, 164, n. 8, p. 287). He presents his position on the thesis about "final decision" by the Catholic theologian Boros (Lohfink 2018, 164).

Luis Ruiz de la Peña (Castellucci 1998, 192). A long-time lecturer at the Pontifical Urban University in Rome, Gianni Colzani (2009, 258), also asks a question about the reality and value of the continuation of history.

The theory of resurrection in death stands in stark contrast to the teaching of the Catholic Church, which is not referenced by Lohfink. The Second Vatican Council speaks of universal resurrection "at the end of the world." (*LG* 48) In 1979, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith spoke in the *Letter on Certain Questions Concerning Eschatology* (*De quibusdam quaestionibus ad eschatologiam spectantibus*) against the resurrection in death, pointing to the Church's teaching on the fate of a Christian between death and the universal resurrection (Frosini 1994, 206; Yates 2017, 17). This document clearly says that the Parousia "to be distinct and deferred with respect to the situation of people immediately after death" and that "The Church understands this resurrection as referring to *the whole person*." (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 1979; cf. Colzani 2009, 256; Yates 2017, 17–18) The topics referred to in the Congregation's letter were also found in the document by the International Theological Commission of 1992, titled *Some Current Questions in Eschatology* (Prusak 2000, 97; Ancona 2007, 254).

Conclusions

The presentation by Lohfink of the Christian faith in the resurrection of the dead draws its lifeblood from the Bible and different conceptual models contained therein. Whereas the Old Testament focuses primarily on temporality, clearly separating the world of death and the underworld from God, and it is only the Psalms that anticipate the later faith in resurrection, the leading role in the New Testament is played by the Paschal experiences of the first witnesses and the preaching resulting therefrom. The Gospel accounts of encounters with the Resurrected put a strong emphasis not on the spiritualization of the Resurrected and the incorporeality of the saved—transcending the thinking of the Greeks—but on the corporeality of Jesus. Lohfink points out the important contexts of the Paschal event, including both the image schema applied by the first witnesses and the community nature, strongly accentuated in the statements on resurrection, and the radically eschatological dimension. The first witnesses, knowing different image forms present in Judaism of their era, described their encounter with Jesus after his death not as much through the category of him being taken up to heaven, acceptance as a martyr, or "exaltation" as, above all, as an encounter with him whom God had resurrected from the dead. Thus, since the very beginning, the resurrection of Jesus has been connected with the resurrection of all the dead (cf. 1 Thess 4:14; Eph 2:5–6; 1 Cor 15:20, 23; Rom 8:29; Col 1:18; Rev 1:5) and comprises an eschatological

experience (signifies the end of the world). To Lohfink, the intrinsic link between the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of all the dead also means that the resurrection of all the dead and the cosmic renewal of the universe have already begun. The long-time lecturer at the University of Tübingen also appreciated one of the most characteristic elements of the New Testament eschatology, namely, the closeness of the Parousia, through the purification of mythological influences, which situated this event as historical and spatial, at the end of the world.

Using biblical foundations, including particularly Jesus' eschatology of the present, as conveyed in the Gospel of John (cf. John 5:24) and the texts by Paul the Apostle and the Pauline school (cf. Rom 6:1–14; 2 Cor 5:17; 6:2; Eph 2:4–6), Lohfink builds a vision of "the last things" (τα ἔσχατα) known as the schema or model of resurrection in death. As a point of departure for his deliberations, unlike other models of this kind, he chooses the concept of time that does not exist anymore in the afterlife, and much less in eternity. A dead person who meets God in death is not only a soul separated from the body but is understood from the very beginning in personal categories as a soul containing the experienced history within, and that history, in turn, as a history of a specific life, is never disembodied. To reconcile the connection of the dead person with the time, resulting from the fact that the person carries all of their personal history, with the transcending of time by the same person, dead–resurrected, who is no longer subject to expectation for what is still to be fulfilled on earth, Lohfink introduces the category of *aevum*, known from the Middle Ages, to designate the dimension between *tempus* and *aeternitas*. In death, standing in the presence of God with all their personality and all their history, each human experiences the fulfillment of the world and history. Although the German exegete rejects, as he calls it, the traditional "interim state" and does not accept the formerly used terms "the poor souls in purgatory" or "the indulgences," he still speaks, referencing the subject matter of the judgment and purification of the dead in death, of some "transition," some "between" in which the confrontation takes place with Christ coming for the second time, with the fire of his judgment as the expression of true love. Lohfink does not ignore Christian solidarity with the dead, and apart from the significance of the intercessory prayer, particularly present in the eucharistic prayer and drawing its power from Jesus' sacrifice of life, he also speaks of the seeds of good and evil sown by them. The cultivation of the sown good, but also the downplaying or even total removal of the effects of their guilt, affects the process of purification of the dead.

The resurrection, as the ultimate and full encounter with God, no longer refers to the endpoint of the history still continuing on earth but to the death of every individual, comprising a part of that history and initiating the encounter with God. Transfigured in death, the existence of a human with God is not eternity yet, within the meaning of God's eternity, but a new, God-given manner of existence, constituted almost in full by what has previously been done in the earthly time. For a human,

the participation in the abundance of God's life is eternal life that finds its beginning as early as on earth, in the sacramentality of Christian life, in dedicated involvement for the good in the world, and in building the kingdom of God.

Sharing his admiration for the intellectual grandness of the Christian eschatology, Lohfink asks many questions and provides answers that are nevertheless not always coherent and, most of all, not always compliant with the Catholic interpretation. The strict incompatibility of the resurrection in death model consists in reducing the Parousia to an encounter with Christ in death, disregarding the difference between people's situation immediately after death and that at his final coming, as well as in questioning the truly bodily nature of the resurrection and its communal and universal dimension (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 1979; International Theological Commission 1992).

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