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Communal Identity in *Philippians*

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the manner in which Paul's argument in his *Letter to the Philippians* functions to shape a sense of communal identity among his auditors.[1] In particular, I argue that when read in light of this recent work, we see the processes of identity formation at work in Paul's argument and that we can detect the basic contours of Paul's vision for the Philippian Christ-followers.

I will begin with a brief overview of central tenets of collective identity. I then devote the bulk of the paper to an examination of Paul's argument in *Philippians* in light of the dynamics of communal identity. The focus of the essay lies in the argument of the letter itself although I make limited reference to the context in Philippi. Although locating the *Philippians* within their larger socio-cultural context is necessary for a full examination of the identity-forming process in the letter, such a task would take us far beyond the scope of an article such at this.[2]

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[1] For major studies of Paul or Pauline texts built upon an informed social-scientific theoretical basis, see Regina Börschel, *Die Konstruktion einer christlichen Identität: Paulus und die Gemeinde von Thessalonich in ihrer hellenistisch-Römischen Umwelt* (Bonner Biblische Beiträge, 128), Berlin, Philo, 2001; Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans*, Minneapolis, Fortress, 2003; Atsuhiro Asano, *Community-Identity Construction in Galatians* (JSNTSup, 285), New York, T & T Clark, 2005; Minna Shkul, *Reading Ephesians: Exploring Social Entrepreneurship in the Text* (LNTS, 408), New York, T & T Clark, 2010; and Bruce Hansen, *'All of You Are One'. The Social Vision of Gal 3.28, 1 Cor 12.13 and Col 3.11* (LNTS, 409), New York, T & T Clark, 2010.

[2] Note, for example, that Börschel's full examination of Christian identity construction in Thessalonica (*Die Konstruktion einer christlichen Identität*...) runs to 461 pages of text.

II. Collective Identity[3]

Forged within the multifaceted forces of social interaction, collectivities come in a bewildering variety of configurations. They may form for any number of reasons, they may be made up of people whose adherence to the group varies depending on a further host of factors, and they are shaped by the particulars of time and place. This many-layered, contextual nature of social groupings makes collective identity a difficult matter to study and define.

Nevertheless, a number of widely agreed upon basic tenets concerning such identity do exist. In what follows, I offer a brief summary of these issues.[4] Given the extent of the subject and the limitations of space, I make no pretense of completeness. Yet, I believe this eclectic portrayal of the field would garner widespread assent among those involved in such study.[5]

I organize my analysis into three key components. First, collective identity is the perception of similarities and differences. Second, collective identity is perceived as persisting through time. Finally, communal identity is a social process. This general depiction of group identity will serve as the basis for my examination of identity-formation in *Philippians*.

1. Collective Identity Involves the Perception of Similarity and Difference

First of all, collective identity involves a perception of similarity and difference between one group of people and another. In simple terms, it entails a sense of "we are us, they are not us, and we are not them".

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[3] For a more thorough introduction to the subject as it relates to biblical studies, see James C. Miller, "The Sociological Category of 'Collective Identity' and Its Implications for Understanding Second Peter", in: Robert L. Webb – Duane F. Watson (eds.), *Reading Second Peter with New Eyes* (LNTS, 382), London, Continuum, 2010, 149-56. Portions of that article appear in what follows, sometimes verbatim. Reproduced by kind permission of Continuum International Publishing Group.

[4] The following summary of collective identity derives largely from Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity*, London, Routledge, 2004²). For a similar description of identity focused on ethnicity, see James C. Miller, "Ethnicity and the Hebrew Bible: Problems and Prospects", CBR 6/2 (2008) 170-213.

[5] Esler (*Conflict and Identity*...) makes good use of Social Identity Theory (SIT) in his groundbreaking book on Romans. I will use SIT selectively. My unease with the theory lies in its focus on how *individuals* identify with collectivities. Based upon my experience of living in a non-Western, more collectivist society for well over a decade (Kenya), I question whether beginning with individual consciousness is the best starting point for examining identity in pre-Enlightenment, collectivist cultures such as those of the first-century Mediterranean world. On the SIT tradition, see Henri Tajfel (ed.), *Differentiation between Social Groups*, London, Academic Press, 1978; Naomi Ellemers – Russell Spears – Bertjan Doosje (eds.), *Social Identity: Context, Commitment, Content*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1999.

