ALEXANDER N. KIRK

The Departure of an Apostle

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 406

Mohr Siebeck

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zum Neuen Testament · 2. Reihe

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Alexander N. Kirk

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Paul's Death Anticipated and Remembered

Mohr Siebeck

Alexander N. Kirk, born 1980; 2002 BA in Philosophy integrated with English Literature, Wheaton College; 2004 MA in Biblical Exegesis, Wheaton College; 2010 MA in New Testament, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; 2014 DPhil in Theology, University of Oxford; currently preparing to teach biblical studies and theology in Indonesia.

e-ISBN PDF 978-3-16-154312-8
ISBN 978-3-16-154311-1
ISSN 0340-9570 (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2. Reihe)

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at *http://dnb.dnb.de*.

The book was printed by Laupp & Göbel in Gomaringen on non-aging paper and bound by Buchbinderei Nädele in Nehren.

Printed in Germany.

Preface

This monograph is a significantly revised and expanded version of my doctoral thesis, completed at the University of Oxford under the supervision of Markus Bockmuehl. My examiners, Andrew Gregory and Simon Gathercole, offered valuable criticism of my original work that I have tried to address in this updated version.

Anyone who has traveled along the long and winding road of graduate and postgraduate studies knows that it is not a solitary journey. It is thus my pleasure to acknowledge in some small way many of the people who have contributed to my education and this publication.

I would first acknowledge five great teachers in my life: my childhood pastor, Brad Evans, who taught me about the sovereignty and grace of God; my college pastor and friend, Chris McGarvey, who taught me about the religious affections and pastoral ministry; John Piper, who taught me about the glory of God; and Scott Hafemann, who taught me biblical theology and scholarly integrity. Finally, with regard to the present work, I would especially like to thank Markus Bockmuehl for his patient and incisive critique. His brilliant scholarship and outstanding supervision is not reflected in the quality of this monograph as much as it should be, but I am grateful to have been his student.

During my studies at Oxford I was surrounded by excellent colleagues and a warm church community at St. Ebbe's. In particular I would like to thank Bobby Ryu, Christopher Hays, David Lincicum, Nicholas Ellis, Nicholas Moore, and Ben Edsall – a band of brothers – for their encouragement and feedback. Ben Edsall very generously assisted me in preparing this manuscript for publication. The Keble College Sloane-Robinson Award linked to the Clarendon Fund made my studies financially feasible, for which I am profoundly appreciative. I would also like to thank the Kerusso Fund and the Ok Han Hum Scholarship. In addition, several friends gave sacrificially to support this endeavor.

My parents, Mark and Toni Kirk, and my parents-in-law, Barry and Jean Nelson, have cared for and supported us in ways that only parents can. Thank you. My children, Norah, Harriet, Hugh, and Walter, have brought a deeper joy to my life than any academic accomplishment ever could. And to my wife, Betsy, what can I say? You are my faithful partner in all things. No one

but me knows the labor of love you have offered in bringing this book to completion. Although the gift has its flaws, this book is lovingly dedicated to you.

Alexander Kirk
Central Java, Indonesia
Soli Deo gloria

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Translations and Abbreviations

All translations of ancient and modern texts throughout this monograph are my own unless otherwise noted. Translations of key texts are reproduced in full for the convenience of the reader and follow the grammar and syntax of the original language as closely as possible, even if this results in English that is slightly wooden or overly literal. This decision is motivated by a desire for greater transparency in the commentary.

Interaction with the Greek New Testament and Septuagint is based on the texts of the Nestle-Aland 27th edition, the Göttingen *Septuaginta* (*editio maior*) where available, and the 1935 Rahlfs edition, though textual variants are introduced when required. All statistics concerning these texts and the Greek Pseudepigrapha were generated by *BibleWorks 8* biblical software.

For other ancient texts in Greek or Latin, I have consulted the following sources, not all of which are cited or appear in the bibliography:

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All abbreviations conform to *The SBL Handbook of Style* (1999) or are otherwise noted. A version of the author-date citation style is adopted. All italics in quotations are original to the work unless otherwise noted.

Part I

Introduction

Chapter 1

Points of Departure

1.1 The Subject of This Study

1.1.1 Paul in the Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs

Did early Christians find resources in the Apostle Paul for their approach to death? An intriguing but fleeting reference to Paul to consider in this regard can be found in the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* (ca. A.D. 180). In what appears to be a transcript of court proceedings the African proconsul Saturninus pressures Speratus, a Christian, to renounce his faith. At one point in the trial Saturninus asks Speratus what he has in his "satchel" (Latin: *capsa*). Speratus replies, "Books and letters of Paul, a just man."

