RICHARD I. DEIBERT

Second Corinthians and Paul's Gospel of Human Mortality

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How Paul's Experience of Death Authorizes His Apostolic Authority in Corinth

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

This monograph is a modest revision of a PhD dissertation that began while listening to Dr Paul Tournier lecture on the meaning of human suffering at a conference for pastors and physicians in Hendersonville, North Carolina, in the spring of 1978. I was a sophomore at Davidson College in Davidson, North Carolina, majoring in religion and "minoring" in pre-medicine. My pastor, the Rev Ed "Didi" Wayland (1924–2016) of the Cornelius Presbyterian Church, graciously compelled me to spend the weekend with Dr Tournier (1898–1986). Through this great physician, a seed was planted to reunite medicine and ministry in their once-common vocation of healing.

Seven years (and a medical education) later, Dr Charles B. Cousar (1933–2014) of Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, led me into the luminous world of the New Testament. With peculiar Cousarian passion, he introduced me to 'a Jew from Tarsus,' whose Second Corinthians he contended was "the last unploughed field in Pauline studies." Later, in a study of Romans, Dr Beverly R. Gaventa facilitated Saint Paul as he disclosed the triumphant apocalyptic horizon of creation. All the while, Dr Walter Brueggemann, adamant about Paul's rootage in the Old Testament, was bellowing about the text like a Talmudic sage: "Turn it, and turn it, for everything is in it! Look deeply into it and grow grey and old over it! Never move away from it, for nothing is better than it!"[1] The inspiration of Dr Shirley C. Guthrie (1927–2004) allowed the creation of the Guthrie Scholars program at Columbia Theological Seminary, wherein the enduring mystery of physical death became the unexplored niche of Pauline thought that captivated me.

If it were not for the unconditional love and financial generosity of my parents, Barbara (1931–2006) and Irvin (1927–2013) Deibert, my study at the University of Cambridge and our family's glorious season in this "green and pleasant land" would not have been remotely possible. And if it were not for my brother Don, who embodies this thesis in so many ways, I would not have had the necessary perspective. My wife Elizabeth, pastor through and through, has suffered mightily from the theoretical character and academic tedium of this work. But she has remained a faithful companion, nurturing me

[1] The Mishnah, Aboth 5.22 (Rabbi Ben Bag-Bag).

with unending encouragement. I could not have prevailed apart from her love. My beloved children, Emily (and Nicolas), Catherine (and Taylor), Andrew, and Rebecca, have been patient beyond their years with a father who is "still in school." I am afraid to tell them that it will always be so.

I thank Dr Bruce W. Winter, then Warden of Tyndale House in Cambridge, for the generous use of a truly unique library (and Christian community) for biblical studies; also, for warmly inviting me to accompany him to the site of Paul's beloved city, ancient Corinth. Thanks to my tolerant deskmates, Drs Andrew Turkanik and Charles L. Echols, both of whom regard the New Testament merely as "midrash" on the Old Testament (not really); and to my fellow readers, Drs Jeff Dryden, Jules F. Gomes, Dirk Jongkind, Daniel Niles, Bill Salier, Paul Swarup, and John W. Taylor, for teaching me about Peter, Bethel, Codex Sinaiticus, Luke, John, Qumran, and the Apostle himself, respectively. I also owe much to the servant spirit of Dr Elizabeth Magba, then Librarian of the Tyndale House; and to the helpful staff of the Moye Library of the University of Mount Olive in Mount Olive, North Carolina, and to the staffs of the Divinity School, Perkins, Lilly, and Law Libraries of Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Not least, gratitude to my steadfast pastor-friend, Rev Dr William R. Clough, for his painstaking preparation of source and author indices.

To the following, who generously interrupted their study to discuss my thesis over a cup or a pint, I give thanks: Drs Markus Bockmuehl, James R. Edwards, Scott J. Hafemann, Donald A. Hagner, Edwin A. Judge, Justin Meggitt, and Margaret Thrall (1929–2010). And to Dr Ron Nedderman, Cambridge University Lecturer in the Department of Chemical Engineering, for his gracious hospitality, hearty Sunday dinners, and heartening conversation about the intersections (and divergences) of religious and scientific knowledge.

I am who I am, to a significant degree, because I have had the privilege of sharing a deep common life in Christ with three faithful congregations: Immanuel Presbyterian Church, of Montgomery, Alabama; Great St Mary's, The University Church, of Cambridge, England; and Peace Presbyterian Church, of Lakewood Ranch, Florida.

Deepest gratitude to Dr Henning Ziebritzki, Director of Mohr Siebeck, for his humble service, and to his angelically patient host of editors.

The final preparation of this work was slowed because I am in full-time medical practice with Tidewell Hospice of southwest Florida, caring for patients in their last days on this good earth. But this work has also become immeasureably richer by walking with sisters and brothers whose "outer nature is wasting away" but "whose inner nature is being renewed." These men, women, and children – of all faiths and of none – vividly testify that the life-creating "deadness of Jesus" mysteriously inhabits all bodily affliction;

and that, while significant in its time, physical death is actually slight, momentary, and not worth comparing with the eternal weight of glory that is to be revealed when standing face-to-Face with the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I thought about this work and wrote most of these words as my langmütiger und freundlicher Doktorvater, Graham N. Stanton, the Lady Margaret's Professor of Divinity in the University of Cambridge, was battling an invasive malignant melanoma, which Graham would defeat in death on 18 July 2009. It is one thing when a supervisor affirms the intellectual integrity of a student's work. It is a wholly different matter when a supervisor's suffering existence *authenticates* his student's thesis. Yes, here in the midst of life, we are all in death. Here in death, may we all be as Graham Stanton, *so much in the midst of life*. To his eternal memory, and to his beloved Esther, I rededicate this work.

"Christ has risen from the dead,
trampling down death by death,
and upon those in the tomb, bestowing life!"

