EKTROMA (1COR. 15:8): A THEOLOGICAL SEMANTICS*

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Résumé: Diverses traductions ont étés proposées pour *ektroma*, un *hapax* dans le Nouveau Testament, de « prématurément né » à « l'avorton », « mort-né » ou même « monstruosité » (quelques-uns des termes visés étant les solutions de traduction que plusieurs Bibles, y compris les roumaines, ont donné à *ektroma*). Bien qu'on ne peut pas être sûr de la signification exacte d'*ektroma* pour Saint Apôtre Paul en raison de son utilisation unique du terme en 1Cor. 15: 8, cet article se concentre également sur d'autres textes liés que mettent en lumière ce terme, comme Gal. 1:15-16 et Phil. 3:7-14. On prend aussi en compte des événements de l'Ancien Testament et leur lien possible avec la pensée de Saint Apôtre Paul. Quelques commentaires modernes et patristiques sont mentionnés. Sur le plan méthodologique, l'article tente de sortir des limites de la méthode historique critique, valorisant également les textes bibliques du même auteur et des autres, ainsi que la réception patristique des textes bibliques.
Mots-clés: *ektroma*, prématurément né, mort-né, expérience du Christ, vie en Christ, paradigme de la vie et de la mort

1. Introduction

This article proposes for 1Cor. 15:8, *ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων ὡσπερεὶ τῷ ἐκτρώματι ὤφθη κἀμοί*, the following translation: "Last of all, *as to one born dead*, he appeared also to me", as it will be argued along the exposition.

Methodologically speaking, this article tries to subscribe to a more recent direction of research, orthodox biblical hermeneutics. Some of its principles would be the unity between Old and New Testament, the connection between biblical (e.g. Pauline) texts and Patristic exegesis: explaining a text not only by referring to the same author, but also by recurring to other biblical and patristic texts, and last but not least, the spiritual experience as fundament for exegesis.

Ἔκτρωμα is an uncommon word in Greek classical literature, coming from *ἐκτιτρώσκω* 'to cause a miscarriage', 'to cast the fruit of the body'. It is rather found in Greek physicians' literature. *Ἔκτρωμα* means 'untimely birth', 'miscarriage', 'abortion'. "The reference is always to untimely birth, whether the child lives or not. The decisive feature is the abnormal time of birth and the unfinished form of the one thus born" (TDNT 2: 465). In the Bible the term is scarcely used. In the New Testament it is only

* Ektroma *(1Cor. 15:8): une sémantique théologique*

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used in 1Cor. 15:8, a *crux interpretum*, as considered by many. Here, St. Apostle Paul compares himself with an *ἔκτρωμα*.

Although a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament, *ἔκτρωμα* appears 3 times in the LXX. In Job 3:16 and Eccl. 6:3 (LXX), *ἔκτρωμα* renders the Hebrew word נֶפֶל *nephel* 'miscarriage'. However, at the first occurrence, Num. 12:12 (LXX), *ἔκτρωμα* renders the Hebrew word כַּמֵּת *kammet* 'as a dead one'. At this point in argumentation we should note the aspect that this first occurrence connects *ἔκτρωμα* with the idea of death, the Hebrew expression containing a comparison and being rendered by this particular Greek term. Several biblical translation solutions have been given for *ἔκτρωμα*. Some Romanian Bibles give such translations for the term occurrence in 1Cor. 15:8: "născut fără de vreme" (1648 NT, 1914 Bible), "lepădături" (1688 Bible), "născut înainte de vreme" (Romanian Synodal Bible 2013, Anania 2001), "stârpituri" (Cornilescu 1924).