This very brief exchange raises many more questions than it answers: Did Speratus intend to distinguish between "books" (*libri*) and "letters" (*epistulae*) of Paul, and how would the content of these documents compare with the letters attributed to Paul that are extant today? What prompted Speratus to characterize Paul as a "just man" (*uir iustus*)? Was Speratus unexpectedly apprehended while carrying these documents or did he intentionally bring them with him to the trial? Whether Speratus found resources in the figure of Paul or in Paul's writings that strengthened his resolve to confess Christ unto death is a question whose answer lies buried in the sands of time. Yet Paul's shadowy presence in this courtroom invites us to compare Speratus's approach to death with Paul's, more than a century earlier.

1.1.2 Paul's Approach to His Own Death

The task of this monograph is to unearth – as far as it is possible – the Apostle Paul's approach to his own death. The term "approach" is deliberately vague and is intended to encompass a number of questions: What was Paul's attitude toward his death? How did he act and what did he say and write in view of it? What hopes did he hold for himself beyond death? In other words, my interest is not in what Paul thought about death and beyond *in general*, but in how Paul approached literal (bodily) death as he considered it *in relation to himself*.

Having an approach to death implies that death is anticipated. In Paul's case an experience in Asia, referred to in 2 Cor 1:8–10, prompted him to

grapple with his own mortality in a new and intense way. The historical nature of this "affliction" (θλῖψις; 2 Cor 1:8) is notoriously difficult to pin down. A more productive line of research might be to inquire what Paul's new-found consciousness of death led him to write to others and why. Thus, our excavation of Paul's approach to death will primarily be a literary one.[1] This monograph will examine passages in four Pauline letters that look forward to Paul's death and passages in Christian texts from the late first to the mid-second century that look back on Paul's death.[2] It will be a study on Paul's death in prospect and retrospect.

1.1.3 How to Approach Death: A Live Question in the Ancient Mediterranean World

By investigating Paul's approach to his death we are neither psychoanalyzing Paul nor anachronistically imposing a contemporary question on his letters. Indeed it is accurate, if somewhat hackneyed, to state that the Roman Empire of the first century was more in touch with death than we are today. As Peter Bolt has illustrated, Roman power, malevolent magic, and pervading illness all contributed to an awareness of the precariousness of life so that "inhabitants of the Greco-Roman world lived constantly under the shadow of death" (1998: 51). In the face of this grim, everyday reality much of first-century life was preoccupied with the struggle against death and much thought was expended in coming to grips with one's inevitable and often hasty demise.

One of the most well-known and important ancient accounts of a person's approach to death must be Plato's *Phaedo* (ca. 375 B.C.). This dialogue opens with two questions Echecrates puts to Phaedo about Socrates's death: "What did he say before his death? And how did he meet his end?" (57a).[3] Phaedo's recollections are from the final day of Socrates's life as he is conversing with his friends before drinking the hemlock poison prescribed for him. Early on in the recollected conversation Socrates says, "It may be particularly appropriate for someone about to travel there [Hades] to consider thoroughly and tell stories about what we think the stay there is like. For what else is there to do to fill the time until sunset?" (61e). Later Socrates adds, "Other people have probably not realized that the sole pursuit of those who correctly engage in

[1] For a historical and legal approach to Paul's death, see now Barclay 2015b. I would like to thank Professor Jörg Frey for allowing me to read this volume in advance of its publication.

[2] The key passages include 1 Cor 4:1–5; 9:15–27; 2 Cor 1:7–14; 4:16–5:10; Phil 1:18d–26; 2:16b–18; 3:7–14; 2 Tim 1:12; 4:6–8, 17–18; Acts 20:18–35; *1 Clem.* 5.5–7; Ign. *Eph.* 12.2; *Rom.* 4.3; Pol. *Phil.* 9.1–2; and the last section of the *Acts of Paul* (commonly called the *Martyrdom of Paul*).

[3] Translations of the *Phaedo* (*Phd.*) are taken from Sedley and Long 2010.

philosophy is dying and being dead.[4] If this is true, it would surely be absurd for death to be their sole aim throughout their life, but, when it actually arrives, for them to resent that which has long been their aim and pursuit" (64a). These passages demonstrate the great importance "Socrates" attached to one's approach to death. Therefore, in asking Paul about his own postmortem journey and how he prepared for this departure, we are asking questions that Socrates thought appropriate.