The Sunday of the Holy Forefathers, Eastern Nativity Fast
Third Sunday, Western Advent, 2016

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Chapter 1

Introduction, Issues, Method

1.1 Introduction

Second Corinthians is at once the most perplexing and revealing of Paul's writings. In no other epistle is the occasion for writing more opaque, the unity of writing more in doubt, and the target for writing more theorised. At the same time, no other epistle discloses more about Paul's person, personality, and purpose than 2 Corinthians.[1]

This work is an attempt to simplify the mystery of 2 Corinthians by locating the congregation's anxiety principally in Paul's struggle for physical well-being.[2] We will argue that a near-death experience precipitated a crisis of confidence regarding the apostle's authority and reliability. This loss of confidence by the Corinthians plunged Paul into a personal crisis of confidence. And this personal crisis generated enormous introspective energy,[3] to which we attribute both the epistle's infamously awkward structure and its atypical preoccupation with physical suffering, death, and corporeal matters.[4]

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[1] In this work, "Pauline" refers to the undisputed writings of Paul: Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon.

[2] The collapsing relationship between Paul and the Corinthians remains one of the enduring mysteries of the New Testament and of Christian origins, as Charles Kingsley Barrett, "Paul's Opponents in 2 Corinthians," in *Essays on Paul* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1982), 61, prophesies: "It is not too much to say that a full understanding both of New Testament history and of New Testament theology waits on the right answering of this question."

[3] Stendahl's corrective was levied at introspective *conscience* about being "convicted by the Law and its insatiable requirements for righteousness," not introspection itself, Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," in *Paul among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1976), 87. Edwin Judge emphasised, in a personal conversation on 22 November 2000, that Paul's "self-disclosure" is "unique in world history and unparalleled until Augustine."

[4] For example, 2 Corinthians is the arena for nine of 21 total Pauline uses of θλῖψις; three of four uses of θλίβω; six of 11 uses of ἀσθένεια; and seven of 15 uses of ἀσθενέω. Candida R. Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 27, recognises Paul's preoccupation with physical suffering in 2 Corinthians: "The theme of suffering lingers under the surface of the entire work and forms the basis for Paul's apostleship. It legitimizes him as an apostle, serves as

When Paul's two extant letters are laid side-by-side, it becomes immediately clear that in the interval between something has dramatically altered Paul's relationship with the Corinthians. The strikingly different tone, language, apostolic posture, and theological content in each letter evidences a sharp deterioration in Paul's relationship with the Corinthians by the writing of the second epistle.[5] Despite variations in the particular dates and sequencing of Paul's chronology, there is significant consensus that the interval between 1 and 2 Corinthians was no longer than 18 months, and possibly, less than 12. For example, Raymond Brown proposes a late 56 / early 57 date for 1 Corinthians and a late summer / early autumn 57 date for 2 Corinthians, which means that the interval was conceivably as short as nine months.[6]

Paul tells us that during this interval he paid a visit to Corinth from Ephesus,[7] which was made painful by the congregation's harsh treatment of a Christian brother (2 Cor 2.1–11). Paul left Corinth and travelled through Macedonia back to Ephesus, from which he sent via Titus a "tearful" letter demanding that the Corinthians repent from their harsh treatment of the brother. Propelled by anxiety over Titus' fate, Paul travelled back to

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the cornerstone of his missionary activity, and is a marker of his special relationship to Christ. Indeed, it is these sufferings that validate and confirm his vocation … Paul's accounts of his sufferings for Christ permeate this epistle." Marquis' rhetorical reading, Timothy L. Marquis, "At Home or Away: Travel and Death in 2 Corinthians 1–9" (Yale University Dissertation, 2008), while sensitive to the letter's emotional texture, strains itself by needing to locate Paul's affliction solely as "an internal tribulation" (124). Not only does Marquis fail to attend to the pervasive physicality of Paul's struggle throughout the letter, he neglects the continuity and depth of Paul's long relationship with the Corinthians. Something has ruptured the bond between the Apostle and his beloved church. His task is larger and more urgent than merely the "manipulation" of emotions and social status. Something has happened to Paul's whole self against his will that directly threatens his Apostolicity.

[5] Scott J. Hafemann, *Suffering and Ministry in the Spirit: Paul's Defense of His Ministry in II Corinthians 2:14–3:3* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 62, attributes this dramatic shift in content and tone between the two epistles to physical affliction: "The meaning and necessity of Paul's suffering as an apostle are no longer common ground between Paul and his church, but are the very points of contention in the Corinthians' growing distrust of the legitimacy of Paul's apostolic claim."

[6] Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, The Anchor Bible Reference Library, ed. David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 515, 43. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 280, 308, 17–19, proposes a nearly 12-month interval, suggesting a May 54 date for 1 Corinthians, a March–April 55 date for 2 Corinthians 1–9, and a summer 55 date for 2 Corinthians 10–13. Also, Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*, 3rd ed. (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2002), 174–75.

[7] Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 299, notes that this trip would take at least two weeks by boat and 5–7 weeks by foot (1,082 kilometres).

Macedonia to locate him. He did. And he gladly received Titus' report that the Corinthians had responded obediently to his letter.[8]

We will argue that, during this 9–18 month period between the writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul experienced the mortal affliction that he reports in the opening of the letter (1.8–10).[9] News of Paul's "sentence of death" (τὸ ἀπόκριμα τοῦ θανάτου) somehow reached the Corinthians, who received it with offence. For some reason (probably the nature of Paul's affliction) the Corinthians experienced revulsion, perceiving the corruption of death to abound in their apostle. They found this manifestation of mortality contradictory to Paul's apostolic authority and ultimately charged that he was no longer competent for the ministry. Paul writes 2 Corinthians from Macedonia with an aim to address this issue of apostolic reliability and to defend human mortality as divinely commensurate with the ministry of the new covenant (2 Cor 3.4–6).[10]