Without a sense of commonality, collective identity could not exist. At the same time, similarity cannot occur apart from difference; to say 'we are alike' necessarily entails the idea that others are unlike us.

This sense of similarity and difference arises as a result of social interaction. Through the give and take inherent in social engagement, similarities and differences become apparent. These similarities and differences become the stuff defining the "boundaries" between groups, those factors that enable those involved on both sides of the divide to distinguish who "we" are as opposed the "them".[6]

A critical component in this process is variously referred to as ascription, categorization, labeling, or stereotyping. As used here, these terms all refer to the activity of attributing to a group characteristics shared by all members of that group.[7] This can occur in various ways. For example, we ascribe characteristics to our own group, a process often referred to as 'group identification' ('we are children of Abraham'; John 8,33).[8] We also categorize or label others as unlike ourselves ('Cretans are always liars'; Tit 1,12). A third type of categorization occurs when a group itself is categorized by an outsider or outsiders (think of being a Cretan in our second example). In each case, the attributed characteristics are believed to be shared by all or most members or the group.

One common form of ascription concerns what is variously called model figures, exemplars, or prototypes.[9] These are individuals who embody the group ideals or traits. They can be part of the group's past (however mythical) or present. In either case, part of the group's identity is found in emulating this central figure(s). By the same token, a prototype figure(s) of an outgroup can embody the ideals the ingroup sees as contrary to their own, an activity generally referred to as stereotyping.

2. Collective Identity Involves a Sense of Continuity Through Time

Describing communal identity as emerging out of social interaction does not mean that identity is spontaneous, as if it arises or exists only in

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[6]   A 'boundary' in this sense refers not to some sort of permanent barrier, but to the identified differences between groups that emerge in the midst of interaction. See below on § *3. Collective Identity is a Social Process*.

[7]   Rupert Brown, quoted by Philip F. Esler (*Conflict and Identity*..., 21), describes stereotyping as attributing to a group 'certain characteristics that are seen to be shared by all or most of their fellow group members'(*Group Processes: Dynamics within and between Groups*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2000[2], 290). Esler himself defines stereotyping as «social categorical judgments, perceptions of people in terms of their group memberships» (*Conflict and Identity*..., 21).

[8]   Jenkins calls this 'group identification', though 'self-categorization' or 'self-ascription' seem just as apt.

[9]   For a more complete description of the theoretical basis for this concept and its application to a letter written by Paul, see Esler, *Conflict and Identity*..., 171-94, and the literature cited there.

the moment. A critical component of collective identity is the perception that it persists through time. We can identify two factors that contribute to this sense of continuity: communal narratives and routinization or institutionalization of identity.

Communal Narratives. Collective identity involves a sense of place within an ongoing story of a group.[10] 'We" are "us" because people and events in the past have made us what we are. This past not only informs our self-understanding in the present, but also carries narrative momentum that creates expectations of future continuity. These communal narratives serve a number of vital roles in the life of a collectivity: defining the kind of world within which the group lives, determining behavioral expectations of characters who inhabit this narrative, and so on. In effect, a communal narrative provides a 'point of view' on the world.[11] Rooted in a particular recounting of events, characters, and settings, such a narrative cannot be anything but an evaluative recounting of the story of what brought us to where we are in the present. A communal narrative, therefore, tells us the way things *are*, but always from a particular perspective.[12]

Routinization/Institutionalization. Characteristic expressions of identity – from particular language usage, to styles of clothing, to eating habits, and so on – become routine. Such patterns of behavior turn into "the way things are done".[13] Once recognized as such, we can say they are "routinized" or "institutionalized" within a group.[14]

Philip F. Esler speaks of such behaviors as "norms" or "identity descriptors". These are «the values that define acceptable and unacceptable behaviors by members of the group. They tell members what they should think and feel and how they should behave if they are to belong to the group and share its identity».[15] They play a particularly useful role when group members face new and unfamiliar

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[10] Stephen Cornell writes, «When people take on, create, or assign an ethnic identity, part of what they do – intentionally or not – is to take on, create, or assign a story, a narrative of some sort that captures central understandings about what it means to be a member of the group» ["That's the Story of Our Life", in: Paul R. Spickard – W. Jeffrey Burroughs (eds.), *We Are A People: Narrative and Multiplicity in Constructing Ethnic Identity*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2000, 42].