The narration of Socrates's approach to death in the *Phaedo* exerted tremendous influence throughout the ancient world and through the centuries. According to Plutarch, Marcus Porcius Cato (Cato the Younger) read Plato's *Phaedo* multiple times (*Cat. Min.* 68.2–4; 70.2) before stabbing himself in the stomach and then tearing at his entrails.[5] There are also other indications in Plutarch's account that Cato drew inspiration from the *Phaedo* and even deliberately patterned his own death after the death of Socrates: Cato takes a bath on the night of his death as Socrates did (*Cat. Min.* 66.6; *Phd.* 115a); that evening Cato engages in philosophical debate (*Cat. Min.* 67.3; *Phd. passim*); and Cato, like Socrates, remains resolute in his decision to take his own life despite the attempts of his friends to forestall it (*Cat. Min.* 69.1–5; *Phd.* 116e).[6] Although Plutarch's agenda in presenting Cato's death is debated,[7] his portrayal of Cato's death suggests a vibrant interplay between ancient literary anticipations of death and the effects and even performances that these texts generated.

Such literary anticipations of death were not limited to Greek and Roman authors. In *The Jewish War* Josephus narrates the Romans' penetration of Jotapata and how he leapt into a pit with forty of his comrades in order to evade capture (3.341–42). When the Romans discover Josephus and offer him clemency, the Jews who are with him contend that suicide is more honorable than surrender. In response Josephus says,

> Know you not that they who depart this life in accordance with the law of nature and repay the loan which they received from God, when He who lent is pleased to reclaim it, win eternal renown; that their houses and families are secure; that their souls, remaining spotless and obedient, are allotted the most holy place in heaven, whence, in the revolution of the ages, they return to find in chaste bodies a new habitation? (3.374)[8]

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[4] G. M. A. Grube (in J. M. Cooper 1997) translates this sentence as follows: "I am afraid that other people do not realize that the one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death."

[5] References to *Cato Minor* (*Cat. Min.*) are dependent on Plutarch 1984.

[6] As Alexei Zadorojnyi observes, Cato's "Socratic pose" is "a cumulative product, crystallizing out of the undercurrent and the explicit reminiscences throughout the *Life*" (2007: 217).

[7] See Trapp 1999 and Zadorojnyi 2007 for competing theories.

[8] Translations of Josephus are taken from the Loeb editions (Page et al. 1927 and 1928).

Near the end of *The Jewish War* Josephus provides an account of the siege of Masada. The episode ends with mass Jewish suicide as two speeches of Eleazar, a Jewish commander, persuade the people not to allow the Romans to capture them alive. In the second speech Eleazar chastises the hesitant with the example of the "Indians" (Ἴνδοι). An extended section of Eleazar's speech is worth quoting in full:

> They, brave men that they are, reluctantly endure the period of life, as some necessary service due to nature, but hasten to release their souls from their bodies; and though no calamity impels nor drives them from the scene, from sheer longing for the immortal state, they announce to their comrades that they are about to depart. Nor is there any who hinder them: no, all felicitate them and each gives them commissions to his loved ones; so certain and absolutely sincere is their belief in the intercourse which souls hold with one another. Then, after listening to these behests, they commit their bodies to the fire, that so the soul may be parted from the body in the utmost purity, and expire amidst hymns of praise. Indeed, their dearest ones escort them to their death more readily than do the rest of mankind their fellow-citizens when starting on a very long journey; for themselves they weep, but them they count happy as now regaining immortal rank. (7.352–56)

This section from Eleazar's speech demonstrates that Jews were influenced by a broader discourse in the ancient world concerning death and beyond. One should also recognize that Josephus was not present at Masada and his account of what happened there likely came from two women who, according to Josephus's narrative, probably did not hear Eleazar's speeches (see *J.W.* 7.399). This suggests that Josephus constructed these speeches without any oral report of what was in them and perhaps without knowledge of whether they were given at all. Josephus could compose his account in this manner because a person's approach to death was an ancient literary *topos*.

Whereas Plato, Plutarch, and Josephus reflected on deaths that had already occurred, actual anticipations of death can be found in the writing of Seneca the Younger (ca. 4 B.C.–A.D. 65). Seneca wrote letters to his friend Lucilius that are packed with reflections on aging and death. In one letter Seneca writes, "Most people are buffeted between fear of death and the agony of living; they don't want to live and they don't know how to die" (*Ep.* 4.5).[9] In light of this, Seneca gives Lucilius advice on how to die: "Do you want to be free in spite of this body? Then live like someone who is going to move away. Think that you will have to go without this lodging sooner or later, then you will be braver to face the necessity of departing" (70.17). Seneca offers some personal reflections in another letter:

> Take this assurance about me: I shall not be trembling at the final moment, I am already prepared, I am not planning a whole day at a time. As for you, praise and imitate the man who is not reluctant to die even when it gives him pleasure to live. For what is the merit in departing

[9] Translations of Seneca's letters are taken from Fantham 2010.

when you are evicted? Yet this too is a merit; I am certainly being evicted, but as if I were leaving freely. (54.7)

Seneca also describes the high achievement in confronting fears of the afterlife:

Even when you have persuaded men that these are fantasies and nothing is left for the deceased to fear, another fear arises; for just as men are afraid of being in the underworld, so they are afraid of being nowhere. In face of these beliefs infused in us by long-held conviction, surely the brave endurance of death is glorious and among the greatest achievements of the human mind. (*Ep.* 82.16–17)

These excerpts from Plato, Plutarch, Josephus, and Seneca are presented in passing only to demonstrate that the question of how one ought to approach death was of vital interest in the ancient Mediterranean world around the time of Paul.[10] In this study I will not directly compare Paul's approach to death to the approaches displayed in these Greco-Roman and Jewish texts. Nevertheless, it would be easy to multiply literary examples of this kind. Anticipations of death and what lay beyond were in the literary air in the first century A.D. – air which Paul would have breathed and into which he spoke. Therefore, how to approach death would have been a prominent concern in Paul's world and among his earliest readers and followers.

1.2 A Brief Survey of Related Scholarship

If the question of how to approach one's death was of cultural concern and literary interest in the first century, then it is surprising that no previous study has focused sustained attention on Paul's contribution to this topic. Yet this study will not thereby venture into entirely uncharted territory. As we will see below, there have been a number of substantial and recent studies conducted in related areas of research. Moreover, there has obviously been much scholarly discussion of the Pauline and early Christian texts we will consider in the course of our investigation. The value of this monograph, then, is not in bold-

[10] As David Aune writes, "The idea of *commentatio mortis* ['preparation for death'] or μελέτη θανάτου was relatively widespread in antiquity" (2013 [1995]: 393). See the many ancient texts he cites on pages 392–95. However, he later claims, "There is a phenomenological similarity between the negative and positive cognitive and behavioral aspects of the *commentatio mortis* and Paul's utilization of the language of death and resurrection as bases for Christian ethics. The major difference lies in the fact that for a philosopher the proleptic experience of death was always limited to the anticipation of his own death, whereas in Paul, the death and resurrection of Christ became paradigmatic for individual experience." Aune does not consider the idea of *commentatio mortis* in relation to Paul's anticipation of his own death.

ly going where no *Neutestamentler* has gone before, but rather in surveying the topography of Paul's theology from a new vantage point. In so doing I will examine textual and theological features that have not been appreciated in previous works.

1.2.1 Recent Studies on Paul's Theology of Death and Beyond

The general backdrop for our investigation is what ancient Mediterranean societies believed and religions taught about death and what came after death. This area of research has been well served in recent years. Two massive and massively different books may illustrate the range of scholarship in this area.

At 817 pages N. T. Wright's *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (2003) stands as a colossal work of history and theology at the service of orthodox Christian apologetics. The book is primarily concerned with the bodily resurrection of Jesus, the question of what really happened on Easter morning. In arguing his case, however, Wright conducts a nearly comprehensive tour of death and beyond in ancient paganism, the OT, and post-biblical Judaism. His task is to show that Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus could have grown only from Jewish soil, but that it was nevertheless a mutation within the Jewish worldview that must be accounted for historically. Wright's primary interest is in what he calls "life after life after death" and consequently many of the texts that will form the core of the present work are on the periphery of Wright's volume.[11]

Alan Segal's *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West* (2004) is even more sweeping in scope than *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Throughout Segal's "voyage" to map the afterlife as it is depicted in Western culture he argues that this journey is nothing more than an investigation of "our own self-consciousness through the mirror of our culture" (344). In other words, for Segal we cannot see beyond death but only into our own sociologically-conditioned selves. Segal's 42-page chapter on "Paul's vision of the afterlife" displays an interest in Paul's conversion, his visit to heaven (2 Cor 12:1–4), and his relationship to Jewish "mysticism/apocalypticism" (439; cf. 410–12 and Segal 2008). According to Segal, "Paul's own conversion experience and his mystical ascension form the basis of his theology" (438). Yet this conviction does not explain why there is no discussion of 2 Cor 5:1–10 or Phil 1:18–26 in the chapter or the book. While Segal has forcefully raised the question of the origin of Paul's vision of the afterlife, he has offdered little exegesis with which to interact in this study.