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[8] The internal evidence for Paul's epistolary history with the Corinthians includes a minimum of three visits and four letters: 1. Original 18-month visit (Acts 18). 2. Lost Letter A, admonishing little tolerance for sexually immoral persons (1 Cor 5.9). 3. Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (members of Corinth) visit Paul in Ephesus (1 Cor 16.17). 4. Letter B (1 Corinthians) from Ephesus, addressing multiple concerns; also indicating that Paul has recently (?) sent Timothy to Corinth (4.17; 16.10) and that Paul himself desires to visit "soon" (ταχέως in 4.18–21), perhaps even to winter there for an extended visit (16.5–8). 5. Changes travel plans from the single long visit proposed in 1 Corinthians 16 to the two short visits in 2 Cor 1.15–16 on his way to and from Macedonia, by which he plans to complete the Corinthian collection for Jerusalem. 6. Makes first short visit as planned (implied by 2 Cor 2.1, 5), which turns out to be "grievous" (ἐν λύπῃ ... λελύπηκεν). 7. Changes his mind, drops plan for second short visit, probably proceeds to Macedonia but ultimately returns to Ephesus instead of Corinth, and writes lost "tearful" Letter C in response (2 Cor 2.3–4, 9; 7.8, 12), which is most likely delivered by Titus (Paul appears to be justifying these altered plans in 2 Cor 1.23–2.4). 8. Departs from Ephesus for mission in Troas, but his anxiety over Titus' absence compels Paul to search for him in Macedonia (2 Cor 2.12–13); finds Titus in Macedonia and is comforted by Titus' report (2 Cor 7.5–13). 9. Letter D (2 Corinthians) from Macedonia per Titus (2 Cor 8.6, 16–24) and two "brothers" (2 Cor 8.18, 22; 12.17–18?), intending to complete the collection by inspiring the Corinthians with news of the Macedonian generosity (2 Cor 8.1–6). 10. Makes a third visit (2 Cor 9.4; 12.14; 13.1–2) to complete collection (affirmed by Rom 15.25–26). See the helpful discussion in Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 422–30, 514–15, 41–44.

[9] When Paul came back into Macedonia searching for Titus, he indicates that he came "afflicted in every way" (ἐν παντὶ θλιβόμενοι, 7.2–5), a phrase that exactly repeats 4.7b–8a. By all accounts, Paul drafted 2 Corinthians shortly after reuniting with Titus in Macedonia.

[10] Paul's account in 7.6–16 of Titus' favorable report, that the Corinthians had been grieved by his letter into repenting, does not preclude the Corinthians' disquiet over Paul's mortality. 7.6–16 is a highly rhetorical affirmation of the Corinthians' obedient response to a particular demand; it should not be taken to mean that Paul and the Corinthians have completely reconciled their differences. Besides, Paul's glowing affirmation immediately prefaces his long appeal to the Corinthians for the Jerusalem collection (2 Cor 7–8). There is

We will argue that Paul's bodily experience of near death collided with Graeco-Roman attitudes toward the human body, dying, and death that were held dear by the Corinthians. Paul's powerful gospel of *bodily* resurrection, so clearly articulated and pronounced to the Corinthians in his first letter ("this perishable must put on imperishability and this mortal put on immortality" 15.53) has become inconceivable to the Corinthians in the fading light of Paul's own perishing body. Foundational to the escalating conflict in Corinth is the cruel fact that, in the eyes of his beloved congregation, Paul *himself* [11] has become radically incommensurate with his own gospel. [12]

Since the original completion of this work in 2005, Manuel Vogel's important monograph on 2 Cor 5.1–10 appeared: *Commentatio mortis: 2Kor 5,1–10 auf dem Hintergrund antiker ars moriendi*. [13] Vogel attempts to locate 2 Cor 5.1–10 as a seamless part of Paul's extended apostolic apology, 2 Cor 2.14–7.4. Vogel argues that Paul was battling widespread Hellenistic-Roman (and Hellenistic Jewish) sociocultural assumptions about human death as a "problem" (*Todesproblem*) that required particular skills (*Todesgeschick*), by which one's character could be determined – an ancient *Ars Moriendi* (Art of Dying). The Corinthians are immersed in a "social reality that perceives dying and death within the parameters of honour and dishonour." [14] How an individual understands and prepares for death publicly declares the strength (or weakness) and dignity (or disgrace) of that individual's character and life. Vogel insists that Paul is not primarily interested in eschatology or anthropology in 5.1–10, but is defending himself as a worthy practitioner of *ars moriendi*. Paul is making "*a character sketch designed for the problem of death, spoken with apologetic intention, in which he unfolds his personal*

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nothing more important to Paul than that the Corinthians remain inspired to participate in this mission.

[11] That is, Paul's person as represented by his body. Florence Dupont, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, trans. Christopher Woodall (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 239–41: "The Roman citizen consisted of a name and a body ... One's body could not lie: the image communicated to others was an expression of one's character ... The body of a citizen was the man himself, the 'embodiment' of the truth about him."

[12] Stephen C. Barton, "The Resurrection and Practical Theology with Particular Reference to Death and Dying in Christ," in *Eschatologie - Eschatology: The Sixth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium: Eschatology in Old Testament, Ancient Judaism, and Early Christianity*, ed. Hans-Joachim Eckstein, et al., WUNT 272 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 305–30, explores the contemporary practical implications of this personal identification with Christ's dying and rising, an identification so powerful that rejection of one's person by others amounts to rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

[13] Manuel Vogel, *Commentatio mortis: 2Kor 5,1–10 auf dem Hintergrund antiker ars moriendi*, FRLANT 214, ed. Dietrich-Alex Koch, et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

[14] Vogel, *Commentatio mortis*, 45, (author's translation).

understanding of death [persönliches Todesverständnis]."[15] He is rhetorically employing (and displaying) his "death skills," appealing to the Corinthians at all levels of emotional, cognitive, and voluntative power. Whether or not Paul is the masterful rhetorician portrayed by Vogel is not the issue here. The issue is the Corinthians' distrust of Paul's character because of his "inconspicuous, weak, and susceptible physical constitution." Vogel accurately discerns that the entire first half of 2 Corinthians is Paul's defence of his "personal fitness and capability for the Apostolic service."[16]

It is important to make two clarifications here at the outset. First, we are not claiming that Paul's mortal affliction is the exclusive reason for his embattled Apostleship in Corinth. The entirety of 1 Corinthians is ample evidence for a strained relationship. Second, we cannot know whether Paul's affliction is new in onset or an exacerbation of a pre-existing ailment. But this does not alter our fundamental thesis that the principal conflict in 2 Corinthians is over Paul's corporeal mortality. See the Conclusion for evidence of physical affliction elsewhere in the Paulines.