Several biblical translations for Num. 12:12 are: "as one dead" (KJV, RSV, JPS, NJPS), "like the stillborn baby" (NAB), "comme l'avorton" (BJ), "comme l'enfant mort" (TOB), "ca un copil născut mort" (Cornilescu 1924), "ca cel născut mort" (Romanian Synodal Bible 2013). As for Eccl. 6:3: "the child born dead" (NAB), "untimely birth" (KJV, RSV, JPS), "the stillbirth" (NJPS), "l'avorton" (BJ, TOB), "o stârpitură" (Cornilescu 1924), "fătul lepădat" (Romanian Synodal Bible 2013) and for Job 3:16: "like a stillborn child" (NAB), "untimely birth" (KJV, RSV, JPS), "like a stillbirth" (NJPS), "tel l'avorton" (BJ), "comme un avorton" (TOB), "ca o stârpitură" (Cornilescu 1924), "o stârpitură" (Romanian Synodal Bible 2013). For 1Cor. 15:8, some Bibles offer the translations: "as to one born abnormally" (NAB), "as of one born out of due time" (KJV), "as to one untimely born" (RSV), "comme à l'avorton" (BJ), "l'avorton" (TOB), "als einer unzeitigen Geburt" (Luther 1984), "Mißgeburt" (EÜ).

We can observe that in Num. 12:12 "as one dead" is the most frequent translation solution, while for Eccl. 6:3 and Job 3:16 there is more than one solution like "untimely birth", "stillbirth" or "abortion". The same appears to be the case for the only New Testament occurence of *ἔκτρωμα*, 1Cor. 15:8, though in the Romanian Bibles there is a preference for the meaning of 'untimely birth'.

Regarding the usage context of *ἔκτρωμα* in LXX, an interesting inference is that comparison and contrast are shaping the understanding of the term (Mitchell 2003: 474), but this idea could be further expanded, the term's meaning at its very core being 'the point of comparison and contrast between death and life'. This kind of contextual pattern is also found in 1Cor. 15, namely death and resurrection/life, and in other connected texts like Phil. 3:7-14.

2. Understanding the term in his biblical context

Different opinions have been formulated regarding the meaning of the term in his immediate and larger biblical context.

1Cor. 15 begins with a credal tradition from vv. 3b–5a, while vv. 5b, 6b, c, and 7 speak of a series of Christophanies. The common view is to regard vv. 3b–5 as one of

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the earliest confession, even if parts of vv. 6–7 come from pre-Pauline sources. The Christophanies to St. Apostle Peter and the Twelve makes them "foundational witnesses" in early traditions. The "common experience of grace and reversal" gives St. Apostle Peter and St. Apostle Paul a shared role as witnesses of the resurrection (Thiselton 2000: 1203-1204). The appearance to James, Lord's Jesus brother (Gal. 1:19), a "pillar" of the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:9; cf. Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; in Gal. 2:9 James, Cephas and John are described as the three "pillars" of the Jerusalem church) as well as to all the apostles, "the apostolic body as a whole", is also regarded as foundational (Thiselton 2000: 1207-1208). Actually, St. Paul uses "apostles" in a wider sense than the Twelve, as "foundational witnesses": As such is paved "the way for v. 8: the entire apostolate are bound up together in witnessing to Christ's saving work and resurrection: with his reference to his own calling in v. 8, this will complete the list and establish this common foundational apostolic witness to the reality of the resurrection as one of the cardinal elements of the gospel (15:3)" (Thiselton 2000: 1208). In vv. 8-9 the emphasis lies not just on St. Paul's place at the end of witnesses' list, but on the grace of God "who chooses to give life and new creation to those reckoned as dead, or, in Paul's case, both a miscarried, aborted foetus whose stance had been hostile to Christ and to the new people of God" (Thiselton 2000: 1208). While "a prematurely born dead foetus" could be a meaning which reflects the figurative sense of the term in the LXX, one step further is "grace gives life to the dead", says Thiselton (Thiselton 2000: 1209). The term denotes "one born abnormally" (NIV, NAB, NJB and in effect NRSV, KJV). However, in accordance with two of the three LXX's occurrences of the term, it could be understood as "miscarriage". Thiselton also mentions some other opinions. Theodoret of Cyrus considers the term as unworthiness to be called an apostle similarly to the consideration of an abortion to be a fully human person. Luther asserts St. Paul compared himself with a dead child until rebirth through Christ. However, this term could be understood also as deformity, whether or not an abortion. In modern Greek the meaning is "a monster or freak" (Thiselton 2000: 1209-1210). However, given St. Paul's association of his "encounter with the resurrected life as one of new creation (2Cor. 4:6; cf. Gen. 1:3–5)", it seems St. Paul perceives God's grace as life giving to one who was "humanly beyond all hope" (Thiselton 2000: 1210). This also reflects the theme of resurrection prominent in this chapter, concludes Thiselton (Thiselton 2000: 1210). Hence, *life-death paradigm* in relation to *ἔκτρωμα* is noticed in Thiselton's analyses.