[11] Wright treats Phil 1:18–26 in less than one full page (2003: 226–27) and barely mentions 1 Cor 4:1–5; 9:15–27; 2 Cor 1:7–14; Phil 2:16–18; and 2 Tim 1:12; 4:6–8, 17–18.

These two expansive surveys of ancient beliefs about the afterlife do not engage with Paul's approach to his own death. This signals that scholarship situating Paul's view of death and beyond in its religious milieu has been preoccupied with questions other than the ones animating this study. Furthermore, texts such as 1 Thess 4 and 1 Cor 15, which are central to many Pauline studies on death and beyond, will not feature in this study because they contain no *self-referential* reflections.

Other studies on Paul's theology of death concentrate on matters of literary form or genre. For example, the literary form of the farewell address or farewell discourse (*Abschiedsrede*), related to the genre of "testament,"[12] has been studied by NT scholars. It is generally agreed that in the NT fully-formed farewell discourses can be found only in John 13–17, Acts 20, and perhaps Luke 22 (see Kurz 1990a). In an essay entitled "Angesichts des Todes das Leben formulieren: Abschiedsworte Sterbender in der biblischen Literatur" (2005), Klaus and Sabine Bieberstein outline the characteristics, functions, development, and variations of this form from the Hebrew Bible to the deuterocanonical and apocryphal early Jewish writings and into the NT. As the use of "Abschiedsworte Sterbender" ("parting words of the dying") in the subtitle suggests, their survey includes passages that cannot technically be considered *Abschiedsreden* but are similar enough to render comparisons productive. Although the authors devote significant space to the last words of Jesus in each of the four canonical Gospels, they invest less than a full page in treating "Die Abschiedsschreiben des »Paulus« (2Tim) und des »Petrus« (2Petr)," in which section they conclude that elements of farewell discourses have been integrated into the form of each letter (25; cf. Schröter 2012: 214).

Paul's reflections on death have also occasionally been read in comparison to texts on suicide or martyrdom. Arthur Droge and James Tabor in their book *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom Among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (1992) argue that the dividing line between what we call suicide and martyrdom was not recognized in antiquity before Augustine. Whether one agrees with that assessment or not, Droge and Tabor have convincingly documented the intense interest and ambiguities that have attended the discussion of voluntary death throughout antiquity. They read Phil 1:21–26 within this conversation and argue that Paul's views on voluntary death align with the dominant views of his Greco-Roman context. Yet there is a lot of Pauline data outside of Phil 1:21–26 that Droge and Tabor could have considered in investigating Paul's view of his death. Ten years after Droge and Tabor's book, Jan Willem van Henten and Friedrich Avemarie edited a book entitled, *Martyr-*

[12] See the very short but oft-cited introduction to this genre in Kolenkow 1986. Farewell discourses are often embedded in narratives but share similar concerns to testamentary literature.

dom and Noble Death: Selected Texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity (2002). Curiously, no texts from the NT are included. To this day Paul's view of "martyrdom" remains hardly explored.[13]

Therefore, while there have been a few attempts to read Paul (esp. 2 Tim 4:1–8) in light of ancient farewell discourses and testamentary literature,[14] and while there have been a few other attempts to read Paul (esp. Phil 1:18–26) in dialogue with ancient literature on suicide and martyrdom, no previous study has incorporated all the relevant texts into an analysis of how Paul approached his death. This monograph will investigate passages from 1 and 2 Corinthians, Philippians, and 2 Timothy. In so doing, the range of related Pauline literature will be broadened, cutting across what have been considered distinct forms and genres. This study thus adopts a thematic approach, though one which attempts to remain sensitive to literary form.

Yet another perspective on Paul's theology of death and beyond is from the angle of what could be called Paul's constitutive anthropology – that is, the study of the various components or aspects in which a human person consists. There has been a significant renewal of interest in Pauline anthropology in the last ten years. One noteworthy study is Joel Green's *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible* (2008). Though dealing with the nature of humanity in the Bible, Green's work is deliberately done at the intersection of biblical studies and neurophilosophy. His basic project is to show how recent findings in the cognitive sciences can prompt questions and shed light on biblical interpretation without necessarily discrediting the biblical view of human nature. In the fifth chapter Green seeks to dismantle a view of the intermediate state in which an ontologically-distinct soul departs the body at death and has a conscious experience of waiting for the resurrection in the presence of Christ. Green's entire book argues against such a dualism on biblical and scientific grounds. He claims that various forms of monism are becoming the dominant scholarly position with regard to NT anthropology (13). Although this study will not address Pauline anthropology head-on, my reading of 2 Cor 5:1–10 and Phil 1:18–26 will nevertheless support the rather beleaguered "traditional" view that Paul left his body and went to heaven when he died.[15]

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[13] I agree with van Henten and Avemarie that "the phenomenon of martyrdom is older than the Christian or Jewish terminology that indicates it" (2002: 3) and therefore I am adopting here a functional definition, as they do. As Paul Middleton writes, "The closest Paul comes to talking about martyrdom is in the anticipation of his own death" (2009: 84).