[11] Jenkins, *Social Identity*..., 136. Jenkins at this point refers specifically to the "symbolic universe" depicted by Peter L. Berger – Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, London, Allen Lane, 1967.

[12] I have developed the idea of "narrative world" in relationship to the Pauline letters and *Hebrews*' in James C. Miller, "Paul and Hebrews: A Comparison of Narrative Worlds", in: Gabriella Gelardini (ed.), *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods – New Insights* (BIS, 75), Leiden, Brill, 2005, 245-64.

[13] Jenkins, *Social Identity*..., 133.

[14] Jenkins notes that one can just as easily speak of «routinization» or «habitualization» (*ib.*, 134).

[15] *Conflict and Identity*..., 20.

circumstances, helping them to discern what is appropriate in these situations. Thus, we see that expected behaviors and attitudes both maintain and reinforce collective identity.[16] In other words, identity becomes embodied in forms that helps reinforce and perpetuate not only collective self-understanding, but also the view of the world that supports this sense of self.

3. Collective Identity is a Social Process

Collective identities are not reified entities. Rather identities are constantly negotiated. As people bring perceptions of group identity with them into social interaction, this "identity" must be produced and reproduced in each new situation.[17] In the process, identity becomes redefined, if only slightly, for every fresh set of circumstances. Identities, therefore, are enacted or embodied perceptions of similarities and differences within a given social situation. In effect, group members must ask themselves at every turn, "What does it look like to be one of 'us' within this situation?".

Answering that question is a complex task. It depends on which aspects of identity come into question in the specific situation, how negotiable these facets of identity are, the social positions of the various parties involved, the number and degree of differences between groups, and so on. What features of identity are called upon in a particular situation can determine how vigorously and in what manner that aspect of identity becomes enacted.

Thus, social interaction organizes perception in the form of defined categories ('us' and 'them') that enable us to make sense of our social world. These classifications take on a customary feel over time. Yet, in fact, they develop as the categories are renegotiated in the ongoing process of ever-changing social situations. Similarities and differences between groups of people must be enacted in ever-new social situations. As such, communal identity is both situational and flexible. As much as they may be perceived as unchanging and continuous, collective identities in fact must be adaptable.

III. Identity-Formation in *Philippians*

In light of this conception of social identity as a process of interaction, Paul's letters can be understood to play a role on the ongoing for-

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[16] *Ib.*, 21.
[17] Jenkins, *Social Identity...*, 94.

mation of identity for the Christian community in Philippi. In Berger's and Luckmann's terms, Paul's letters constitute exercises in socialization into a particular way of organizing the world for his auditors and directing them into finding their place within it.[18]

Of the three issues I have highlighted regarding collective identity – the perception of similarity and difference, the sense of continuity through time, and the ongoing social process – the first two are most salient for understanding identity formation in *Philippians*. I understand Paul's letters as fundamental components in the process of identity formation. What requires attention is the manner in which Paul constructs boundaries and a communal narrative as part of this process. I will begin by focusing on a sense of continuity through time then examine how boundaries become constructed in light of that identity in the particular circumstances of the letter's auditors.

1. Continuity Through Time in Philippians

1.1 The *Philippians* Within the Story of God's Gospel

At first glance, *Philippians* appears to be an unlikely candidate as a resource for plotting its auditors within a communal narrative. Other passages in Paul such as *Romans* 5,12-21 and *1 Corinthians* 15,21-28 locate Paul's hearers within a narrative landscape that stretches from the first Adam to the second. In *Romans* 4,1-25 and *Galatians* 3,1 – 4,7, Paul narrates his auditors into a lineage reaching back to Abraham. *Philippians* contains none of this type of discourse.

But first appearances can be deceiving. Three statements in the letter opening embed the *Philippians* within a larger story. These are not insignificant texts. As scholars have long recognized, Paul calls attention to important issues in his letters by highlighting them in the letter openings. In other words, by his initial statements, Paul himself constructs a set of expectations for his auditors that frame the manner in which the letter to follow should be heard.

First, in Paul's opening thanksgiving (1,3-11) he gives thanks for their «partnership in the gospel» (1,5; ἐπὶ τῇ χοινωνίᾳ ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιου). If one understands εὐαγγέλιου simply as a message about how an individual gets to heaven, this can be taken simply as Paul's commendation to the Philippians for being active evangelists.[19]

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[18] Berger–Luckmann, *Social Construction*..., especially 129-63.

