The article by Dr Murray Harris in the last issue of the Tyndale Bulletin raises incidentally the old problem of the nature of the 

θλίψις in Asia (2 Cor. 1:8). On his view it marked a turning-point in Paul’s perspective on death and resurrection. Without entering here on speculation about the circumstances or on discussion of the problems of Pauline thought which he has treated so ably, I suggest that a verbal point in verse 9 may shed light on his contention that Paul’s experience was one of mortally critical import.

The traditional rendering of the phrase ἀπόκριμα τοῦ θανάτου is ‘sentence of death’ (so AV, Rvmg., Rsv, NEB). The RV text alone offers the literal, if obscure, ‘answer of death’. The usual version goes back to Chrysostom and Theodoret, and is supported by a gloss of Hesychius.

ἀπόκριμα is a rare word for which only two early literary parallels are cited, but which occurs sparingly in inscriptions, including some close in time and place to the provenance of our text. They are sufficient to show that the supposed sense here is unparalleled. There is no ground in contemporary usage for seeing a judicial metaphor here. The comments of Ditten-
berger, MM, and Deissmann all point in a different direction.\(^5\) ἀπόκριμα became a technical term for an official decision in answer to the petition of an embassy.

The surviving parallels illustrate the point clearly:

(a) The earliest reference is probably that in Polybius, 12.26\(^6\).1, who says that the representatives of the Greeks in assembly at Corinth πραγματικάτατον ἀπόκριμα δοῦνα τοῖς παρὰ τοῦ Γέλονος προσβέβεταις (‘an answer straight to the point’).

(b) A lengthy but fragmentary series of documents of Pergamum, dealing with a dispute between Pitane and Mytilene and dating from the last years of the Attalid kingdom, mentions the word in a badly mutilated context: ‘... τὰ διποσταλέντα υν’ [αθ]τῶν ἀποκρίματα B[άγγειος Εὐθήμων et alii ...’. The persons listed are shown elsewhere in the inscription to have been the ambassadors of Pergamum.\(^6\)

(c) A decree of Acraephiae in Boeotia (AD 37) honours one who had led an embassy to the emperor: ἄρετος ἀπόκριμα πρὸς τὸ δῆνα πάνης [φιλείς]θραπιλας καὶ ἐπίθουν ὀγαθῶν πλήρες.\(^7\)

(d) A fragment from Rhodes (AD 51) uses the same formula. The broader context is evidently similar: ‘...] τὰ εὐκταίοτατα ἐνήρεται τὰ πόλει ἀποκριματα [...].\(^8\)

(e) A decree of Cos (AD 54) honouring the imperial physician C. Stertinius Xenophon records that he also held the post ἐπὶ τῶν Ἑλληνιστῶν ἀποκριμάτων. The occasion is evidently that to which Tacitus refers (Ann. 12.61): with the man’s secretarial office compare (h) and (j) below.\(^9\)

(f) The only other early literary reference is itself contained in the citation of a decree of Julius Caesar in favour of the Jews (Jos. Ant. 14.10.6.210). The privileges accorded Hycranus,\(^8\)

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\(^5\) Dittenberger on (e) and (h) below; MM and Deissmann, loco cit.

\(^6\) Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae, ed. W. Dittenberger, Hirzel, Leipzig (1903–1905) 335.94–96. The restoration of the list of names is guaranteed by lines 4–6 and 48–50. The verb is not preserved in the present context. The lettering is assigned to the mid-second century bc; the restoration of [τ]οῦ βασι[κ]ῶν (line 90) in the heading of the Pergamene decree dates the documents before 153 bc.

\(^7\) IG 7.2711.68–70. Cf. the related passages d. ἄνωκάιο (7.2711.107–108), and τὸ δ. ἀντέρκαυον (reply from Gaius/Caligula, 7.2712.47–48). Orthography sic, and so in documents quoted throughout this paper.

\(^8\) Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum, ed. W. Dittenberger, Hirzel, Leipzig, 2(1915–1924) 804.5 = 3(1899–1901) 386.5. Tacitus attributes the benefits bestowed on Cos to the high favour this Xenophon enjoyed with Claudia. For the same man’s alleged complicity in the poisoning of his imperial patron shortly afterwards see Tac. Ann. 12.67.

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his children, and the ambassadors sent by him conclude with the words: καὶ ἀπεσαμένους παρὰ δικτάτορος ἢ παρὰ ἰππάρχου παρελθεῖν εἰς τὴν σύνελτον εἰσάγοσι καὶ τὰ ἀποκρίματα αὐτοῖς ἀποδιδόσων ἐν ἡμέραις δέχα ταῖς ἀπάσαις ἀπ' ἦς ἢν τὸ δόγμα γένηται.