[14] See especially C. A. Smith 2006 and the discussion in chapter 12.

[15] For a recent back-and-forth on this topic see Bockmuehl 2011 and Wright's appended response.

The subject matter of this monograph could also be considered in relation to previous works on Paul's theology of suffering (e.g., Hafemann 1986), the development of Paul's eschatology (e.g., R. N. Longenecker 1998), Paul's theology of final judgment (e.g., Kuck 1992; Yinger 1999; VanLandingham 2006; Travis 2009), and Paul's use of personal example (e.g., Fiore 1986; B. Dodd 1999). The Pauline texts within the ambit of this study touch upon all of these areas and these works will be discussed as they become germane to particular points of interpretation.

Two additional studies on Paul's theology of death warrant special mention. The first is a chapter from Xavier Léon-Dufour's book *Life and Death in the New Testament: The Teachings of Jesus and Paul* (1986), originally published in French under the title *Face à la mort, Jésus et Paul* in 1979. The eighth chapter of this book is entitled "Paul Faces Death" and near the start of this chapter Léon-Dufour asks the question, "Were the specter of death to draw near, how would Paul react then?" (247). He answers, "On two separate occasions he confided his sentiments in this regard, first in a serene way to the Philippians and afterward in sorrowful fashion to the Corinthians, with the result that we can assert that Paul depicted death both with a beloved face and also with a horrifying visage" (247). Like many others, Léon-Dufour focuses on Phil 1 and 2 Cor 5 in his analysis, though he does also introduce a number of other Pauline texts on both suffering and death. My interpretation of these passages will counter Léon-Dufour's reading at almost every point, especially in his contention that the language of the "beatific vision" (i.e., the Christian afterlife) and the language of the resurrection of the dead are describing essentially the same reality.

The second work to mention is an essay by Lukas Bormann entitled "Reflexionen über Sterben und Tod bei Paulus" in the 2001 volume *Das Ende des Paulus: Historische, theologische und literaturgeschichtliche Aspekte*. Bormann's description of his essay's task overlaps with the approach of the present work to a great degree: "In what follows, texts in the Pauline letters will now be investigated that relate *experiences* with dying and death. Therefore fundamental considerations, such as in Rom 5:12 or 1 Cor 15, will not constitute the starting point, but rather texts that reflect near-death and experiences with death" (2001: 310; my translation). Bormann considers a number of texts that are also analyzed in the present work, including Phil 1:21–24; 2:16–17; 3:9–11; 2 Cor 1:8; 2:14–17; and 4:7–15. Space constraints do not allow Bormann adequate space for a thorough discussion and comparison of these texts. Yet as we will see, there is much truth to Bormann's contention regarding the relationship between death and Paul's apostleship: "Der apostolische Dienst steht in einem realen Verhältnis zum Tod" (316).

1.2.2 Recent Interest in Paul's "Religious Experience"

Bormann's essay includes a reference to the "experiences" (*Erfahrungen*) Paul had with dying and death. We have observed that many of the previous studies related to Paul's theology of death neglect the personal dimension of Paul's thought on this topic. This neglect may be another symptom of the relative lack of scholarly interest in studying the "religious experience" described in the earliest Christian writings. This gap in modern scholarship was forcefully exposed by Luke Timothy Johnson in his *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity* (1998).[16] As Johnson writes,

> Both the historical and theological paradigms – at least as usually practiced – tend toward the general and the abstract, whereas this religious language remains specific and concrete. My call for a phenomenological approach is not the advancement of a new "method" but the invitation to a way of seeing, a way that begins with the assumption that religious language and religious experience are actually about something and deserving attention in their own right. It then seeks ways of getting at that register of the texts more adequately. (182)

Johnson's observations regarding a scholarly preference for the general and the abstract certainly hold true for study of Paul's theology of death and beyond. The foregoing survey has shown that scholars have concentrated on what Paul thought about death and beyond *in general* to the neglect of how Paul approached death as he considered it *in relation to himself*.