Another aspect worth mentioning refers to the verb which is in relation to *ἔκτρωμα* in 1Cor. 15:8. The verb describing the Christophanies in the beginning of 1Cor. 15 is *ὤφθη*, the first aorist passive indicative of the defective *ὁράω*. Although the aorist passive indicative can mean 'was seen', the passive also has the frequent sense of 'he became visible' or 'he appeared', considers Thiselton. In the LXX it occurs for "theophanies as well as for appearance to the eyes and other senses" (Thiselton 2000: 1198).

The use of the aorist passive of the Greek verb *ὁράω*, 'see', as appearance is "a Hebraism preserved in the LXX (e.g., Gen. 12:7; 17:1; 18:1; 26:2, 24; 31:13; 35:9; 48:3;

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Ex. 3:2; 6:3; 16:10; Lev. 9:23; Num. 14:10; 16:19; 17:7; 20:6; Judg. 13:3; 1Kgs. 3:5 [usually translating Hebrew *wayyērā'*, *niphal* impf.])", considers Fitzmyer (Fitzmyer 2008: 549). As such, when translated as *ὤφθη,* an intransitive meaning, 'appeared', emerges. "The early Christian tradition about the risen Christ's appearances, then, imitated this Hebraic usage", explains Fitzmyer (Fitzmyer 2008: 549). Moreover, *ὤφθη*, the passive aorist of *ὁράω*, which can be considered a divine passive in relation to theophany in LXX, should be understood in 1Cor. 15 in connection to the spiritual, interior perception (Thurston 2003: 235).

St. Paul's list of the Resurrection witnesses begins with Cephas/Peter (possibly because of his leadership position) and the Twelve (possibly because of the symbolic strength of the number for Jews). The appearance "to more than five hundred brothers at one time" is not mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament (St. Paul mentions this maybe because the majority of them remained alive and could be answered). St. James is described as a leader of the Christian church at Jerusalem only in Acts, but St. Paul records in 1Cor. 15 Christ's post-resurrection appearance to St. James, the Lord's brother. The appearance to "all the apostles" closes this main part of the list, just prior to the final mentioned appearance, to St. Paul, "as to one untimely born". Literally, this would mean he had been "prematurely born", as "a kind of stillborn Christian before the vision on the way to Damascus" (Orr/Walther 1976: 321-322). Probably the 'miscarriage' or 'untimeliness idea' is the meaning of the term, consider further Orr and Walther. His role as persecutor of the Christian Church could be "a misfortune that resulted from the 'untimeliness' of Paul's conversion" (Orr/Walther 1976: 323). Hence, Orr and Walther conclude: "His digression, which came out of his mention of his somewhat irregular place in the chain of witnesses to the resurrection, has worked around to proclamation and ensuing faith, the action of God's grace" (Orr/Walther 1976: 323).