(g) A legal papyrus text of the second century AD cites part of an ἄποκρίμα of the late Hadrian: [ἐκ] μέρους ἀποκρίματος θεου Ἀδριανοῦ. The history of the case is obscure and the force of ἄποκρίμα here has been debated. It is usually explained as a 'rescript', though Wilcken compares the ἀποφάσεις of Trajan and Hadrian later in the same text. That term is more suggestive of the 'award' of an arbitrator.¹⁰

(h) An inscription of Miletus, undated but of about the second century AD, honours another person eminent in the public service λαβὼν [μ]όνος ὀμοί π[ισ]τίν ἐπιστο[λ]ῶν, ἄποκρ[ω]ν ἀτο[ν], διαταγμάτ[ων], κλήρου, . . .¹¹

(j) Suidas, on Dionysius of Alexandria, the librarian there in the later first century AD, records of him also that ἐπὶ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν καὶ πρεσβευόν ἐγένετο καὶ ἀποκριμάτων.¹²

These documents, when set carefully in context, give an interesting picture. The word ἄποκρίμα was evidently current in the official language of the early Empire. Two of the four texts from the territory of proconsular Asia (which included the islands of Rhodes and Cos)¹³ are datable as within five years previous to the writing of 2 Corinthians 1:9.¹⁴ The meaning is clear in several cases from the setting. The connection with πρεσβευταὶ is explicit. The formula ἐπὶ τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν ἀποκριμάτων and its variants are analogous with the titles of the celebrated


¹¹ Or. Graec. Inscr. 494.17–19. The man evidently held these responsibilities under the proconsul of Asia. Dittenberger comments: ἐπιστολαὶ et ἀποκρίματα ita distinguuntur, ut haec sint quae legationibus, per quas provinciales proconsulem advent, responduntur, illae litterae quas ipse ad imperatorem, senatum, civitates procuratoresque dat; a quibus rursus distinguuntur διαιτήματα, quae non nominant ad certos homines scribuntur, sed publice proponuntur, quae Latine edicta appellari solent. The term κλήρου he finds obscure.

¹² Suidas, Διονύσιος Ἀλεξάνδρεις.

¹³ For the provincial limits among the Aegean islands see Ptolemy, 5.2.1, 28–32 (2nd century AD).

¹⁴ On any view of the unity of the letter there is no great lapse of time involved in the unfolding of the Corinthian crisis and its correspondence. The passage will not be later than AD 56.
chief secretaries introduced by Claudius. The ἐπὶ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν (Plutarch, Otho 9.3; cf. (h) and (j) here) was in Latin the ab epistulis (Suet. Claud. 28). This Xenophon of Cos was evidently head of another department of the new imperial civil service. Perhaps his appointment gives us the Greek term corresponding to the Latin a libellis (Suet. Dom. 14), the secretary for petitions. 15

The only passage which might favour a different nuance is the papyrus text (g). But even if we understand that to refer to a 'rescript', the essential principle holds good. A 'rescript' was in essence an answer, an authoritative ruling on a question submitted.

It will be noticed that ἀπόκρυμα is freely used of a favourable verdict. Indeed, it was the success of a mission which prompted a city to perpetuate its ambassadors' names on stone.

I suggest that the usage of 2 Corinthians 1:9 is not unique at all, but to be explained in terms which were current. The metaphor is not judicial.

The situation is understandable in the light of a close reading of the whole context of 2 Corinthians 1:3–11, which I take to have been moulded by the experience of verse 8. In the five preceding verses θλίψις and cognates occur three times, πάθημα and cognates four times, and παράδειγμα and cognates no fewer than ten times.

A reconstruction might be possible somewhat on the following lines. Paul had in earlier days expected to survive to the Parousia (1 Thes. 4:15, 17). The language of 2 Corinthians 5, whatever else it may imply, points at least to a difference of personal perspective. The time of the change may be plausibly associated with the drastic experience of 2 Corinthians 1:8ff., of whose nature the Corinthians already knew. In his extremity Paul had 'petitioned' God about the outcome. The 'verdict' was death. 16 Yet with the answer Paul was given a rich assur-

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15 One may speculate that the contemporary influence of Xenophon and the favours bestowed on Asia through his agency brought to the popular notice the previously obscure term ἀπόκρυμα in the title of the secretaryship which enabled him to deal with the granting of petitions.

16 'Verdict' may perhaps be the best verbal rendering of ἀπόκρυμα, provided that it is given no forensic connotation. It is important to stress the neutral flavour of the word. In Paul's case the 'verdict' could equally have been 'life', but it was not God's pleasure to grant that petition.

We cannot dogmatize about the circumstances. It may well have been that a critical experience of the closeness of physical death occasioned the prayer and a consequent assurance of and resignation to a new understanding of the divine
ance and comfort that he might in turn be enabled to mediate assurance and comfort to others (1:4–6). No man could now say that he was privileged to be exempt from death until the Lord came, and was presuming to teach less favoured Christians to face a hurdle he would never meet. He was to share that experience too (cf. 1:7).

With this conception of prayer as petition and verdict we may compare closely 2 Corinthians 12:8–9. Thrice Paul besought the Lord to remove the ‘σκόλοπη in his flesh’: the answer was a richer endowment of strength to overcome his weakness, though the σκόλοπη was not removed.

We cannot however follow C. H. Dodd in his speculation that the experience amounted to ‘a sort of second conversion’ (BJRL 17 (1933) 104). Dodd views the case from a quite different perspective and his idea depends on the questionable identification of 2 Cor. 10–13 as part of an earlier ‘severe’ letter.

For a related metaphor cf. further ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ οὖν πρεσβευομεν ὅς τοῦ Θεοῦ παρακαλοῦντος δι’ ἡμῶν (2 Cor. 5:20). Paul’s petition as ambassador was not granted but he was privileged to be God’s representative in his turn to others. Perhaps the thought here is rather different and the parallel not to be pressed, but there is at least some confirmation of the presence of this embassy theme in Paul’s mind in the writing of 2 Corinthians.