

**DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS**

**THE METAPHORICAL USE OF “CALL” BY PAUL: ROMANS AS  
A TEST CASE**

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**Project Abstract:**

Modern studies of the Pauline epistles have long noted the importance of metaphor as an element of Paul’s thought and expression. In the words of Richard B. Hays, “*Paul, the missionary preacher, is at least as much poet as he is theologian* [...] throughout his writings, Paul’s language sparkles with the veiled energy of metaphor and allusion.”<sup>1</sup> James Dunn notes that among the various metaphors employed in Paul’s discourse, the term *καλεῖν* is one of the apostle’s more significant soteriological metaphors which originate from everyday life of his lifetime, but he does not explore this important idea further.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, Kristal Stendahl and others<sup>3</sup> have stressed the importance of Paul’s concept of “divine

<sup>1</sup> R. B. HAYS, “Introduction to the Second Edition”, in: *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids 2002, xxi–l, p. xxxiii. Italic is authorial.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. D. G. DUNN, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids 1998, 329.

<sup>3</sup> Cf., for example, K. STENDAHL, “Call Rather Than Conversion”, in: *Paul among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1976, 7–23; B. R. GAVENTA, *From Darkness to Light*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1986; A. F. SEGAL, *Paul the Convert: the Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee*, Yale University Press, Yale 1990; E. KOBEL, „Paulus in seiner Welt“, in: *Paulus als interkultureller Vermittler: Eine Studie zur kulturellen Positionierung des Apostels der Völker*, Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, Paderborn 2019, 65–132. C. STRECKER, *Die liminale Theologie des Paulus: Zugänge zur paulinischen Theologie aus kulturanthropologischer Perspektive*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1999. Although I. Hussey stresses importance of call metaphoricality in his study of Paul’s soteriological use of call, he doesn’t go deep into it. Cf. I. HUSSEY, *The Soteriological Use of Call by Paul and Luke*, ACT Monograph Series, Oregon 2018.

calling,” but have lacked a comprehensive investigation into its metaphorical nature. In order to contribute significantly to the field of New Testament exegesis, my dissertation attempts to fill this gap in scholarship by focusing on the metaphorical aspects of Paul’s divine call language.

Metaphor is a complex literary phenomenon and its exploration has a long history from ancient to contemporary times. The long-standing view that perceives metaphor as a cognitive device reaches its fruitful climax in contemporary cognitive linguistic studies; more specifically in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which will be the primary methodology used in this research. In this theory, founded by cognitivists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, metaphor is approached as an element of everyday thinking and communication. It is defined as understanding one concept/conceptual domain (target) in terms of another concept/conceptual domain (source).<sup>4</sup> What is important for the purpose of this study is the observation that with metaphor, one kind of experience (usually concrete, psychosomatic) is used for the understanding of another kind of experience (usually abstract). Seen in this light, metaphor can arguably be understood as a primary cognitive device that is reflected in language. As cognitivists scholars have stressed, metaphors can have a strong influence on our ideas and the way we behave by way of perception and comprehension.<sup>5</sup> This dissertation similarly explores the ways the biblical concept of calling and its use metaphorically can be approached as a cognitive device through which the apostle Paul, among other biblical writers, shaped the perception and attitudes of his audience.

Given that Paul was naturally influenced by the social-cultural world in which he lived (as a Roman citizen and former Pharisee), I will be using CMT as my primary methodology to examine how the “divine call” in the Septuagint was used and interpreted metaphorically in order to shed light on its influence on Paul’s own use of the “divine call” metaphor in his letters. In this regard, I focus first on divine call in so called call narratives found in the Old Testament, and second on Deutero-Isaiah, which I argue is the origins for the use of divine calling as a metaphor. In call narratives, the call is observed as an act of speech, which has structural parallels with directive speech acts, since typically a speech transpires between a human and God, enabling us, with the use of CMT, to point out the metaphorical aspects of its perception. I suggest that metaphorical usage of calling is further elaborated in Deutero-Isaiah. Using CMT vocabulary, we could say that the speech act of calling has been used by Deutero-Isaiah as a source domain in

<sup>4</sup> Cf. G. LAKOFF / M. JOHNSON, *Metaphors We Live By*, University of Chicago Press, London 2003, 1–13, 244–245. Z. KÖVECSES, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, Oxford University Press, New York 2010, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. G. LAKOFF / M. JOHNSON, *Metaphors We Live By*, 244.

metaphorical reasoning; as such it calls attention to the wide range of nonverbal activities by God. Since “divine calling” requires speech interaction, its metaphorical usage stresses that God functions as an interactive character in history. Furthermore, God is always presented in this discourse as the “one who calls,” which metaphorically points to his sovereign managing of history. By Greek translation of Isa 40-55 metaphorical usage of the divine call is associated with *καλέω* language. With these insights, followed by a brief look at the metaphorical usage of “divine call” in the intertestamental and Graeco-Roman literature of Paul’s world, the first section of the research closes.