Johnson defines religious experience as "a response to that which is perceived as ultimate, involving the whole person, characterized by a peculiar intensity, and issuing in action" (60). On this definition Paul's near-death experience in Asia must certainly qualify, though Johnson does not include 2 Cor 1:8–10 in any of his lengthy lists of texts describing Paul's religious experiences.[17] Furthermore, it seems reasonable to include any serious encounter with death or reflection on death as part of Paul's religious experience, though scholars working in this field have yet to seize upon this.[18]

In a *Festschrift* for Luke Timothy Johnson, published ten years after *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity*, James Dunn laments that Johnson's call for a recovery of religious experience has not been heeded: "So perhaps it is appropriate to reinforce Johnson's plea to highlight the 'missing dimension' in NT studies, since it may be a dimension that needs to be rediscovered yet again in traditional contemporary Christianity" (2008: 4). Nevertheless, there

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[16] An emphasis on NT religious experience was invigorated by J. D. G. Dunn 1970 and 1975, but perhaps initiated by Gunkel 1888. See Flannery 2008: 2–8 and Batluck 2011 for histories of research.

[17] See the numerous Pauline references Johnson provides in footnotes 3–43 on pages 4–12.

[18] A partial exception might be found in Shantz 2008: 203–4, which analyzes Phil 1 and the anticipation of "pain and transformation" (203) therein as religious experience.

were signs even in 2008 that interest in Christian religious experience was beginning to gain steam.

In addition to the many monographs published since 1975 that can be considered within this general area of research (for which, see Batluck 2011), one significant sign of scholarly interest is the formation of the SBL program unit, "Religious Experience in Early Judaism and Early Christianity," inaugurated as a "Consultation" in 2005 and continued as a "Section." This research group generated two volumes of papers presented at SBL annual meetings, *Experientia* volumes 1 and 2. In the first volume, Troels Engberg-Pedersen helpfully reminds us that Paul's references to religious experience serve rhetorical purposes and always come in interpreted form (2008: 150). Nevertheless, according to Engberg-Pedersen, such references point to something that was "genuinely there," though not necessarily in the specific way it is interpreted (157). While Paul's actual religious experience is obviously inaccessible to us, the entire *Experientia* volume argues that "what we *can* do is to take seriously the textual *articulation* of religious experience in antiquity" (Flannery 2008: 2; reiterated in Shantz 2012: 1). As Colleen Shantz asserts in the second *Experientia* volume, "Texts communicate the residue of experience or a record of its effects" (2012: 14). Thus this study will embrace a literary approach to Paul's religious experience, focusing on the textual articulation of Paul's encounters with death. Unlike many other studies on religious experience, however, I will not use the Pauline texts to launch into the fields of anthropology, sociology, phenomenology, neuropsychology, or the like.[19]

Of all the secondary literature I have consulted, Steven Kraftchick's essay, "Death's Parsing: Experience as a Mode of Theology in Paul" in the volume *Pauline Conversations in Context: Essays in Honor of Calvin J. Roetzel* (2002; cf. also Kraftchick 1993 and 2007) comes the closest to approximating my focus. Kraftchick's essay is written in the vein of this recent emphasis on "religious experience." He claims, "Paul's theology is shaped not only by his heritage, his religious convictions and his struggles with his congregations, but also by his experience of the human condition" (145). Kraftchick later expands upon this remark, engaging with the thought of Calvin Roetzel. His comments are worth reproducing at length:

> A significant value of Roetzel's conception of Paul's theologizing is that the humanity of Paul is not lost in the process of searching for his fundamental thought and belief. I want to stress two features that Roetzel's interpretation of Paul suggests. First, that Paul's theologizing emerges as he is thinking and that it is a dynamic process: a result of an interaction between convictions and contexts. Roetzel has emphasized Paul's interactions with his congre-

[19] My approach does have some similar concerns to practical theology. Cf. e.g., Stephen Barton's essay, "The Resurrection and Practical Theology with Particular Reference to Death and Dying in Christ" (2011). However, my work will be descriptive, not overtly prescriptive.

gations and opponents, and undoubtedly, the majority of his theologizing was a result of such engagement. However, it is also clear that, on occasion, Paul's theologizing occurs through particular reflection on his own experiences. I want to argue that this personal element must also be included in an attempt to read Paul and discern his theological process. A robust interpretation of Paul, therefore, must take into account not only his heritage and his argumentative context, but also his personal experience of his finite nature. (149)