[19] For example James Patrick Ware takes the preposition phrase in 1,5, along with the reference to the *Philippians* being «sharers in grace» at 1,7 as evidence that partnership «in the spread of the gospel» in an evangelistic sense «as the central theme of the epistle» [*The Mission of the*

If, however, one understands Paul's use of εὐαγγέλιου as a reference to the whole actions and purposes of God expressed in the life, death, resurrection, and enthronement of Jesus *and the repercussions of those events*, it quickly becomes apparent that the Philippians' partnership involves a participation in something far larger. Note that Paul's labeling of the Philippians as "partners" in the gospel is his *first* ground for his thanks to God for them, thereby highlighting its significance.

This element of partnership receives additional emphasis in v. 7. There Paul judges (φρονείν) that he is justified in his evaluation of the Philippians, that God will complete God's good work begun among them, because they are "partakers" (συγκοινωνούς) with Paul in God's grace. As at 1,5, Paul employs to κοινωνία vocabulary in order to commend the Philippians, giving emphasis via repetition to this theme of sharing in some venture. Furthermore, at 1,7, the Philippians are said to share in God's χάρις toward Paul. As with "gospel", if we limit "grace" to God's saving power made available to Paul individually, we miss the larger context of Paul's thought. For Paul, God's grace includes God's effective power working through Paul, enabling him to carry out God's call. The Philippians *share* in *this* grace with Paul.[20] So Paul establishes at the outset of the letter the Philippians' participation in God's ongoing gospel activity and the empowering power that makes this participation possible and fruitful.

A second narrative component found in the letter opening consists of Paul's reference to God's work among them that began in the past, and which God will bring to «completion at the day of Jesus Christ» (1,6). This divine work consists precisely of the outworking of the "gospel" in which the Philippians have become caught up. The Philippians stand between the commencement of this work among them in the past and the finalization of that work at the coming of the exalted Jesus. In Paul's words from later in the letter, their task in the present is to «work out» their «own salvation with fear and trembling» (2,12).

A third narrative element involves the fact that the Philippians are caught up in God's saving purposes expressed through the events narrated concerning "Christ Jesus". In order to describe this story, I need to turn to the routinization of behavior as a factor in communal identity since the communal behavior Paul advocates emerges from the narrative pattern of Christ.

Church in Paul's Letter to the Philippians in the Context of Ancient Judaism (NovTSup, 120), Leiden, Brill, 2005, 168].

[20] In saying this I am not overlooking that Paul's immediate reference to the Philippians' sharing in the gospel and its accompanying grace consists of the gift sent by the Philippians to Paul in his imprisonment. My only claim here is that we must not limit Paul's referent to that event only.

1.2 Exemplars of the Φρόνησις of Christ

Paul's argument in the letter revolves around the pattern Jesus' obedience depicted in 2,6-11. The contours of this pattern have been well-documented in biblical scholarship.[21] Jesus, though being in the μορφή of God, does not regard such equality as something to be exploited for his own advantage.[22] Rather, Jesus chose to humble himself for the sake of others, an undertaking that led to the extreme suffering and shame of the crucifixion (2,8). Paul labels the mindset embodied in this pattern of action the "φρόνησις" of Christ (2,5).

Paul calls upon the Philippians to practice this φρόνησις among themselves (2,5).[23] He indicates that pattern of discernment and action is embodied by Timothy (2,19-24), by Epaphroditus (2,25-30), by Paul's attitude toward his own circumstances in prison (1,12-26) and toward his own heritage (3,2-16). Paul then concludes the lengthy central section of exhortations by calling on the Philippians to «become imitators of me and those who walk after the pattern you have in us» (3,17). Discerning how to embody Christ's manner of life within the particularities of their own circumstances will constitute the Philippians exercise of godly φρόνησις. In *Philippians*, *this* is the behavior that should become the characteristic, routine manner of life among the Christ-followers. In this sense, then, Christ and those known to the Philippians who imitate Christ's mindset, serve as exemplars for what those whose «citizenship in heaven» looks like (1,27; 3,17-20).

