

Identity, Ethics, and Ethos in the New Testament

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‘...as citizens of heaven live in a manner
worthy of the gospel of Christ...’

Petrus J. Gräbe

1. The foundation

In Paul’s letter to the Phillipians we hear the voice of a person in the deepest need, shackled for the sake of the gospel. And yet, it is a letter resounding with joy. How is this possible? And how can Paul be so concerned about *others* while his own circumstances are so miserable?

This leads us to the ‘deep structure’ or foundation of Pauline ethics as handed down to us in his letter to the believers in Philippi, namely *self service versus serving (O)thers*: ‘Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others’ (Phil 2:4; cf. also 1:17, 21; 2:21; 3:3, 8-11). This is, indeed, a corner stone of Pauline ethics as illustrated, for example, by 2 Corinthians 4:5 where Paul affirms: ‘For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake’.³⁹⁰

In contrast to Philippians 1:12–26 where Paul reflects on his imprisonment, he turns to the Philippians and *their situation* in the next section (1:27–2:18). Contrary to the previous narrative section, Paul now uses primarily imperatives. His imperative in Philippians 1:27 shapes the argument of the whole passage to 2:18: ‘live out your citizenship – the heavenly one (see 3:20) – in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ’.³⁹¹

2. The Gospel of Christ

The word ‘gospel’ (εὐαγγέλιον) occurs nine times in Philippians (cf. Phil. 1:5, 7, 12, 16, 27 [2x]; 2:22; 4:3, 15), which is, relative to the size of

390 Unless stated otherwise, all Scripture quotations are from the NIV.

391 Fee 1995, 161 correctly points out that the translation ‘conduct yourselves’ is unfortunate (cf. πολιτεύεσθε, 1:27 and πολιτεύμα, 3:20).

the letter, the most of all Pauline letters. He is specifically concerned about the Philippian believers' continued relationship with Christ. Although the epistle to the Philippians can formally be described as a 'hortatory letter of friendship', in Paul's hands everything turns into gospel... 'in his hands form does not come first, *Christ and the gospel do, first and always*' (Fee 1995, 13-14; my emphasis, PJG).

The noun *εὐαγγέλιον* ('gospel') occurs sixty times in the Pauline corpus, the verb *εὐαγγελίζομαι* ('preach the gospel') twenty-one times, and the noun *εὐαγγελιστής* ('evangelist') twice (O'Brien 1986, 213-4). The concept 'gospel' is of pivotal importance in Pauline theology. In some passages it denotes the content of the apostolic message. Paul can, therefore, speak of the gospel he preached, heralded, announced, told, offered, shared, and made known. He can also write that the gospel has been heard, received as 'tradition', welcomed, and taught.³⁹² It is in this context that the 'gospel of Christ' in Philippians 1:17 has to be interpreted – it emphasises Christ as the content of the gospel (cf. also Rom 15:19; 1 Cor 9:12; 2 Cor 2:12; 9:13; 10:14; Gal 1:7; and 1 Thess 3:2).³⁹³ By using the term *εὐαγγέλιον* ('gospel') Paul emphasises the crucial importance of evangelism, 'preaching Christ' (1:18) so that others will hear it for the good news that it is' (Fee 1995, 47).

Paul not only cared for the spiritual welfare of the Philippian believers, but he is especially concerned about the cause of the gospel in Philippi, a city where Nero is celebrated as *κύριος*, 'lord' (Fee 1995, 157). Following Christ as described in 1:27 would lead them to 'stand firm in the one Spirit (or in one spirit), striving together with one accord for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you' (TNIV).

3. Imitation of Christ

It is noteworthy how Philippians 2:1-5 takes up motives mentioned earlier (especially the notions of unity and unselfishness) and points to Christ as the principal example for believers.

392 O'Brien 1986, 215. The Scripture references are as follows: The gospel preached: 1 Corinthians 15: 1, 2; 2 Corinthians 11:7; Gal 1:11; heralded: Galatians 2:2; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; Colossians 1:23; announced: 1 Corinthians 9:14; told: 1 Thessalonians 2:2; offered: 1 Corinthians 9:18; shared: 1 Thessalonians 2:8; made known: 1 Corinthians 15:1; Galatians 1:11; Ephesians 6:19; been heard: Ephesians 1:13; Colossians 1:5; received as 'tradition': 1 Corinthians 15:1, 3; Galatians 1:9, 12; welcomed: 2 Corinthians 11:4; taught: Galatians 1:12.