Some understood *ἔκτρωμα* as a term of abuse used by St. Paul's opponents who were questioning his apostolic office. While the other Apostles had seen Lord Jesus during His earthly ministry, he was persecuting the early Church community. It could be considered that prior to his conversion his behavior was monstrous and he was having no true life. However, says Schneider, "Paul is one who from the spiritual point of view was not born at the right time because he had not been a disciple during the lifetime of Jesus. His calling to the apostolic office, which presupposed having seen Christ, could not take place in the normal, orderly, organic sequence… He is torn from his previous course of life by the powerful intervention of the exalted Christ and set in the kingdom of Christ. He is thus brought to see Christ and to his apostolic calling by a very different route from that of the other apostles" (TDNT 2: 466).

Some scholars view *ἔκτρωμα* in relation with Gal. 1:15 as having a double function: St. Apostle Paul is appointed by God from the womb, but God's purpose has miscarried or been aborted because of his former persecution of the Church. Hence *ἔκτρωμα* would mean 'deficient', 'embryonic', 'unrealized' (Nickelsburg 1986: 204). For the same author, Nickelsburg, it seems even simplest to explain the term as "Paul's own invention" (Nickelsburg 1986: 205). However, others consider "Paul is describing himself as 'the abortion' from among the apostles… cast aside and rejected

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in the same manner as an aborted fetus". Hence, he is in fact apologetic regarding his apostolate (Mitchell 2003: 484-485). Moreover, others infer that a prophetic call pattern of "sufficiency in spite of insufficiency" is present in 1Cor. 15:9-10. Therefore, in the contextual proximity of *ἔκτρωμα*, such a call pattern could be adopted from the Hellenistic Jewish tradition reflected in the Greek Old Testament, and the metaphoric sense of unworthiness would be transferred to the term (Hollander/van der Hout 1996: 234-236). Unworthiness and exceeding humility is also a common line of comment when Church Fathers refer to 1Cor. 15:8 (St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians*, 38.6, NPNF I 12: 230).

Fitzmyer understands *ἔκτρωμα* in 1Cor. 15:8 as 'iscarriage' or 'untimely born' and considers it a derogatory term of St. Paul about himself along with "last of all" and "least of the apostles" and maybe less "he appeared also to me" in an emphatic final position. He asserts the term should be understood in a figurative sense, as in the LXX usages, meaning one "in the condition of death to whom grace […] has been shown" (Fitzmyer 2008: 552). In 1Cor. 15:8 St. Paul alludes to the Christophany he received on the road to Damascus "as a means of affirming the resurrection of Christ" (Fitzmyer 2008: 551). Another reason for alluding to this event could be for sustaining his apostolic authority (cf. 1Cor. 9:1-2; Gal. 1:12, 15) and the validity of the Gospel he is preaching. St. Paul does not make any difference between the risen Christ appearance to him, after Pentecost, and to others before the Ascension, neither he says there are no further appearances after him, he just places himself at the end of his list of the Resurrection's witnesses out of humility, although he is equally an apostle (1Cor. 15:11). Fitzmyer refers to St. Ignatius' understanding of the term in Epistle to the Rom. 9:2, 'unworthy', as an expression of humility (Fitzmyer 2008: 552). Fitzmyer does not favor the interpretation as term of abuse, like 'abortion', 'one who has been cast aside' and rejected as an aborted foetus from the apostolic body. He mentions the opinion that St. Paul was calling himself an *ἔκτρωμα* in relation to the unaccomplished purpose for which he was appointed from the womb until risen Christ revealed Himself to him as the Son of God. In conclusion, Fitzmyer stresses most the humility aspect of the term and the importance of St. Paul's testimony because "Paul is the only NT writer who maintains that he personally has had a vision of the risen Christ" (Fitzmyer 2008: 552).