One further point of emphasis regarding the identification of the Christ-followers in Philippi with Jesus Christ warrants mention. Paul's opening description of his auditors in 1,1 labels them, «all the saints *in Christ Jesus*» (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ). The theme of being "in Christ" then resonates throughout the letter, applied often to the Philippians or to Paul in settings where Paul's auditors are to see Paul as a model

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[21] See, in particular, William S. Kurz, "Kenotic Imitation of Paul and of Christ in Philippians 2 and 3", in: Fernando F. Segovia (ed.), *Discipleship in the New Testament*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1985, 103-26; Michael J. Gorman, *Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2001, and Idem, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2009; Stephen E. Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul* (JSNTSup, 36), Sheffield, JSOT, 1990, 49-101, Idem, "Christology and Ethics in Philippians 2:5–11", in: Ralph P. Martin – Brian J. Dodd (eds.), *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2*, Louisville, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998, 140-53; and, Id., *Philippians* (THNTC), Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2005. For a contrary perspective on what I argue here, see Brian J. Dodd, "The Story of Christ and the Imitation of Paul in Philippians 2–3", in: Martin–Dodd (eds.), *Where Christology Began...*, 154-61.

[22] For this interpretation of 2,6, see especially N.T. Wright, "Jesus Christ is Lord: Philippians 2.5-11", in: N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1992, 62-90.

[23] See the studies cited above in footnote 21.

for imitation.[24] So, for example, Paul asserts that the «peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus» (4,7; RSV). Or, he asks rhetorically, «If there is any encouragement in Christ» (2,1) knowing that within the realm of Christ such encouragement certainly exists.[25]

Thus, Paul locates the Philippian Christ-followers within the larger story of God's saving actions which he labels the "gospel". Their proper role within this "gospel" entails embodying the mode of life exemplified in the crucified and resurrected Lord.

2. *Perceptions of Similarity and Difference in* Philippians

Perceptions of similarity and difference can be dealt with under two headings. First, we will examine what Paul ascribes to the Philippians. Second, we will consider Paul's construction of boundaries between insiders and outsiders.

Paul describes his auditors in two noteworthy ways. The first of these, their ties to Jesus Christ including their location "in Christ", has been described above. The second, unique to this letter within the New Testament, ascribes to the Philippians "citizenship" in a heavenly realm. Paul does this in two important places within the letter body. The initial, general exhortation that stands over the body of exhortations in the letter calls on them to «conduct your citizenship in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ» (1,27; ἀξίως τοῦ Χριστοῦ πολιτεύεσθε). What this citizenly conduct looks like is then spelled out in greater detail via the exhortations in the remainder of the letter. Paul then concludes his plea for the Philippians to imitate him and those like him (3,17) by appealing to the fact that their «citizenship is in heaven» (3,20; ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει). The implication of this final appeal is that such imitation, in contrast to those who walk as «enemies of the cross» (3,18), is normal for those who bear such citizenship.

The κύριος of this realm has already been designated in the opening greeting as the «Lord Jesus Christ» (1,2), the one to whom the Philippians belong. This Lord has been super-exalted and given the name above every name by God through God's resurrection of Jesus (2,9-11). That resurrection was accomplished in recognition of Jesus' decision not

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[24] As a description to the Christ-followers in Philippi, in addition to 1,1, see 1,26; 2,1.5; 3,3; 4,7.19.21. As a description of Paul, with overtones of imitation, see 1,13. Paul describes the churches that he once persecuted as being «of God in Christ Jesus» (3,14). Note also the variant phrase, ἐν κυρίῳ, which occurs ten times in the letter.

[25] The debate over the precise meaning of Paul's «in Christ» formula within the Pauline corpus is extensive and unresolved. Here I only note the close connection Paul make between his auditors and Jesus Christ.

exploit what was rightfully his for his own gain, but to humble himself to the point of death for the sake of others (2,6-8).

Through Paul's use of the language of citizenship and lordship, as noted many times by scholars, echoes of the Philippians' context resound loudly.[26] Philippi was a Roman colony. Its inhabitants were regularly reminded of Rome's presence through public veneration of the emperor and the presence of the emperor's cult temple in the city's Roman forum.[27] Furthermore, acclaiming the emperor "κύριος" was a regular feature of imperial propaganda.[28]

All of this is to say that Paul, in ascribing citizenship to his auditors in a realm other Rome and in positing a κύριος other than the emperor, subverts central commonplace experiences and images, and the stories they embody, within their world. In other words, he exploits central vehicles used to construct and maintain Roman identity in order to create an alternative identity rooted in a different story with another empire ruled by a κυριός before whom all will bow.