393 O'Brien 1986, 215. Paul also mentions 'the gospel of our Lord Jesus' (2 Thess 1:8), 'the gospel of his Son' (Rom 1:9), and 'the gospel of the glory of Christ' (2 Cor 4:4).

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,³⁹⁴ then make my joy complete by being *like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.*³⁹⁵ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look *not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*

This is then followed by the Christ hymn, verses 6–11. The placement of the Christ hymn here is significant, as it conveys Paul's message to the readers to follow the example of Christ (Osiek 2000, 69). 'Imitation of Christ, then, is *the pattern of discipleship in Philippians*' (Hawthorne 1996, 169).³⁹⁶

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Martin Luther pointed to some excesses in the mediaeval devotion to Christ's humanity and emphasised that Jesus was not only exemplar but also *gift*. Karl Rahner aptly points out that '(t)he imitation of Christ does *not* consist in the observance of certain moral maxims which may be perfectly exemplified in Jesus, but which have an intrinsic value in themselves independently of him... [but] in a true entering into *his* life and *in him* entering into the inner life of the God that has been given to us'.³⁹⁷ Paul expresses this thought in Philippians 1:21: 'For to me, to live

394 Cf. Phil 4:5: Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

395 Cf. Phil 4:21: I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche *to agree with each other in the Lord.*

396 Hawthorne 1996, 170-71 points out that the presence of the *imitatio Christi* theme in Philippians 2:6–11 becomes even clearer in the light of the fact that these verses may have constituted an early Christian hymn. The impetus for this hymn may have stemmed from the life and teaching of Jesus as recorded in the early Gospel tradition. He mentions specifically the church's recollection of Jesus washing his disciples' feet, later recorded in John 13:3–17. In John 13:14–15 Jesus asserts: 'For I have set you *an example* that you should do as I have done to you'

397 Rahner, K. *Spiritual Exercises*, quoted by Stanley 1984, 129.

is Christ and to die is gain'. In Galatians 2:20 he observes that he has been crucified with Christ and no longer lives, because Christ lives in him. He continues: 'The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me'. The Christian life is a reshaping into Christ: 'And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are *being transformed* into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit' (2 Cor 3:18, cf. also Rom 8:29³⁹⁸). The foundation of ethics in Paul's theology lies in the images of 'I no longer live, but Christ lives in me'; 'being transformed into his likeness'; in the 'new creation' of 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15.

Otto Merk (1989, 172) correctly points out that the theme of the 'imitation of Christ' is not only expressed in those passages where it is mentioned explicitly, namely 1 Thessalonians 1:6³⁹⁹ and 1 Corinthians 11:1,⁴⁰⁰ but also where it occurs implicitly – in 1 Thessalonians 2:14; 1 Corinthians 4:16; Philippians 3:17,⁴⁰¹ and 2 Thessalonians 3:7, 9. The following of Christ determines, according to Paul, the whole Christian life. He talks about 'living in Christ' (e.g., Rom 6:4; Phil 1:27;⁴⁰² Col 2:6⁴⁰³), 'living in the Spirit' (e.g. Gal 5:25; Rom 8:4). Whoever died with Christ (Rom 6:4) and has been crucified with him in the world (Gal 6:14) has the responsibility to be obedient to the resurrected Lord and to live a new life (Rom 6:4). The concept of following the example of Christ (μιμέσθαι) focuses in the Pauline context on the act of obedience. The believers were not merely pointed to an outstanding ethical example, but were admonished to obey Him, who was himself obedient and who was exalted to be the Lord of lords (Phil 2:5-11).

The ethical dimension flows from the believer's sense of identity in Christ. 'How we see ourselves, then, determines how we will conduct ourselves...'. (Webster 1986, 309). The Christ 'story', so central to Philippians, affects ethical behaviour in different ways. It forms Christian vision and identity and in this way gives direction to the moral life. This story elicits imitation – believers are called to follow Christ's example – and in this way provides the contours for the growth of believers' ethical behaviour. To reflect on the Christ story also points to be-

398 'For those God foreknew he also predestined to be *conformed to the likeness of his Son...*'.

399 1 Thess 1:6: 'You became imitators of us and of the Lord...'