Among the Fathers of the Church opinions, probably the most representative one is St. John Chrysostom's, who understands *ἔκτρωμα* in terms of the exceeding greatness of St. Paul's humility. "In that having first spoken modestly and heaped up against himself many charges, he then magnifies the things concerning himself… [T]his blessed man first declares his own misery, and then utters that lofty expression… partly to abate the offensiveness of speaking about himself, and partly that he might hereby recommend to their belief what he had to say afterwards. For he that truly states what things are discreditable to him and conceals none of them, such as that he persecuted the Church… cause the things that are honorable to him also to be above suspicion… [C]onsider the exceeding greatness of his humility… By first dwelling on the humiliating topics and those which involve accusation, he both took off what might be grating in such a narrative, and prepared the way for their belief in

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his testimony. And yet all those things were forgiven, but nevertheless he himself never forgot them, desiring to signify the greatness of God's favor… [H]e states both reasons and proofs: of his being 'one born out of due time', his seeing Jesus last; and of his being unworthy even of the name of an apostle, 'his persecuting the Church'… [E]lsewhere [he] makes mention of these same things… (1Tim. 1:12, 13)" (St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians* 38.6-7, in: NPNF I 12: 230-231).

St. Ignatius (*Epistle to the Romans* 9.2, in ANF 1: 77) understands the term as 'unworthy'. St. Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 1.4.7) uses the term in connection with *ἄμορφος*, "formless". Eusebius (*Church History* 5.1.45) describes the Church as a virgin mother who has been giving birth to both alive and dead children (those who did not confessed the Christian belief during persecutions). Theodoret of Cyrus (*Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* 266) asserts: "Paul compares himself here to an aborted fetus which is not even regarded by some as fully born". Ambrosiaster understands the term as "untimely born". St. Paul "was born again outside time" receiving "his apostleship from Christ" after the Ascension (Bray 1999: 150).

A clearly linked text to 1Cor. 15:8 (written in the spring of the year 55 – Schnelle 2005: 75) is Gal. 1:15-16 (written in the autumn of the year 55 – Schnelle 2005: 114), the Pauline paternity of the two epistles being recognized among researchers. St. Paul's crucial and life giving event of the encounter with the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus is described in St. Luke's narratives from Acts 9:1-30/22:1-21/26:1-23 (written between the years 90-100). Some other texts, more remote and not having a Pauline paternity, such as Phil. 3:7-14, are also considered in order to understand St. Paul's experience of Christ and the meaning of *ἔκτρωμα* in the light of his spiritual experience.

Especially Gal. 1:16, "to reveal his Son in me", will be discussed next. As in 1Cor. 15:8, the event of Christ's encounter on the road to Damascus is alluded to, described in terms of "seeing" Christ (1Cor. 9:1) or of Christ's "appearance" (1Cor. 15:8). At this point, St. Paul expresses his personal transformation (cf. 2Cor. 4:6 – "in our hearts"; Gal. 2:20 – "Christ in me") effected by the revelation of Christ as God's Son raised from the dead. However, Dunn considers that central to St. Paul conversion was a "change in his perception regarding the Gentiles in God's purpose" due to his commissioning to preach to them the Gospel (Dunn 1993: 65-66). Hence, "in me" should rather be read as "in and through me" (Dunn 1993: 64).

The *ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί* (Gal. 1:16) relates to the *ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* mentioned in Gal. 1:12. The reference to Christ's encounter on Damascus-road experience recorded as seeing of (1Cor. 9:1), appearance of (1Cor. 15:8), apprehension by Christ (Phil. 3:12) "probably points to the inwardness of the experience" (Bruce 1982: 93) (cf. 2Cor. 4:6). "The appearance of the risen Christ to him was an objective experience, in which Christ took the initiative: the repeated *ὤφθη* of 1Cor. 15:5–8 ('he let himself be seen') means that the appearance of the risen Christ was as real as his earlier appearances to Peter, James and others". In this experience, "conversion and commission came together", considers Bruce (Bruce 1982: 93).