1.2 Literary & Historical Reconstruction of Second Corinthians

The integrity of this thesis does not hang on certitude regarding the epistolary unity of 2 Corinthians. Nor does this thesis depend on certitude regarding the chronology of the Pauline epistles and evidence in other Pauline communities for corresponding conflict over Paul's mortality. Nonetheless, there is sufficient suggestion throughout 2 Corinthians and across the undisputed Pauline letters that Paul's physical vulnerability was an abiding theological challenge throughout his ministry. Moreover, as we argue in the Conclusion, Paul's personal experience with near-death appears to play a pivotal role in his theological understanding of the Christian gospel.

This thesis argues more particularly that there was an acute deterioration of Paul's physical condition amid his correspondence with the Corinthians. This corporeal malady gave ammunition to Paul's fiercest critics. These "opponents" transformed misgivings about Paul's leadership in divisive ethical matters within the community into a frontal attack that focussed on the weak physical status of the apostle.[17] This explains, we believe, the remarkable attention given to physical suffering throughout 2 Corinthians, a conceptual consistency that underlies the disparate literary character of the letter.

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[15] Vogel, *Commentatio mortis*, 14, (author's translation, italics his).

[16] Vogel, *Commentatio mortis*, 12–13.

[17] Divisive matters related to the Corinthians' ethical behaviour are seen throughout 1 Corinthians, but rarely in 2 Corinthians.

For this reason, and in light of the entirely harmonious textual witness, we defend the literary unity of canonical 2 Corinthians as more plausible than theories of disunity.[18] Quarrels about leadership style have given way to personal assault. Paul's writing in 2 Corinthians is intensely rhetorical and charged with feelings throughout every theorised partition. Emotionality, alone, could account for sharp vacillations, shifts in focus, and apparently illogical transitions.[19] Also, Paul is striving to accomplish contravening ends: he must theologically rectify Corinthian disillusionment over his affliction, yet not jeopardise their enthusiasm for the Jerusalem collection. Moreover, the letter must deal strategically with a divergent Corinthian readership, composed of congregation and leaders with varying agendas and contrasting loyalties.[20] The sheer complexity of Paul's situation and epistolary challenge place the burden of proof squarely upon all division-hypotheses.[21]

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[18] As James M. Scott, *2 Corinthians*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 7, posits, "a historical reconstruction that can operate with the unity of 2 Corinthians has the advantage over partition theories, since it works with fewer unknowns."

[19] Arthur W. Handley Moule, ed., *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Translation, Paraphrase, and Exposition by Handley C. G. Moule* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1962), 137: "For in few of the Epistles, if any, are the connexion and argument, often and again, so fine and subtle in their texture, or gain so veiled and clothed, as it were, with personal emotion; and nowhere meanwhile is it more important to seek for them, to divine them amidst the concealments, and to set them out before the mind."

[20] Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary Series, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2000), 32–33, emphasises "the mixed nature of the Corinthian community" that Paul is adjudicating: "in chapters 1–9 the repentant are addressed directly and the rebellious indirectly, whereas in chapters 10–13 the opposite is the case."

[21] Speculation about the literary disunity of 2 Corinthians is driven mainly by the apparent abruption between chapters 1–9 and 10–13, in composition, subject, and tone. If this abruption demarcates two chronologically distinct writings, what then is the order of these writings and how might they fit into the larger puzzle of Paul's epistolary history with the Corinthians? This relatively simple theory of the composite character of 2 Corinthians has spawned a variety of more complex theories, dividing the letter into as many as six pieces. For helpful overviews, see Victor P. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, The Anchor Bible 32a, ed. William F. Albright and David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 29–55, Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 548–51, and Steven S. H. Chang, "The Integrity of 2 Corinthians: 1980–2000," http://www.ttgst.ac.kr/upload/ttgst_resources13/20123-156.pdf. Important contributions over the past half-century to the issue of compositional complexity include: Günther Bornkamm, "The History of the Origin of the So-called Second Letter to the Corinthians," *New Testament Studies* 8 (1962), 258–64; Alan M. G. Stephenson, "A Defence of the Integrity of 2 Corinthians," in *The Authorship and Integrity of the New Testament*, ed. Kurt Aland, Theological Collections 4 (London: SPCK, 1965), 82–97; William H. Bates, "The Integrity of 2 Corinthians," *New Testament Studies* 12, no. 1 (1965), 56–69; Francis Watson, "2 Cor 10–13 and Paul's Painful Letter to the Corinthians," *Journal of Theological Studies* 35 (1984), 324–46; Frances Young and David

While this work (or any other) will not solve the enigma of 2 Corinthians' compositional character, we will attempt to unite Paul's dominant concern (the defence of apostolicity) with Paul's modus operandi (the theological argument that physical vulnerability *authorises* his apostolicity). And so we offer the following sketch as a plausible reading of 2 Corinthians:

1.3–11 opens atypically with the issue of shared suffering and mortal affliction in Asia, which have providentially strengthened Paul's apostolic identity and purpose.

1.12–5.21 constitutes Paul's lengthy argument that his new covenant apostolic sufficiency is authenticated by the triumphal, life-giving procession of Jesus' deadness within his mortal body. Paul's physical vulnerability both prepares him for the eschaton and reveals to all that Christ's own physical death is the source of Paul's new covenant ministry of reconciliation. God has transfigured physical death by the physical resurrection of Jesus! The eschatological enemy has become a source of life.