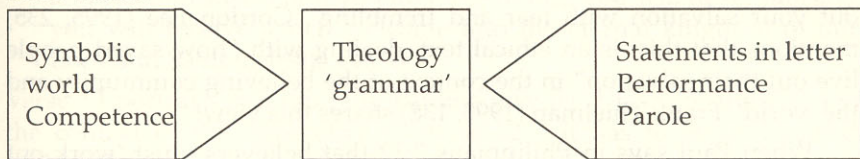
400 1 Cor 11:1: Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

401 Phil 3:17: Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.

402 Phil 1:27: Whatever happens, as citizens of heaven live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

403 Col 2:6: 'So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him...'

lievers' status and character beyond themselves. Their 'moral choosing is neither arbitrary nor self-directed, but determined at all points by the acts of Christ' (Webster 1986, 311). As believers their identity is shaped by their 'being in Christ' and in the Spirit. Reflecting on the Christological narrative reminds believers of the wonderful gift they received in the gospel, and also calls them to the highest ethical behaviour exemplified by Christ. The Christ story functions, therefore, as both indicative and imperative. Richard Hays (1988, 319) illustrates the relationship between identity and performance by using the concept of a symbolic world.



4. Ethical consequences of the Christ hymn

Wayne Meeks correctly pointed out that the most comprehensive purpose of the letter to the Philippians is the shaping of a Christian φρόνησις,⁴⁰⁴ a practical moral reasoning that is conformed to Christ's death in hope of his resurrection (Meeks 1991, 333). It is noteworthy that the verb φρονεῖν appears 10 times in Philippians. Paul's aim with this letter is to empower the Philippian believers both intellectually and from a moral perspective to live their lives worthy of the gospel of Christ (1:27). Φρόνησις/φρονεῖν indicates a practical reasoning not according to the civic life of the ordinary πόλις, where classical Greco-Roman ethics was practiced, but the practical reasoning of citizens of the heavenly πολιτεύμα (Meeks 1991, 333).

Within this context the story of Christ narrated in 2:6–11 functions as an example. This is underlined by the fact that Paul precedes the Christ hymn with the admonition: 'Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus' (τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἔν ὑμιν..., 2:5), and follows it with the word, ὥστε ('therefore', 2:12).⁴⁰⁵

Paul begins verse 12 on a positive note: 'Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence'. It is not stated to whom such obedience has been

404 Φρόνησις can be translated with 'practical reasoning' or 'practical wisdom' in order to distinguish it from the more theoretical wisdom. Meeks 1991, 331.

405 Cf. the apt chapter heading of Fowl's contribution 1998, 145: 'The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Philippians'.

given – to Paul in his preaching of the Gospel of Christ or obedience to Christ. It is probably ‘obedience to Christ’ (cf. 2 Cor 10:5-6) – although there is actually no contrast at stake here. In the letter to the Romans Paul points out that *faith in Christ* results in *obedience to Christ* (cf. Rom 1:5: ‘the obedience of faith’) expressing a life lived under Christ’s Lordship (Fee 1995, 233). Paul is concerned about the differences that have arisen among them – despite the Corinthian congregation’s long history of obedience. Unfortunately the fine play on words in the Greek is lost in translation: *παρουσία* (presence) and *ἀπουσία* (absence).

The imperative now follows almost as a climax: ‘continue⁴⁰⁶ to work out your salvation with fear and trembling’. Gordon Fee (1995, 235) mentions that this ‘is an ethical text, dealing with “how saved people live out their salvation” in the context of the believing community and the world’. Frank Thielman (1995, 138) shares this view:

When Paul says in Philippians 2:12 that believers must ‘work out [their] salvation’ he does not mean that they should ‘work for’ (JB, NJB) salvation on the final day. He means instead that they should ‘conduct’ themselves ‘in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ’ (1:27) as they await the final affirmation of their right standing before God at the day of Christ.

Carolyn Osiek (2000, 70) interprets this text by pointing out that *σωτηρία* has to be understood within the broader sense of health, welfare, and well-being, as well as protection and deliverance from danger. It was expected from effective rulers to provide this to their subjects. A ruler who fulfilled this expectation (e.g. Augustus) was proclaimed *σωτήρ*. Prior to its use in Christianity *σωτηρία* had the component of meaning of the salvation of an individual beyond mortal life – this meaning was, however, vague. Carolyn Osiek (2000, 70) concludes that *σωτηρία* in Philippians 2:12 does not only refer to salvation in an eschatological sense, although this component of meaning has to be included. ‘Paul is speaking of their total well-being, including their spiritual prosperity both now and in the future’.

