

'Consider yourselves dead' (Rom 6:11): Biographical Reconstruction, Conversion, and the Death of the Self in Romans

⁷ ὁ γὰρ ἀποθανὼν δεδικαίωται ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας.

⁸ εἰ δὲ ἀπεθάνομεν σὺν Χριστῷ, πιστεύομεν ὅτι καὶ συζήσομεν αὐτῷ,

⁹ εἰδότες ὅτι Χριστὸς ἐγερθεὶς ἐκ νεκρῶν οὐκέτι ἀποθνήσκει, θάνατος αὐτοῦ οὐκέτι κυριεύει.

¹⁰ ὁ γὰρ ἀπέθανεν, τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ἀπέθανεν ἐφάπαξ· ὁ δὲ ζῆ, ζῆ τῷ θεῷ.

¹¹ οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς λογίσεσθε ἑαυτοὺς [εἶναι] νεκροὺς μὲν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ζῶντας δὲ τῷ θεῷ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. (Rom. 6:7-11 NA28)

⁷ For whoever has died is freed from sin.

⁸ But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.

¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 6:7-11 NRS)

⁷ Denn wer gestorben ist, der ist frei geworden von der Sünde.

⁸ Sind wir aber mit Christus gestorben, so glauben wir, dass wir auch mit ihm leben werden,

⁹ und wissen, dass Christus, von den Toten erweckt, hinfort nicht stirbt; der Tod wird hinfort nicht über ihn herrschen.

¹⁰ Denn was er gestorben ist, das ist er der Sünde gestorben ein für alle Mal; was er aber lebt, das lebt er Gott.

¹¹ So auch ihr: Haltet euch für Menschen, die der Sünde gestorben sind und für Gott leben in Christus Jesus. (Rom. 6:7-11 L17)

1. Comparing Deaths: Conversion and Death in Paul's Cultural World

“Neither an evolutionary derivation of Christian baptism from specific rituals in the world of early Christianity nor the rejection of any connection between the two worlds are feasible.” Fritz Graf, “Baptism and Graeco-Roman Mystery Cults” in vol. 1 of David Hellholm et al., eds., *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (de Gruyter, Berlin: 2011), 114.

ἀποθνήσκω (“I die”), 6x in Rom 6

θάνατος (“death”), 7x in Rom 6

νέκρος (“dead”), 4x in Rom 6

θνητός (“mortal”), 1x in Rom 6

“The central point in the passage is *death*.” William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC, 5th edition (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1968), 156.

In *Joseph and Aseneth*, the conversion of Pharaoh's daughter to the worship of the God of Israel, so that she becomes a suitable bride for the Jewish hero Joseph, is “conceived as a transition from the death and destruction which characterize the predicament of the godless to the life and immortality enjoyed by those who worship the true God.” Randall D. Chesnutt, *From Death to Life: Conversion in Joseph and Aseneth* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1995), 150.

Origen, who wrote a commentary on Romans, is “the first and *only* Eastern theologian to refer to the text of Romans 6 in relationship to Christian baptism in the first four centuries.” Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 57.

2. Complicated Deaths: Conversion and Death in the Argument of Romans 6

“The different senses of ‘life’ and ‘death’ always lie near together with St. Paul, and his thought glides backwards and forwards from one to another almost imperceptibly.” Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 159

These chapters are not only permeated by the motif of death, but also by “powers, submissions, and slaveries.” John M.G. Barclay, “Under Grace: The Christ-Gift and the Construction of a Christian *Habitus*” in Beverly Roberts Gaventa, ed., *Apocalyptic Paul: Cosmos and Anthropos in Romans 5-8* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 63.

“Bodily obedience is necessary as an anticipation of bodily resurrection.” Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 177.

3. Continuing to be Dead: Justification and Dying to Sin in the Argument of Romans 6

“Faith means ... reckoning as God reckons.” Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, sixth edition, translated by Edwyn C. Hoskins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 206.

“If God is the one who counts (*λογίζομαι*) faith as righteousness, now the baptized are to reckon (*λογίζομαι*) themselves to be dead to sin and alive to God as baptized into Christ. The faithful enjoy, therefore, the God-given status of righteousness. They also enjoy the state of being in Christ as those who have been baptized *into* him. God has identified and reckoned them to be righteous and buried and crucified with Christ. What is left for the baptized believers to do is the self-reckoning and self-identification that is in accordance with this God-given state that they already enjoy.” Samuli Siikavirta, *Baptism and Cognition in Romans 6-8*, WUNT 2.407 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 167-68

Paul’s use of *λογίζομαι* in 6:11, “seeks to elicit the act of faith, which accepts the salvific event embodied in baptism. Ontologically united with Christ through faith and baptism, Christians must deepen their faith continually to become more and more psychologically aware of that union.” Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 33 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 438.

Romans 6:11 is simply the first note in a crescendo of new “orientations, allegiances, and dispositions” that are to mold the behavior of believers and which fill the rest of the argument of the chapter. See Barclay, “Under Grace,” 69.

the “newness of life” (6:4) experienced by the believer “is not some reformation of the self, or some newly discovered technique in self-mastery; it is an ectopic phenomenon, drawing on the ‘life from the dead’ that began with Jesus’ resurrection.” Barclay, “Under Grace,” 65

4. Conclusions

“To have a conversion experience is nothing much. The real point is to be able to keep on taking it seriously; to retain a sense of its plausibility.” Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 158.