6.1–7.16 illustrates that while Paul's ministry appears to be a physical failure, it is, in actuality, triumphant. Paul's body is a "temple of the living God." The Corinthians must resist prostituting themselves to his critics in

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Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians*, Biblical Foundations in Theology, ed. James D. G. Dunn and James P. Mackey (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 28–44; Nicholas H. Taylor, "The Composition and Chronology of Second Corinthians," *JSNT* 44 (1991), 67–87; David A. deSilva, "Measuring Penultimate against Ultimate Reality: An Investigation of the Integrity and Argumentation of 2 Corinthians," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 52 (1993), 41–70; Ben Witherington, "Argument 5, Division 1: 10:1–18," in *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 429–41; Alistair Stewart-Sykes, "Ancient Editors and Copyists and Modern Partition Theories: The Case of the Corinthians Correspondence," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 61 (1996), 53–64; William S. Kurz, "2 Corinthians: Implied Readers and Canonical Implications," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 62 (1996), 43–63; David G. Horrell, "Appendix 1: The painful letter and the chronological order of 2 Cor 1–9 and 10–13," in *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence: Interests and Ideology from 1 Corinthians to 1 Clement*, Studies of the New Testament and Its World (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 296–312; Larry L. Welborn, "Like Broken Pieces of a Ring: 2 Cor 1.1 – 2.13; 7.5–16 and Ancient Theories of Literary Unity," *New Testament Studies* 42 (1996), 559–83; J. David Hester Amador, "The Unity of 2 Corinthians: A Test Case for a Re-discovered and Re-invented Rhetoric," *Neotestamentica* 33, no. 2 (1999), 411–32; J. David Hester Amador, "Revisiting 2 Corinthians: Rhetoric and the Case for Unity," *New Testament Studies* 46 (2000), 92–111; J. David Hester Amador, "Re-reading 2 Corinthians: A Rhetorical Approach," in *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts: Essays from the Lund 2000 Conference*, ed. Anders Eriksson, Thomas H. Olbricht, and Walter Übelacker (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2002), 276–95.

Corinth who claim otherwise; instead, they must unashamedly enter into the physical partnership of death and life with Paul, as Titus has so ably done.[22]

8–9 leverages the Corinthians' pledged financial fidelity to the Jerusalem saints by citing the surpassing example of their neighbouring Macedonian believers, for whom "affliction" has only served to increase liberality. Paul nests this lengthy appeal for liberal giving inside his reflection on mortality because he is eager to allay Corinthian anxiety over his unfitness to complete the collection for the Jerusalem church.

10–13 intensifies Paul's defence and sharply addresses those leaders in Corinth most culpable of arguing that Paul's mortality undermines his apostolicity. Once again Paul defends himself against the charge that his weak bodily presence jeopardises his mission. Even as he expresses his tender sense of belonging to them as a people, Paul viciously lashes at the "false apostles" among them who have been boasting of superior endurance in their service to Christ. Paul's savage rhetorical assault crescendos through a litany of physical challenges to climax with a personal boast in weakness (ἀσθένεια). Paul's mortal body actually serves as a witness to God's power (12.6). To seal his argument absolutely, Paul relays a vision in which the words of Christ the Lord reveal that Paul's bodily weakness and resultant dependency have actually perfected Christ's power for apostolic service. Paul concludes his argument and the letter with reassurance of his forthcoming third visit. As he signals the principal issue that they "desire proof that Christ is speaking in [him]" (13.3), he points to Christ as the paradigm for strength in weakness and subversively rejoices in the discrepancy between his weakness and their strength.

What becomes clear in a close reading of 2 Corinthians is the way in which the question of compositional unity gradually yields to the manifestation of

[22] Some argue that Paul's long list in 6.3–10 of personal things "authenticating" (συνιστάντες) his apostolic service – 32 conditions, situations, and circumstances! – is clearly rhetorical and thus mitigates against any particular physical affliction being more prominent. In this view Paul's rhetorical sweep, which lumps "dying" (ἀποθνήσκοντες) with all manner of vicissitude and virtue, suggests that the issue for the Corinthians is not death per se, but Paul's generally weak, needy, non-charismatic, and ineffective person. Indeed, the Corinthians must have been anxious over Paul's many deficiencies. However such an interpretation neglects the impression throughout the letter that some event of singular force has broken the back of Paul's apostolic authority and urgently precipitated the writing. That Paul includes "dying" in his list of self-commendations, as one among many challenges, does not lessen its force as a distinctive back-breaking insult. It is more likely the case that, *because* his near-death experience is *the* quintessential stumbling block, by lumping it among many offences, Paul is actually *absolutising* the argument that his apostolic ministry is *comprehensively* unassailable. That this is Paul's rhetorical strategy is suggested in 6.9b by his interjection and momentary shift from passive participles to the active indicative verb, καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶμεν ("– behold, we are alive! –").

theological coherence in an apologetic context.[23] Indeed, the key to reading 2 Corinthians is to read the particulars carefully through the lens of Paul's general thematic concern: to defend his own mortality and endurance and apostolic vocation *as* the actual manifestation of Jesus' death and resurrection. Ironically, reading 2 Corinthians faithfully may just require a measure of the thematic eisegesis so chagrined in modern New Testament studies.[24]

1.3 Opponents

If the principal problem between Paul and the congregation in 2 Corinthians is Paul himself rather than his teaching, what do we make of the reams of speculation about a third Christian party mysteriously wedging itself between the congregation and the apostle?[25] Advocates point almost exclusively to chapters 10–13 for evidence and, thus, generally support the notion that 10–13 constitutes a distinct letter of response to this "intrusion." Most think that this "opponent" is of Jewish-Christian origin. Where there is disagreement is the degree to which this Judaising Christianity has become Hellenised. C. K. Barrett famously theorises multiple, competing opponents in Corinth: "It will not ... lead us far astray if we speak of conservative Judaism, liberal Judaism