This perspective certainly enriches our understanding of the text under consideration. With Gordon Fee and Frank Thielman we must, however, emphasise that Philippians 2:12 deals primarily with ethics and not with soteriology.⁴⁰⁷ This interpretation is confirmed by verse 15: ‘So that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without

406 The NIV translates correctly, as the present tense imperative here (*κατεργάζεσθε*) conveys the sense of duration.

407 The biblical message is, however, clear that the ethical dimension in believers’ lives has soteriological implications and *visa versa*. ‘Ethics’ and ‘soteriology’ are not mutually exclusive.

fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe'. The seriousness of their task is, however, underscored by the phrase 'with fear and trembling'. This expression must be understood within its Old Testament background where it refers to existence in the presence of God and 'reminds the Philippians of the grandeur of the final words in vv. 9-11' (Fee 1995, 236).

Paul's intention in Philippians 2:12 is expressed in a slightly different way in 2 Peter 1:10-11:⁴⁰⁸

Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Verse 13 portrays in a typically Pauline way (cf. 1 Cor 5:7 and Gal 4:9) the context of the imperative in verse 12 – it has to be understood within the frame work of God's previous action. Obedience requires both 'willing' and 'doing'. Paul encourages his readers by mentioning that they are not left on their own. God himself empowers them. It is significant that God not only empowers their 'doing', but also their 'willing'. In Pauline theology the mind is transformed by the Spirit to be conformed to God's character. The behaviour of believers can, therefore, be according to God's 'good, pleasing and perfect will' (Rom 12:1-2). 'The "doing of salvation" for Paul therefore lies in the "willing", which means the radical transformation of life by the Spirit' (Fee 1995, 238).

5. Further concrete admonitions: Harmony and perfection

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, 'children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation'. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. (Phil 2:14-16, TNIV)

These verses (including vv. 17 and 18) conclude the section of the letter to the Philippians, which started with 1:27, in which Paul admonished them to live their lives in a manner worthy of their heavenly citizenship – and spells out what he prayed for them in 1:10 ('so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day

408 As Thielman 1995, 138 correctly points out.

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of Christ', cf. Fee 1995, 241). The 'grumbling' alludes to the grumbling of Israel in the desert (cf. for example, Exod 16:7–12 [6x]; 17:3) and the next phrase quotes Deuteronomy 32:5: 'They have acted corruptly toward him; to their shame they are no longer his children, but a *warped and crooked generation*'. Paul admonishes the Philippian believers to abandon the attitude of the murmuring and grumbling Israelites and in this way work out their salvation with fear and trembling! By urging them to stop arguing Paul emphasises the importance of unity – a theme occurring throughout this letter. 'Arguing' probably refers to 'reasonings that have ulterior and malicious design... as in 1 Tim 2:8' (Fee 1995, 244). Paul reminds the believers that their task is to shine among the pagan Philippians like stars in the sky (cf. Dan 12:1–4). Their attitudes and way of living are clearly distinguishable from the rest of the society, but they also have the task to illuminate the darkness; the task to bring life to others through sharing with them the word of life, 'the life that Christ has provided through his death and resurrection, to those who will take the time to hear' (Fee 1995, 248). In a nut-shell: Throughout the letter Paul shares with his readers how he has devoted his whole life to the advance of the gospel (cf. 1:18, 21; 2:17). In Philippians 1:27–2:18 he urges the believers in Philippi, a missionary church, to do the same (Peterman 1997, 121).

6. Joy/Rejoice

When reading an ancient text, 'it is part of the hermeneutical approach to project a historical horizon that is different from the horizon of the present. Historical consciousness is aware of its own otherness and hence foregrounds the horizon of the past from its own' (Gadamer 2003, 306–7). It is, therefore, really important to listen to the voice of the text, before moving to the next step in the hermeneutical process: the fusion of the historical horizon of the text with our own present horizon of understanding.

Let's pause for a moment to look at the historical world unfolding before us. This letter was written by the Apostle Paul, imprisoned for the sake of the gospel in Rome, in the early 60s. It was addressed to the believers in Philippi, 'an outpost of Rome in the interior plain of eastern Macedonia' (Fee 1995, 1). When reading this letter a picture is portrayed of a congregation experiencing suffering and opposition in Philippi (cf., e.g., 1:27–30 and 2:17). Gordon Fee (1995, 30) mentions that suffering constitutes the church's primary historical context in Philippi and underlies much of the letter.