In Gal. 1:16 St. Paul introduces the christological title *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ* with the reference to the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. The term *ἀποκαλύπτω* is

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interpreted in analogy to *ὁράω* in 1Cor. 9:1 (active form) and 15:8 (passive form). Betz questions himself whether *ἐν ἐμοί* refer to an interior experience or is a dative, "to me". Apparently for St. Paul "the two forms of visions (external and internal) are not as distinct as they may be for some commentators", he considers. Rather, "in me" corresponds to Gal. 2:20 ("Christ [...] lives in me") and 2Cor. 4:6 ("For God […] has shown in our hearts"). We should assume that all these texts complement each other. "This would mean that Paul's experience was ecstatic in nature, and that in the course of this ecstasy he had a vision (whether external or internal or both – 'I do not know, God knows' [cf. 2Cor. 12:2, 3]). This interpretation is supported also by Clem. *Homilies* 17. 13–19", explains Betz (1979: 71).

In understanding St. Paul's experience of Christ, Gal 1:16 *ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί*, "to discover His Son in me", plays its part. It seems to be the only text where *ἀποκαλύπτω* + *ἐν* (D.) has an abstract meaning (divine discovering as an interior experience to someone) similarly to *ἐν* (D.) in John, a clearer expression of the interiority (cf. John 15:4-5; 17:21-24). "The prepositional phrase *ἐν ἐμοί* could be a substitute for the simple dative (cf. *φανερόν ἐστιν ἐν αὐτοῖς*, Rom. 1:19; *ἐν τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις ἐστὶν κεκαλυμμένον*, 2Cor. 4:3), but here it probably points to the inwardness of the experience. For Paul the outward vision and the inward illumination coincided: Jesus, whom he persecuted, was revealed as the Son of God, and the revelation was the act of God himself", considers F. F. Bruce (1982: 93). As St. John Chrysostom (*Commentary on the Galatians* 1, in: NPNF I 13: 11) puts it, St. Apostle Paul richly received the Spirit, the revelation of Christ has enlightened his entire soul and he has had Christ speaking in him.

The verb *ἀποκαλύπτω* has throughout the Bible different meanings when accompanied by different prepositions. With *πρός* (Ac.) the sense is 'to discover (himself) to someone', while with *ἐν* (D.) the sense is locative (proper meaning) as in Judg. 5:2 LXX "revelation was discovered in Israel"; 1Kgs. 2:27; Prov. 11:13; Ezek. 16:36; 22:10 ("they discovered in you the shame of the father"). *Ἀποκαλύπτω* accompanied by D. and *ἐν* (D.) has an instrumental sense, 'to discover to someone by', as in 2Kgs. 22:16 ("through Lord's rebuke"); Dan. 2:19 ("through vision"); Dan. 2:30 ("by wisdom"); Rom. 1:17 ("through the Gospel"); 1Cor. 3:13 ("by fire"); Ephes. 3:5 ("by the Spirit"). Different from *φανερόω*, *ἀποκαλύπτω* firstly refers to discovering (of what before was hidden). What God has discovered to St. Paul was Jesus as the Christ (Thurston 2003: 234). Last, but not least, the apocalyptical element from St. Paul's thinking is obvious in his utilization of *ἀποκαλύπτω* similarly with 1Cor. 1:7 and 2Thess. 1:7 as technical term for *parousia* (Ralston 1990: 202-203). The experience of Christ is for St. Apostle Paul also an anticipation of *parousia*.

The interiority of the experience is also suggested by texts like 2Cor. 4:6 (*ὁ θεὸς… ὃς ἔλαμψεν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν*); Gal. 2:20 (*ζῇ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός*); 4:6; 4:19 (*μορφωθῇ Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν*); Col. 3:3 (*ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν κέκρυπται σὺν τῷ Χριστῷ ἐν τῷ θεῷ*). Before the conversion to Christ there is no true life. The only true life is in Christ (cf. 1Cor. 15:22; Rom. 5:12.17; 8:11; Col. 1:27; 3:3).

Some aspects from the Acts' three narratives about St. Paul encountering Christ are briefly discussed next.