[23] In an illuminating collaboration between systematic theology and biblical studies, Young and Ford, *Meaning and Truth*, 15, make a strong case for the compositional unity of 2 Corinthians based on the "unified thrust" of the letter: "There is a coherence of theme and vocabulary, of circumstances presumed, of fundamental aim that demands to be taken seriously." To facilitate his "utter transparency and openness and his single-minded commitment to his vocation" (15), Young and Ford argue that Paul "self-consciously" conceives 2 Corinthians "as an apology according to the norms of the day ... written with a view to producing certain effects on the reader/listener" (43). "Given the need for persuasive tactics the oscillation between protestations of anger, of love, of appeal and warning is entirely explicable, and the coherence of the fundamental argument is clear" (26). Young and Ford describe the conceptual coherence of 2 Corinthians as "the outworking of death and resurrection in [Paul's] ministry ... as the principal sign of his genuine vocation to apostleship and reliance upon God" (51).

[24] Young and Ford, *Meaning and Truth*, 15, suggest this when they assert that the "presumption [of coherent theme and aim] not only affects our understanding of the whole, but even makes quite a difference to the way certain sentences are read."

[25] See Barrett, "Paul's Opponents in 2 Corinthians," Barrett, "Christianity at Corinth," Dieter Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians*, trans. Harold Attridge, et al. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1986), 315–19, 58–77; Gerd Lüdemann, *Opposition to Paul in Jewish Christianity*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1989), 80–96; Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 291–322.

and revolutionary Judaism,"[26] the last of which Barrett understands to be Paul's own persuasion.

The contorted complexity of Barrett's hypothesis is telling, however, as is his self-acknowledged uncertainty while rendering it. The theory of formally defined opponents who are competing with one another to indoctrinate the congregation against its founder on principles deriving from a single theological tradition remains highly speculative. Most damaging to any thorough-going hypothesis of organised opposition to Paul in Corinth, of course, is the glaring absence of concern by Paul for doctrinal matters that are clearly under attack. By and large, Paul does not expend energy defending his gospel (or the Corinthians) from discernible theological subversion by identifiable organised opponents.[27]

Indeed, the crux of the mystery of 2 Corinthians is the *absence* of any identifiable *practice* by which the congregation is jeopardising its apostolic ministry, as well as the absence of *theological categories* that generally typify Paul's pastoral concern: sin, law, faith, righteousness, and grace. Instead, what we find throughout is that the Corinthians are attacking Paul *personally*. In a period of less than one year, the apostle manifests an entirely new posture of intensely personal self-defence (a posture that runs throughout the letter). This is what makes 2 Corinthians "the most extraordinary letter of the New Testament,"[28] for it discloses the enormous interiority of Paul as he struggles over the rejection of his person. In this letter, above all, we appreciate the unity of Paul's person and vocation.

Craig Hill characterises the situation well: "Paul's apostolic claim is under attack from another quarter, one whose precise theology remains unknown to us, but whose emphasis clearly lay *on the present realization of spiritual power.*"[29] Hill rightly points out that Paul's self-defence in 2 Corinthians has not to do with doctrine but with Corinthian discomfort over issues of personal

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[26] Barrett, "Paul's Opponents in 2 Corinthians," 82. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 303, describes Paul's opposition as "an alliance between free-thinking Hellenistic pseudo-philosophic believers, the spirit-people, and Law-observant Jewish Christians."

[27] Paul's exposition of the new covenant ministry in 3.1–18 is no exception. Here it is clear that Paul *himself* is under attack, not his teaching. The Corinthians have called into question Paul's competency (ἱκανότης) to function as a minister of the new covenant. We argue that this dispute over Paul's competence is more simply rooted in his corporeal weakness, which was recently manifested in his Asian affliction (1.8–10). Paul's majestic defence (which should also be read more simply) is that the transcendently glorious new covenant ministry of righteousness is the bedrock of his competency, because it is actually transforming him into the likeness of the Lord. Paul's competence is entirely "mercied" to him by God (ἠλεήθημεν, 4.1). To him, it has become inconceivable that his "pottery jar" (4.7) could invalidate God's mercy.

[28] Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 309.

[29] Craig C. Hill, *Hellenists and Hebrews: Reappraising Division within the Earliest Church* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1992), 162 (italics added).

competency, such as the efficacy of his preaching, the fidelity of his heritage, and the magnificence of his supernatural life: "The equal ground on which [Paul] claims to stand has uniformly to do with the *practice* of ministry, namely, that it is exercised in knowledge ... and in works of power."[30] While Hill rightly identifies competence as the issue, he does not isolate the physical-fitness of the minister as the heart of the Corinthians' concern. Like other commentators who interpret this conflict in spiritual categories, Hill fails to explain Paul's emphasis on his body and his repeated claim that bodily humiliation actually *enhances* ministerial practice.

In this work, we are arguing that Paul's gospel is at stake in Corinth not primarily because of third-party theological interlopers from without, but because Paul himself has become *an offence from within*.[31] Only such an offence adequately illumines the letter's *pathos* rather than anger (as in Galatians, where the doctrinal centre of the faith has been evacuated).[32] Paul's agony derives from congregational revulsion rather than from intellectual assault. If opponents have infiltrated Corinth, they are targeting something personal about Paul, not doctrinal. Elaborate notions of established theological adversaries fail to account for the profound interiority of the letter, an emotional character that is more plausible if Paul's primary "opponent" is the beloved *congregation*, and the target of their attack, his own *person*. We are not altogether dismissing opponents in Corinth nor are we disclaiming for them a role in disseminating discontent throughout the congregation. We are arguing more simply that these rhetorical "false apostles" (11.13) are familiar, figurehead leaders who have targeted Paul's mortal body as disqualifying him from Apostleship.[33]

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[30] Hill, *Reappraising Division*, 162.