How is it possible that '(o)f all the themes that can be detected in Philippians, *joy* is the most obvious'? (Hawthorne 1987, 107; emphasis PJG). From a human perspective it does not make sense – the author of the letter is in prison and the readers are experiencing opposition and suffering. In the life world or horizons of both author and reader a dimension, a Person, is present that transcends the mere human. Psalm 5:11 can therefore shed some light on this seemingly paradoxical situation: 'But let all who take refuge in you [in God]; in the LORD be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you' (cf. also Ps 9:1, 2;⁴⁰⁹ Neh 8:10⁴¹⁰). Jubilant joy flows from a firm faith in God and the conviction that God acts to save his people (Hawthorne 1987, 107). Joy is a fruit of the Spirit and the ethical dimension attached to this concept in Philippians is clear when Paul admonishes his readers in 2:2 to 'make my joy complete by being *like-minded*, having the *same love*, *being one in spirit and purpose*'. Let's allow Paul to remind us – as he reminded the believers in Philippi over and over again – to '*rejoice in the Lord!*' (3:1; 4:4, 10).⁴¹¹ In the light of Philippians 1:4; 1:18; 2:17-18 and 3:1 Karl Barth (2002, 120) writes: '... "joy" in Philippians is a defiant "Nevertheless!" that Paul sets like a full stop against the Philippians' *anxiety* (1:18 and 2:17-18) and their possible *displeasure* over Epaphroditus (3:1)'.⁴¹²

7. Spiritual and ethical dimensions of a life leading to peace in every circumstance

Contrary to those whose minds are on earthly things (Phil 3:19), Paul reminds his readers that their identity is different⁴¹³ – the believers' place of citizenship is in heaven. 'And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body' (Phil 3:20b-21).

409 Ps 9:2: 'I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High'.

410 Neh 8:10: 'Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength"'.
411 Gadamer 2003, 307 emphasises the importance of *application* in the interpretation process.

412 For a discussion of Stoicism in Philippians, see Engberg-Pedersen 1995, 256-290.

413 See Wolter's 1997 insightful article on ethos and identity in the Pauline churches, especially p. 434.

In Philippians 4:1–3 Paul applies the principles of the previous section (3:3–21) to the Philippian situation and reaches further back to 1:28–2:18 with appeals bringing two outstanding issues to a closure, namely steadfastness and unity (Bockmuehl 1998, 237; Fee 1995, 385).

Philippians 4:4–9 describes the spiritual and ethical dimensions of a life leading to peace in every circumstance. In 4:4 Paul again exhorts the congregation to joy (cf. 1:25; 2:18, 28–29; 3:1). The formulation ‘Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!’ underlines that ‘joy’ stands at the heart of Paul’s message for this congregation. The outward expression of joy – the way other people experience the believer’s joy in the Lord – is mentioned in verse 5: Let your *gentleness* be evident to all. ‘This result goes *along with* joy. And perhaps we are to think at the same time of the fact that the Lord is near: the time of rejoicing is at the door – see that all men notice it!’⁴¹⁴

In which way is the Lord near – spatial (‘close by’) or temporal (‘about to appear’), or both? Rhetorically this series of concluding statements intends ‘to sum up and bring to a point the main message of Paul’s letter... *all* of these brief phrases belong together...’ (Bockmuehl 1998, 245). The nearness of the Lord (both spatially and temporally) also leads to Paul’s ensuing assurance: Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (4:6–7).

Having made the statement that ‘the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus,’ Paul now points to some practical implications of this ‘moral and religious guardianship for Christian life in Roman Philippi’ (Bockmuehl 1998, 249). The content of verse 8 is without parallel in the Pauline corpus. The list appears so Hellenistic in nature that Martin Dibelius was of the opinion that ‘Paul is here moving quite within the bound of rationalistic Greek ethic’ (cf. Furnish 1968, 88). The Pauline context differs, however, completely from that of the ethics of Hellenistic philosophy. The ethics of Marcus Aurelius is founded on the human being as a rational creature; Paul, however, appeals to the Philippian believers ‘to stand firm in the Lord’ (4:1) and to ‘rejoice’ in him (4:4). Furthermore, contrary to the rational approach of Hellenistic ethics, Paul exhorts his readers not only to ‘think about such things’ (4:8), but

414 In this way Barth 2002, 121 takes the interconnectedness of all these verses into account.

also to 'put it into *practice*' (4:9; Furnish 1968, 89). When this takes place the 'God of peace' will be with them.