The second half of the study will focus primarily on the apostle Paul and his undisputed letters, aiming to show how he adapted the “divine call” metaphor from Jewish tradition for his own missionary circumstances and goals. Describing the Israelite God as the protagonist of human salvation, reaching its climax in the Christ event, Paul uses “divine call” language metaphorically when referring to different aspects of his own historical engagement and to the position of his addressees within God’s overall undertaking. What is important to highlight here is that the focus is not so much on Paul’s experience of being divinely called, but rather on the apostle’s metaphorical usage of “divine call” language. In other words, the aim of the study is to explore and examine the “divine call” as an act of speech and element of biblical discourse. Further, the dissertation seeks to provide an understanding of the metaphorical usage and conceptual structure that enabled Paul to reason about a new reality in Christ, thus shaping the perceptions of his audience.

Investigation into Paul’s metaphorical usage of “divine call” language will primarily focus on the passages found in his undisputed letters. After a short survey of 1 Thess 2:12, 4:7, 5:24 and Phil 3:13–14, I will proceed by offering a close examination of “divine calling” in 1 Cor 1:1, 9, 24–26; 7:17–24; Gal 1:6, 15–16; 5:8, 13 and Romans 1:1–6; 4:17; 8:28–30; 9:7, 12, 24–26. Firstly, all “divine call” language will be identified and analysed in their original context in order to offer an understanding of the general usage of “divine call” metaphors in both individual epistles and in Paul’s overall epistolography. I will argue that the apostle metaphorically used the speech act of calling (i.e., source domain) to reason and communicate about multiple aspects of the Christian life (i.e., target domain), stressing different connotations of the “divine call” metaphor (i.e., different elements of its target domain) from letter to letter in order to accomplishing his rhetorical purposes.

In the Letter to the Romans, our test case, “divine call” language is metaphorically used in the prescript and in further argumentation (4:17; 8:28–30; 9:7, 12, 24–26). At the very beginning of the letter, Paul reports that he was “called to be an apostle” (1:1), “called of Jesus Christ,” and “called to be a saint” among God’s beloved in Rome (1:6–7). Here Paul demarcates himself and his recipients by “divine call” language, pointing out that they are together participants in the ongoing process of being the recipient of God’s “divine call.” The language of

“divine call” which employs strong metaphors is prominent in 4:17b. There Paul speaks of God as one who “calls into existence the things that do not exist,” while in 8:28–30 he introduces people who are predestined, called and glorified as participants of God’s eschatological community. In 9:7, 12 he reflects on God’s constitution of Israel by “divine call” language, while in 9:24 he explicitly connects past stages of God’s formation of his people with the current moment, noting that God includes in his community “us whom he has called (ἐκάλεσεν ἡμᾶς), not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles.” In 9:25–26, Paul argues what he stated in 9:24 by Hosea’s prophecy, interpreting it in such a way that “divine call” language denotes the divine act of radical transition of human status from being “not God’s people” to “God’s people” and from being “not beloved” to “beloved.”

Taken together, these examples in Romans suggest that Paul consistently associates “divine call” language with God’s (re)creation of his people in Christ. The structure of “divine call” as a speech act aids his goal of representing God’s plan. In the metaphorical mapping of “divine call” to God’s formation of his people, God is perceived as a speaker (the one who calls), while believers among Jews and Gentiles are perceived as his addressees (the called ones). The “divine call” is God’s device by which he interacts with his creatures and recreates his community in different stages of history as well as in the moment when Paul addresses his Roman audience. Since the “divine call” anticipates a response, being a member of God’s community is not something given by God once and for all time, but it demands active engagement by humans. In other words, when used to describe the status of humans before God, the “divine call” metaphor represents Christians as God’s agents in the process of their own recreation, they are, as Paul asserts, “called to be apostle” and “called of Jesus Christ.” Thus for Paul, “divine call” language is not simply used to designate the actual historical act of calling but also as a means for comprehending and describing a much broader and more abstract experience of being a member of God’s community and maintaining a Christian way of life.

The value of examining Paul’s discourse through the lens of the “divine calling” metaphor is indispensable. This perspective introduces a polyvalent cognitive approach to Paul’s letters with special attention paid to how metaphorical “divine call” language can shed light on God’s relationship with humans. Paul uses this metaphor to influence the perception of his Roman addressees, motivating them to activate and reconstitute themselves accordingly, a technique that continues to remain relevant for contemporary readers. Being aware of metaphorical usage of “divine call” language in Romans instructs us not to reduce this language to some of its connotations (such as conversion, election, naming, etc.) while reading this letter, but to perceive it in a more comprehensive way. Divine call is associated with the biblical mythopoetic representation of God as specific author and manager of this world, and therefrom it takes its semantic richness and polyvalence, which Paul strategically used.

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This research seeks to result in an informative and exegetically applicable analysis of the “divine call” metaphor of Paul’s letters. Additionally, it seems that it can lead to further observations on the metaphorical use of the term ἐκκλησία (assembly) in Paul, since the word derives from ἐκ (from, out of) and κλῆσις (calling). The key aspect of this term, by which Paul often conceptualizes the corporative identity of those participating in Christian life, was being constantly (re)created through the interactive and engaging relationship between God and humans. As such, the study of the “divine call” metaphor can open new perspectives on God’s community with people and interrelations within it, bringing closer complexity and uniqueness of this phenomenon to Paul’s contemporary reader.

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