[31] Contra Charles Kingsley Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries, ed. Henry Chadwick (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973), 6: "It is fair to remark that the cause of the new troubles seems to have entered Corinth from without."

[32] Barrett, *The Second Epistle*, 32, appreciates the letter's pathos: "Paul never wrote a more personal letter ... It is simply a letter in which he wears his heart on his sleeve and speaks without constraint, hiding neither his affection, nor his anger, nor his agony." Further comparison with Galatians is instructive: 2 Corinthians does not open with Paul on the attack; it does not contain a foundational biography as part of the apostolic defence; it does not contain a thematically sustained theological discourse; and perhaps most significantly, 2 Corinthians is marked throughout by an introspective subjectivity that is largely missing from Galatians. In a conversation with Margaret Thrall on 7 May 2001, she insisted that any explanation of Paul's conflict with the Corinthians must account for the profoundly *personal* character of the epistle as well as for Paul's characterisation of his affliction specifically as affliction *from within* (αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς, 2 Cor 1.9a).

[33] This assault on Paul's person explains his ample use of terms related to sufficiency and confidence throughout 2 Corinthians: three of five total Pauline uses of ἱκανός; four of five

1.4 Method

To defend this thesis, we begin with an assessment of attitudes toward dying and death that most likely prevailed in ancient Corinth in the first century. In this first chapter, we provide three studies. First, we sketch the late Republican history of Corinth that produced its unusual amalgamation of Graeco-Roman culture. Secondly, we analyse three important pieces of literature by Plato, Cicero, and Virgil that deal specifically with death and the dead. We argue that this literature generally reflects attitudes toward the human body and death that prevailed in first-century Corinth. Thirdly, we examine certain Roman funereal practices for what they tell us of beliefs about the dead in ancient Graeco-Roman culture. Our aim in this opening chapter is to understand the intellectual and practical cultural forces that inhibited the Corinthian church from fully embracing Paul's mortality.

In chapters two, three, and four, we shift to exegesis. In chapter two, we look closely at what might be the most grievously neglected of Pauline texts, the introductory thanksgiving to 2 Corinthians (1.3–11). We argue that this pericope characteristically signals the core issue that has evoked the epistle: Paul's near-death experience in Asia. We examine the unique way in which Paul embeds pastoral theology about affliction inside a classic Jewish blessing; we also study the theology of Paul's pastoral claims. We argue that this is Paul's strategic way of prefacing his wrenching account in 1.8–10 of the personal despair caused by his mortal affliction. We examine Paul's exalted description of his affliction and his subtle, but extraordinary, theological proclamation.

In chapter three, we move to another understudied text, 2 Cor 4.7–12, Paul's exposition of the divine purpose for the mortal framework of Christian ministers. We examine this important text in detail, arguing that Paul, in his lengthy opening self-defence, shifts from the glorious *content* of the new covenant ministry in 2.12–3.18 to the inglorious *context* of the ministry in 4.7–6.13, which is necessarily corporeal. As Paul makes this shift to the bodily context of ministry at 4.7, we argue that he is consciously returning to the concerns and theology expressed in the letter's introduction, attempting to "prove" to the Corinthians that they are gravely mistaken to dismiss him because of physical affliction. In particular, we examine the careful parallel structure and language of 4.7–12 and attempt to isolate the core of Paul's theology of human mortality. We focus on Paul's use of the grotesque medical phrase in 4.10 (τὴν νέκρωσιν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ) and examine all uses of the noun νέκρωσις in classical literature. We conclude that this medical phrase is

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uses of πεποίθησις; four of 19 uses of πείθω; five of five uses of ὑπόστασις; and a singular Pauline use of ἀρκέω in 12.9.

the lens through which Paul understands his own mortality and its power for life.

Lastly, in chapter four, we attempt to establish a comprehensive "conversation" between 1.3–11 and 4.7–12. We examine correspondences between these pericopes in vocabulary, textual characteristics, and theology, concluding that Paul is exposing the theological power of human mortality (4.7–12), based on his personal experience of it in Asia (1.3–11). We demonstrate a symbiosis between these two pericopes that corroborates our thesis that Paul's physical corporeality lies at the heart of his conflict in Corinth.

It is important to note at the outset of this thesis that we will not attempt to diagnose Paul's physical affliction, though we will argue periodically that a bodily illness (rather than injury or persecution) is more commensurate with the language Paul uses when he conceptualises his affliction in the pericopes under study. We contend that Paul purposely portrays his affliction in general terms, avoiding particularities, because he is determined to make a constructive response to the theological *implication* of the Corinthians' allegation that his bodily affliction contradicts his gospel. This is why we have chosen in this study to identify Paul's concern specifically as human *mortality*. This is also why we conclude that one of Paul's chief ends in 2 Corinthians is to articulate a vision of human mortality that redresses the Graeco-Roman assumptions of the Corinthians. Hopefully, this study will begin to point the way to a Pauline theology of human mortality.

The construal of Paul's conflict in Corinth as a clash between different understandings of "mortality" serves as a more helpful interpretive approach to the entire letter for the following reasons. First, while the language of "mortality" retains connotations that are broader than the physical, its frame of reference is irreducibly physical. "Mortality" clearly conveys Paul's insistence that a *physical* body is definitional to earthly human existence (if not also to heavenly existence).[34]

Secondly, "mortality" is an inclusive term that embraces particular forms of suffering, whether or not particular conditions or afflictions actually eventuate in death.[35] "Mortality" communicates Paul's understanding of

[34] Physicality, for Paul, appears to be the earthbound dimension of human existence. Note the striking ease with which he relinquishes physicality for spirituality in 1 Corinthians 15, while adamantly maintaining human *corporeality*. Paul ties the characteristics of perishability (φθαρτός), dishonour (ἀτιμία), and weakness (ἀσθένεια) strictly to the *physicality* of human embodiment. Endlessly fascinating, though, is Paul's scarcely noticeable caveat in 1 Cor 15.44b: "*If* there is (εἰ ἔστιν) a physical body [in the resurrection], there is also a spiritual body."