Kraftchick returns to this point a few pages later: "A full exegesis of Paul's writings, one that is most nearly historically and cognitively accurate, should contain elements of Paul's humanity and subjectivity. A robust analysis of Paul requires us to examine what he says about any given subject, but also how he experienced it" (153–54). This is precisely my own claim. In expounding Paul's approach to death – that is, the *experiential* and thus subjective dimension to Paul's theology of death – we are not presenting an amusing sidebar to Paul's theology. Rather, in assessing Paul's experience with death, his premonitions of death, and principally Paul's literary anticipations of death, I seek to provide a richer and more human account of his theology. Kraftchick clearly identifies the lacuna in scholarship that the present work seeks to address:

I want to clarify that I am speaking of Paul's contemplation of his own death, that is, to the topic of death as an existential reality. All Pauline interpreters recognize that Paul reflects on death in his letters; however, the vast majority of this work treats Paul's conceptions of death as a cosmic power, its relationship to sin, or Paul's understanding of the death of Christ. Very few investigate Paul's reflections on his own death, not as an Apostle, but as a human being. (146–47)

Kraftchick's essay, besides offering general methodological reflections, is limited to an analysis of 2 Cor 1:8–10. He acknowledges that there are other occasions on which Paul speaks of his death (2 Cor 4:7–12; 5:1–10; Phil 1:19–26; see page 147), but space constraints preclude him from considering any of these texts. Therefore, the present work could be viewed as an extension of Kraftchick's line of inquiry.

Although I share Kraftchick's focus and concerns, in my view his essay has not fully resisted the pull Luke Timothy Johnson describes toward "the general and the abstract." In commenting on Paul's near-death experience in Asia, Kraftchick writes, "Here Paul faces the reality of *his death* and with this he experiences the fundamental human dilemma: 'individuality within finitude'" (160). Kraftchick thus universalizes Paul's experience, presenting it as an abstraction of the fundamental *human* dilemma, "individuality within finitude." I would argue that this exegetical (and hermeneutical) maneuver – which, as we will observe in later chapters, is commonly made – flattens what Johnson calls the "specific and concrete" nature of Paul's religious language. No longer is Paul speaking as an apostle to particular, first-century congregations that he founded; rather, he becomes the mouthpiece for universal Christian, or even human, experience. In contrast, I will attempt to retain the indi-

vidual and situated nature of Paul's theologizing. This is not to suggest that his personal reflections do not have broader import – he is, after all, writing to others – but only that we will miss the crucial *apostolic* element to Paul's thoughts on death if we move too quickly to a discussion of fundamental human dilemmas or realities. Therefore, rather than investigating "Paul's reflections on his own death, *not* as an Apostle, *but* as a human being" (Kraftchick 2002: 146–47; italics added), we will investigate Paul's reflections on his own death as an apostle *and* as a human being.

In sum, Kraftchick rightly stresses the importance of Paul's overwhelming affliction in Asia as an experience that shaped his life and thought. C. H. Dodd even claims that this experience led Paul to "a sort of second conversion" (1953: 81). This monograph could be conceived of as the study of the history of effects emanating from this momentous religious experience. Paul's approach to death, like the Spirit, can only be seen by the effects that it produces (cf. John 3:8). Kraftchick's 2002 essay analyzes the ground near the epicenter. This study will register the near-effects but also those at some distance.

1.2.3 Recent Interest in Early Pauline Reception

In addition to a growing interest in religious experience as an object of legitimate scholarly research, there has been across many academic disciplines a burgeoning recent interest in "effective history" (*Wirkungsgeschicte*) and "reception history" (*Rezeptionsgeschichte*). Though sometimes used interchangeably, these terms derive from the works of different scholars (Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hans Robert Jauss, respectively) and originally denoted different approaches to interpretation (see Knight 2010 and the next chapter). There is no need to provide an account of the philosophical origin or theoretical underpinnings of either approach; others have already done so (see, e.g., Wolfreys 2006). Neither will I attempt to take stock of how these methods have impacted NT studies in general. Rather, I will here mention some of the more pertinent studies in early Pauline reception before extensively reflecting on methodology in the next chapter.

The seminal work in this field of research is Andreas Lindemann's *Paulus im ältesten Christentum: Das Bild des Apostels und die Rezeption der paulinischen Theologie in der frühchristlichen Literatur bis Marcion* (1979). Against the prevailing notion that the Apostle Paul was forgotten or shunned in the second century, Lindemann forcefully argues for his unrivaled influence: "Keine Gestalt des ältesten Christentums hat auf Theologie und Geschichte der Kirche einen solchen Einfluß ausgeübt wie der Heidenapostel Paulus" (1). Something similar is demonstrated by Ernst Dassmann's book *Der Stachel im Fleisch: Paulus in der frühchristlichen Literatur bis Irenäus*, published in the same year (1979), and by David Rensberger's unpublished