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" Ἐν δὲ τῷ πορεύεσθαι ἐγένετο αὐτὸν ἐγγίζειν τῇ Δαμασκῷ, ἐξαίφνης τε αὐτὸν *περιήστραψεν φῶς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ* " (Acts 9)
" Ἐγένετο δέ μοι πορευομένῳ καὶ ἐγγίζοντι τῇ Δαμασκῷ περὶ μεσημβρίαν ἐξαίφνης *ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ περιαστράψαι φῶς ἱκανὸν περὶ ἐμέ* " (Acts 22)
"ἡμέρας μέσης κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν εἶδον, βασιλεῦ, *οὐρανόθεν ὑπὲρ τὴν λαμπρότητα τοῦ ἡλίου περιλάμψαν με φῶς καὶ τοὺς σὺν ἐμοὶ πορευομένους*" (Acts 26)
"On his journey, as he was nearing Damascus, *a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him*" (Acts 9)
"On that journey as I drew near to Damascus, about noon *a great light from the sky suddenly shone around me*" (Acts 22)
"At midday, along the way, O king, *I saw a light from the sky, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my traveling companions*" (Acts 26)

The verbs used in the three Lukan narratives are *περιαστράπτω*, 'to shine around like a lightning' (*ἀστραπή*) and *περιλάμπω*, 'to shine around'. A crescendo is to be noticed: "The description of the light from heaven grows with each mention of it" (Fitzmyer 1998: 758). Common elements of the three narratives are the seeing experience similar with an OT Theophany (seemingly outward but also inward) and hearing the voice of Jesus (cf. Deut. 4:9 seeing the words of God, hence the interpersonal relationship). Through the revelation experience Jesus is recognized as the Son of God (Acts 9:20) and the outcome is St. Paul's commissioning (22:21) and confession of the death and resurrection of Jesus (26:23). Hence, along with the revelation experience, life-death paradigm becomes again prevalent.

The many similarities in thought and expression between 2Cor. 4:6 and the three Lukan accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts suggest the allusion to St. Paul's encounter with the risen Christ in 2Cor. 4:6. In all these texts there are inward and outward aspects of St. Paul experience, but while in 2Cor. 4:6 he emphasizes the inwardness (e.g. the *καρδία* denotes the whole person, with special reference to inward experience), the Acts seem to refer to outwardness, considers Harris (Harris 2005: 336).

Besides the interiority, the continuity of the experience (cf. Philip. 3:7-14) is another important axis of life in Christ. *Χριστὸν κερδήσω* (3:8) *καὶ εὑρεθῶ ἐν αὐτῷ* (3:9) *τοῦ γνῶναι αὐτὸν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ* (3:10) *καταντήσω εἰς τὴν ἐξανάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν* (3:11); *κατὰ σκοπὸν διώκω εἰς τὸ βραβεῖον τῆς ἄνω κλήσεως τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ* (3:14). Gaining Christ (Phil. 3:9) signifies to be found in Him**,** to be united with Him. To be found in Him on Christ's day can be realized only if St. Paul/the Christian is "continuously and progressively living in union with" Christ during earthly existence (Bruce 1989: 114).

The knowledge of Christ refers to the "interpersonal union" with Him, to experiencing "the power of His resurrection" (Bruce 1989: 115). St. Paul's "growing knowledge of Christ, his sharing here and now both in his sufferings and in the power of his risen life, are bringing him nearer the goal" (Phil. 3:12) (Bruce 1989: 120). Hence, St. Paul's "ultimate goal (*ἵνα*) […] is that he might gain Christ perfectly (v. 8) or be united completely (v. 9) with him on the final day" (O'Brien 1991: 382). The continuously growing experience of Christ becomes an interior parousial event for St.

