HE APPEARED TO 500 BROTHERS (1 COR. XV 6)

BY

PETER J. KEARNEY

Washington D. C.

The search for a more primitive formula behind the tradition contained in I Cor. xv 3-8 has led to a fairly widespread agreement that Paul is quoting such a formula in vv. 3b-5 ¹). Whether the appearances which follow (to 500, James, all the apostles and Paul himself) are presented in Paul’s own words or contain at least some quoting of fixed tradition remains more of a problem ²). This study proposes that Paul indeed does quote and also rework a primitive formula in vv. 6-7, one quite distinct from that in vv. 3b-5.


²) For example, Kasting, Anfänge, p. 59, cites as the more common view the opinion that Paul added the apparitions to the 500, James and all the apostles from his own knowledge. This explanation for vv. 6-7 is accepted also by R. Fuller, The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives (New York, 1971) p. 28 (he admits this even for the two apparitions in v. 5) and G. O’Collins, The Resurrection of Jesus Christ (Valley Forge, 1973) p. 4. However, P. von den Osten-Sacken, “Die Apologie des paulinischen Apostolats in 1 Kor. 15:1-11”, Z.N.W. LXIV (1973) p. 245 n. 4, holds that v. 6a could be an older formula. A. von Harnack, “Die Verklärungsgeschichte Jesu, der Bericht des Paulus (I. Kor. 15. 3 ff.) und die beiden Christusvisionen des Petrus”, Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophische-historische Klasse (1922) p. 67, proposed that the apparitions to James and all the apostles were originally formulated to rival the claim for authority implicit in the parallel formula of v. 5. U. Wilckens, “Der Ursprung der Überlieferung der Erscheinungen des Auferstandenen”, in W. Joest and W. Pannenberg (eds.) Dogma und Denkstrukturen (Göttingen, 1963) pp. 71, 75, 81, accepts this two-formula theory of Harnack but regards both as originally “authentication formulae” without any rivalry behind the second one.
The cumulative case for the proposed reconstruction is based upon a clarifying of the coherence within the formula itself, then upon its similarity to other passages in the New Testament, and finally upon its helpfulness in explaining Paul's own process of authorship.

I. Reconstruction of the Primitive Formula in Vv. 6-7

A crucial first step is to inquire whether the two adverbs in v. 6a, ἐπάνω and ἐφάπαξ, not only are similar in form (ἐπί plus an adverb of place and time, respectively) but also should be understood as correlatives, designating the eschatological nature of the appearance: Jesus appeared exalted “above” (ἐπάνω) and “once for all” (ἐφάπαξ). Such an interpretation for ἐπάνω is ancient. John Chrysostom notes that some interpreted this word as referring to the place of apparition, “above and overhead” (ἐνω καὶ ὑπὲρ ἀπαθῆς 3), an observation which survived in the commentaries of Oecumenius (8th century?) 4 and Theophylact (11th century) 5. The former cites the opinion of some that ἐπάνω means “from heaven” (ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) 6, while the latter says that some think it means “from the heavens above” (ἐνωθεν ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν) 7. None of these three interpreters either accepts or rejects this meaning. Their reserve at least indicates that this understanding is acceptable Greek. As for ἐφάπαξ, the eschatological interpretation of this word has been recently revived by P. Seidensticker 8. He understands “once for all” to mean that I Cor. xv 5-7 contains

8) Cf. P. Seidensticker, "Das Antiochenische Glaubensbekenntnis I Kor. 15, 3-7 im Lichte seiner Traditionsgeschichte", Theologie und Glaube LVII (1967) p. 311. H. Meyer, Kritisch Exegetisches Handbuch über den ersten Brief an die Korinther (5th edition; Göttingen, 1870) pp. 416-417, had considered this interpretation but rejected it because the large number in question made the meaning “at one time” more likely. He also rejected the interpretation of ἐπάνω as “above” (p. 416), the only author I have found who considered the eschatological interpretation of both adverbs. O. Gombitza, “Gnade — das entscheidende Wort”, N.T. II (1957) p. 285, anticipated Seidensticker’s interpretation of ἐφάπαξ, but without drawing further implications beyond noting the emphatic position of the word.