The content of verse 8 is also qualified by Paul's remark in verse 9 that his readers should follow everything they have learned, received or heard from him. '(T)hey are to follow Paul's teaching and thus imitate his cruciform lifestyle'.⁴¹⁵ Let's now try to define the meaning of the concepts used in verse 8:

- 1) *Whatever is true*. Truth finds its measure for Paul in God (Rom 1:18, 25) and the gospel (Gal 2:5; 5:7). 'Whatever is true' corresponds to whatever conforms to the gospel.
- 2) *Whatever is noble*. In this context it probably refers to whatever is worthy of respect (cf. Prov 8:6).
- 3) *Whatever is right*. 'Whatever is right' is defined by God and his relationship with his people and also refers to 'righteousness'.
- 4) *Whatever is pure*. This word finds its context in the cult and refers to those things that were pure, because they had been sanctified for the temple (cf. the concept of being 'holy').
- 5) *Whatever is lovely*. The Hellenistic context needs to be taken seriously with this concept, as well as the next one. The NJB correctly translates: 'everything that we love'. This is a broad concept and can refer 'to a Beethoven symphony, as well as to the work of Mother Teresa among the poor of Calcutta' (Furnish 1995, 418).
- 6) *Whatever is admirable*. This word belongs to the same semantic field as the previous one and may represent the kind of conduct approved and honoured by the community at large.

This text has important consequences for living an authentic Christian life within one's cultural environment and applies to the marketplace, the arts, the media, the university, looking for what is 'true' and 'uplifting' and 'admirable'. The key to decide what is good and uplifting is the *message of the cross* by which believers have been redeemed and are continually being transformed (Fee 1995, 421).

415 Fee 1995, 417. In interpreting the following concepts I follow Fee 1995, 417-419.

8. In conclusion: The ethical dimension of the giving of gifts in Philippians 4:10–20

It is crucial not to consider this section in the light of twentieth century assumptions of gratitude, but to take seriously the conventions of gift-exchange and giving during antiquity.⁴¹⁶

The adverb *μεγάλως* occurs only here (4:10) in the New Testament. The concept 'to rejoice greatly' is found in several papyri, confirming the bond between parties. Although it is typically used at the receipt of a letter, it is not used at the receipt of a gift. Similarly Paul's joy is not linked to receipt of the Philippians' gift, but to their remembrance of him, demonstrated by the gift (Peterman 1997, 129). It is significant that the apostle's joy is 'in the Lord' – ultimately he ascribes the cause to God.

It seems that there had been an unexpected gap since the last gift Paul had received from the Philippian congregation. Paul asserts that the cause was they were hindered in sending the gift. The gift displays their concern for him – and therefore he was made happy in the midst of trouble.

The question arises as to the function and meaning of Paul's expression of contentment in 4:11. Paul emphasises that the source of his joy is not to be found in the fact that his need has been relieved. He has learned to be content (*αὐτάρκης εἶναι*) in all circumstances. Within the Hellenistic context of his day Paul's joy arising from relief from need might have been misunderstood as a request, as mentioned by Seneca (*Ben.* 2.2.1–2, 7.24.1–2).

The gift, therefore, displays the Philippian congregation's Christian mindset, which brings the apostle great joy. The apostle shares with his readers his contentment, which has to be distinguished, however, from the Stoic *αὐτάρκεια*. The image of the Church as the body of Christ emphasises Paul's conviction that members are mutually *dependent on each other*.

Related to the issue of giving, Paul emphasises the partnership between him and the Philippian congregation: The apostle contributed spiritual things and they gave a material gift (cf. Rom 15:27; 1 Cor 9:11). The partnership reaches, however, a more profound level: through their gift they shared in his trouble (4:14) and associated with the lowly (Rom 12:16). Furthermore, the gift is a spiritual sacrifice, pleasing to God – and will be rewarded by him.

⁴¹⁶ Cf. the important work of Peterman 1997, whom I follow in this section.

Contrary to the Greco-Roman understanding, by accepting their gifts, Paul has not become inferior and socially obligated by them. Quite to the contrary: by accepting their gifts 'they have been elevated to the place of partners of the gospel' (Peterman 1997, 159).⁴¹⁷

In contrast to the Greek and Roman approach that one displays one's virtue by giving, within a Christian mindset money should be used to *serve* others. Consistent with the Old Testament the reward comes from God and the thanks for the blessing of receiving financial help is addressed to God. Through this sharing a *κοινωνία* ('partnership') is established. The all-encompassing goal of sharing is *the spreading and confirmation of the gospel: κοινωνία εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον*.

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