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Apostle Paul. "Using the language of dying and rising with Christ, Paul indicates that he enters into a deeper personal relationship with his Lord as he is continually being conformed to Christ's death (v. 10). He looks forward to attaining to the resurrection from the dead (v. 11)" (O'Brien 1991: 383). Christ has become indeed St. Paul's true life.

The one element without parallel in v. 7, *διὰ τὸν Χριστόν*, is for St. Paul "the decisive difference". The meaning of *διά* with the accusative, 'because of', sustains the understanding Christ had become central to St. Paul's life (O'Brien 1991: 383, 385). St. Paul continues with progressiveness in his thought, enlarging the meaning of *διὰ τὸν Χριστόν* (v. 8). Quite probable, St. Paul's understanding of *γνῶσις* comes from the Old Testament, signifying "a close personal relationship with someone" (cf. Hos. 6:6), meaning his intensely personal relationship with Christ ("Christ Jesus my Lord") (O'Brien 1991: 387-388). The "dying-and-rising-with-Christ theme" is prevalent (O'Brien 1991: 390). At the point in time of his conversion St. Paul loses *τὰ πάντα* and unites with Christ in His death and resurrection. In deepening his relationship of union and knowledge of Christ, St. Paul continues to unite and know the Lord. He "gains Christ day by day in an ever-deepening relationship" (O'Brien 1991: 391). St. Paul becomes more like Christ "each day, being continually conformed to Christ's death" (O'Brien 1991: 400). *Συμμορφίζω*, a *hapax legomenon* in the Greek Bible, means "to grant or invest with the same form". St. Paul/the Christian, being united with the Lord, shares in the events of Christ "death, resurrection, ascension, and future glory" (O'Brien 1991: 408). The participle *συμμορφιζόμενος* is in the passive signifying St. Paul's is conformed to the likeness of Christ's death. The present tense of the participle points to the continuity of the process of conformity to Christ's death. St. Paul is "renewed daily into the image of his Lord [cf. 2Cor. 3:18; 4:16-18], and this means into conformity with his death" and resurrection, and this is "an ongoing process" (O'Brien 1991: 408). V. 11, with its reference to the final resurrection from the dead, completes the dying-and-rising theme. "Our participation in Christ's sufferings and our being conformed to his death, is paradoxically the process in which we are being transformed into the image of Christ from one degree of glory to another (2Cor. 3:18) and in which the resurrection life of Jesus is being manifested" in us (2Cor. 4:10 f.; Phil. 3:10) (O'Brien 1991: 411).

The true life is when one lives with and in Christ (cf. Col. 3:3). "Life is hidden with Christ in God… and it cannot be tangibly exhibited. Rather it is received by faith as an eschatological gift and is retained by setting the mind on what is above" (Lohse 1971: 134).

There is no true life before experiencing Christ, which equals death in this matter of speaking, and the door to the continuous growing into Christ's life is dying and rising with Him.

3. Conclusions

Concluding, life-death paradigm is present in all discussed connected texts expressing much more than just a pattern of thinking for St. Apostle Paul. The major event of

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encountering Lord Christ, the Son of God, is a metamorphic one that makes death and the life conquering death to be the realities of St. Paul's whole being. Although the Christophany has similar elements with the Old Testament Theophany as light, lightening, voice, fear, blindness and also prophetic call elements, at the same time has similar elements with Christ's metamorphosis event. By its accent on the Godhead of Christ there is a difference from the others post-resurrection appearances. The inwardness and continuity of the experience are two important axes of the life in Christ experience and the life-death paradigm is recognizable in 1Cor. 15:8 and its context. From the connection between the afore mentioned texts and 1Cor. 15, *ektroma*'s meaning has a point of origin in the idea of death, but a direction vector towards life, being at its very core formed by these antithetical notions. The presence of death-life paradigm in both the proximal context and remote texts suggests a possible meaning in accordance with St. Apostle Paul's thinking and the main patristic line of comment (St. Paul's humility). Hence, an appropriate translation for the term could be "born dead".

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