CHAPTER THREE

THE “FOR US” PHRASES IN PAULINE SOTERIOLOGY: CONSIDERING THEIR BACKGROUND AND USE *

1. Introduction

This introductory chapter seeks to prepare the field for the subsequent studies on metaphors in Pauline soteriology. Following the verb σωτερίων ("to save"—cf. Spicq, s.v.), soteriology essentially means deliverance from a perilous situation which would, if it were not for the salvation, end in death. In Paul's thought, God saves humans who are in a situation of mortal danger because of their sins. His salvation is inextricably connected to the rescuing effect of the death of Christ. In many cases Paul expresses the effect of Christ's death by means of traditional formulaic phrases connected with one of the prepositions ὑπέρ, περί or διά to a verb referring to Christ's death, e.g. ἀποθανόμεθα or (παρα)δίδομαι ὑπέρ/περί τινος. The scope of this chapter does not allow the rehearsal of the philological discussion of these phrases (cf. Bieringer 1992), but it might initially be of some benefit to ask specific and preliminary questions, which go beyond mere grammatical matters (4.). Before venturing on the use Paul himself made of such traditional matters, an overview of these phrases in his letters is needed (5.). In most cases, the specific verbs that combine with these prepositional phrases, such as “dying” or “being delivered”, are of paramount importance for the interpretation of the phrase itself. Nevertheless this chapter will focus on the Pauline use of the prepositional phrases themselves (4.). Only then can one answer the question: How was the redeeming effect of Christ's death “for” human sinners perceived and expressed. Finally, a brief overview on the way in which Paul combines the metaphorical depiction of salvation with the “for” phrases is given (5.).

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2. Where Do We Start and How Do We Begin?

2.1. Where Are We to Start?

Our construction of Paul should be within an appropriate historical context. Paul is perceived by many of us as a Hellenised Jew who had a visionary and auditory experience through which he understood to be called upon to proclaim the good news of the crucified Christ to the gentiles (cf. Dietzfelbinger 1989). Long after Paul's death, he was still known as a citizen from Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 9:11; 21:39; 22:3). Before he wrote his first letters known to us, he was in the regions of Cilicia and Syria for almost fourteen years (Gal 1:21; Acts 9:30; 11:25), most probably in the cities of Tarsus and Antioch on the banks of the river Orontes. According to Acts, Barnabas took him to Antioch to help in a Christian congregation of which the founder members were Jewish Christians that had been driven from Jerusalem (Acts 11:19–20, 26).

Paul therefore stands in a twofold tradition. He is a Jew who received his education through the Greek language but within the community of the diaspora synagogue. He stems from “Hellenistic Judaism”. Even if Acts 22:3 should be interpreted in such a way that Paul was educated in Jerusalem (but see du Toit 2000), this still implies he was part of the Greek speaking community in Jerusalem. He then probably was part of the Jewish community from Cilicia (Acts 6:9). We thus have to seek for the sources of the metaphors used by Paul in depicting the death of Christ, and the effects thereof, within the Greek language. We can readily expect to find the closest parallels in the texts of other Jews who have written in Greek. Paul however, became a Christian. He was initially introduced to the traditions of the first Greek speaking Christian communities in Damascus and later in Antioch (for a general overview of these traditions, cf. Hahn 2003a, 161–179). We therefore have to look at those passages in Paul's letters where he tells us that he is drawing upon tradition (cf. 1 Cor 11:22–25; 15:3–8) or where his style is indicative of the use of traditional Christian language (cf. Gal 1:4; Rom 4:25). In these passages prepositional phrases expressing the effect of the death of Christ occur. Paul's own way of ascribing meaning to the death of Christ should thus be related to pre-Pauline tradition. The Pauline interpretation of the death of Christ is to be part of the history of early Christian interpretation of the death of Christ (for such a history, cf. Hahn 2003b, 373–410).