

Each of these passages is closely linked to death: Peter's threatened death at the hand of Herod, Paul's in Rome and Jesus on a cross on Calvary. The first prediction of his Passion follows immediately after, and each is, at the same time, a preparation for life after death: Peter's release by an angel symbolic of the resurrected life; Paul's letter only making sense if death leads to heaven and Jesus's appointment of Peter, clearly to continue his work on earth, which will be as a witness to his own resurrection, his own existence as 'the Son of the living God'. The idea of resurrected life had been around for a while, but current orthodoxy, in the religions of that time, both Jewish and pagan or non-monotheistic, did not welcome such an idea. For most it was a step too far – and what I have in mind is how difficult it is to overturn current orthodoxy, whether religious or secular, at any time in history. Peter and Paul and Jesus will each die because of their challenge to prevailing orthodoxy and this challenge is as relevant for us today as ever, for the prevailing culture in which we live is no longer Christian and the media, and society generally, assault us with ways of thinking which envisage human beings as the arbiter of their own futures, whether as individuals – for that read the present scrum of capitalism – or collectives – for that read the rule of what are, in effect, often, still one set of individuals oppressing another. And this can be a problem within the Church as much as outside it. It all depends where ultimate power resides, or is believed to reside. And this is where our belief in Christ as the Son of the living God remains as vital as ever: that is, the risen Christ, Son of that otherwise unknown God, made known in Christ: the ultimate arbiter of life after death and so of life now.

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