[35] In 1.4–11 alone, Paul employs five different terms (ten total usages) to characterise both his and the Corinthians' existence as subject to the power of death: three uses of the noun "affliction" (θλῖψις); one passive of the verb "afflict" (θλίβω); two of the noun

human existence as continuously exposed to the physical threat of death. Its usage distinguishes *biological* dying within Paul's thought, without completely detaching it, from *theological* dying: "that form of dying that takes place when a person sins."[36] Moreover, "mortality" heuristically distinguishes physical or bodily death in Paul's thought from metaphorical or figurative notions of death, such as "dying to sin" or "dying with Christ" or "dying to the law" – nuances that dominate Romans and Galatians, where Paul's crisis is theological rather than personal.[37] In fact, what makes 2 Corinthians so useful for a study of physical death in Paul's thought is the virtual absence of this classic Pauline construal of theological death.[38]

Thirdly, the use of the language of "mortality" characterises human existence as having a "dying" quality that is graciously kept alive by God. We believe this more accurately captures Paul's language about the burden of physical human existence without sacrificing his appreciation for the invasive, life-giving power of Jesus Christ. The language of "mortality" also focuses our study on dying and death as a common experience of every human being, as opposed to that more exclusive experience of morbidity referred to by the phrase "apostolic suffering."

Fourthly, the language of "mortality" preserves an important conceptual linkage in Paul's mind between the dying-and-death of the believer and the dying-and-death of Jesus Christ, as an experience that includes *physical* and *corporeal* dimensions.

Fifthly, the word "mortality" forces us to consider more carefully how Paul faces the disturbing persistence of biological death in human existence. This

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"suffering" (πάθημα); one of the verb "to bear (suffering)" (πάσχω); two of the noun "death" (θάνατος); one of the noun "dead" (νεκρός). See Appendix 3 for Paul's death vocabulary.

[36] Paul S. Minear, "Some Pauline Thoughts on Dying: A Study of 2 Corinthians," in *From Faith to Faith: Essays in Honor of Donald G. Miller on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Dikran Y. Hadidian (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Pickwick Press, 1979), 92–93. Minear distinguishes seven connotations for the meaning of death in Paul's thought: 1) "death as a medical fact"; 2) "death in sin"; 3) "death-in-Adam"; 4) "Death as the last enemy"; 5) the death of God's Son as a "redefinition" of human dying; 6) "death-in-baptism"; 7) "dying daily." As for physical or "medical" death, Minear concludes, "Only in a minority of cases does Paul employ this connotation, and, when he does use it, he often plays down its importance." 2 Corinthians, we believe, contradicts Minear's conclusion.

[37] James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of the Apostle Paul* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 161, describes this as "the nexus of sin and death," by which Paul explains the origin of death through sin, the universal bondage of humanity to sin-death, and the ultimacy of eschatological death – cosmic features of a conviction that death is God's final enemy.

[38] Remarkably, the noun "sin" (ἁμαρτία) occurs just *two* times (both in 5.21) and the verb (ἁμαρτάνω) occurs only twice in an unusual compound form referring to members who have "sinned previously" (προαμαρτάνω) in 12.21 and 13.2 (here alone in the NT)! In addition, all 11 uses of the noun σάρξ and the singular use of the adjective σάρκινος, are morally neutral references to human or earthly substance.

is an issue in Pauline studies that has received too little attention. Here we simply wish to learn what Paul thinks about humanity's "condition of being mortal or subject to death"[39] as much "after Easter and Pentecost as ... before."[40] New Testament scholarship has largely overlooked this question of physical death as a theological problem for Paul.[41] Oscar Cullmann's articulation fifty years ago stands largely unaddressed:

> At the present time the σάρξ, the power of death, remains indissolubly bound to our σῶμα. Does this mean that there is a whole sphere of our bodies, which is completely untouched by the *present* action of the Holy Spirit? Does its life-giving power still remain condemned to impotence before our body of death?[42]

1.5 Implications

In short, by using the term "mortality" we are attempting to re-frame the hermeneutical window through which 2 Corinthians is translated, read, and understood. We are drawing out Paul's thinking about the mortal framework of human existence, as he has discerned it in his own personal experience. Perhaps the scant attention in New Testament studies both to the introductory pericope of 2 Corinthians and to the impact of human mortality on Paul's theology can be explained by a general reticence in western biblical and theological study to move from experience to truth-claim.

What Paul reveals in 2 Corinthians, however, is that nothing is more personal than having a body, and nothing more powerful for Christian theology than that body's vulnerability to death. Said another way, Paul's struggle with the Corinthians shows us that the human body is constitutive for

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[39] James A. H. Murray et al., eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 17 vols., vol. 6 (L–M) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 673–74. Accordingly, one who is "mortal" is one who is "destined to die."

[40] The phrase is from Oscar Cullmann, "The Proleptic Deliverance of the Body According to the New Testament," in *The Early Church*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins (London: SCM Press, 1956), 166.

[41] Both Dunn, *Theology*, 94, and Calvin J. Roetzel, "As Dying, and Behold We Live," *Interpretation* 46 (1992), 13, affirm that physical decay and death, for Paul, cannot be merely *natural* (divinely created) processes, but they do not pursue dying as a theological problem. Johan C. Beker, *Paul The Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1987), 213–34, on the other hand, wrestles gallantly, concluding that the "reign [of death] over Christians even after Christ's victory over death" must remain a "cosmic mystery" because "death cannot be completely explained by the power of sin" (234). Beker deduces from Paul that "the created order itself is an order of death by divine design" (222). Thus death is an "infectious disease ... that stamps the created order" (232), a "crucial and mysterious 'dark' residue" (233).

[42] Cullmann, "Proleptic Deliverance," 166 (italics his).