In terms of constructing boundaries between insiders and outsiders, Paul refers to four groups over against whom his auditors can distinguish themselves. What is noticeable is that when Paul does identify such people in *Philippians*, it is not always clear they are non-Christ-believers. Rather, outgroups in *Philippians* are any persons who do not practice the pattern of Christ, whether followers of Christ or not. First, there are those who advocate circumcision for gentile, male Christ-followers (3,2). Paul labels them «dogs», «evil workers», and «those who mutilate the flesh» (NRSV).[29] Determining the precise identity of this group has generated no small discussion among scholars.[30] Whoever they are, whether Christ-followers or not, Paul deliberately contrasts his own stance towards his highly-regarded[31] ethnic credentials with those who exploit those credentials for reasons of having confidence in the

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[26] In addition to commentaries, see especially Joseph H. Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor in Roman Philippi: Carmen Christi as* Cursus Pudorum (SNTSMS, 132) Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

[27] See especially Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor…*, 64-87.

[28] Once again, the literature in support of this point is extensive. See, for example, David A. de Silva, "Ruler Cult", in: Craig A. Evans – Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, Downers Grove, IVP, 2000, 1026-30.

[29] Βλέπετε τοὺς κύνας, Βλέπετε τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας, Βλέπετε τὴν κατατομήν.

[30] For a full, but slightly dated treatment of the issue, see Peter O'Brien, *Commentary on Philippians* (NIGTC), Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1991, 26-35 and the literature cited there. For more recent, but less thorough treatments, see Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (BNTC), Peabody/MA, Hendrickson, 1998, 182-91; Mikael Tellbe, *Paul between Synagogue and State* (CBNTS, 34), Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001, 259-67.

[31] Paul does not demean his Jewish credentials (3,4b-7). Rather, Paul's argument for the surpassing value of embodying the mindset of Christ (3,8-11) has merit if, and only if, the markers of the Jewish heritage he now sees in a new light have high value as well.

flesh.[32] Like Christ, Paul's refuses to exploit what is rightly his for his own gain (3,4b-7), choosing rather to serve Christ and others (3,7-14). In other words, the «evil workers» serve as the negative counter example to Timothy, Epaphroditus, and Paul himself, who model (3,17) what should be characteristic of those «in Christ».

Second, Paul contrasts those who embody the mindset of Christ with that of Euodia and Syntyche (4,2-3). Through exhortations directed to each woman individually (παρακαλῶ . . . παρακαλῶ . . .; 4,2), Paul calls on them «to be of the same mind [τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν] in the Lord» (NRSV). Although these women are not regarded as outsiders to the community by Paul, their φρόνησις (4,2) stands outside what is appropriate for those "in the Lord". My point here is to reaffirm that the "boundary" Paul constructs in *Philippians* between insiders and outsiders concerns behavior reflecting what is appropriate "in Christ", namely practicing the "mindset" or φρόνησις of Christ.

Third, Paul mentions some of the "brothers" in his own setting who preach Christ out of «envy and strife» (1,15), «selfish ambition» (1,17), and «false motives» (1,18), thereby hoping to increase Paul's suffering. The precise nature of their preaching has been lost to history. Yet, Paul mentions them, their motives, and his response to their preaching in order to depict for the Philippians his example as one exhibiting the pattern of Christ. In spite of their motives, Christ is proclaimed (1,18) and whatever happens, Paul will be delivered (1,19) either by release from prison or by death (1,20). Either outcome is gain for Paul (1,21), though he prefers release since this will benefit the Philippians (1,24). In other words, his concern is more for them than for his own life (cf. 2,3-5).

Finally, in 1,28-29, Paul builds upon his discussion of «brothers» causing him trouble in prison in order to help his auditors deal with suffering caused by «opponents» (τῶν ἀντικειμένων) in Philippi. Paul makes no effort to characterize these opponents in a manner that would enable him to define the Philippian Christ-followers over against them. Rather, Paul explicitly compares the Philippians' struggle with these people to his own difficulties in prison (1,30). His point is that the Philippians should face their suffering in the same manner Paul faces his difficulties. This comparison of sufferings in 1,30 becomes the springboard for Paul's all-important appeal for practicing the φρόνησις of Christ beginning at 2,1. In addition, these paired sufferings serve as the first instance of imitation called for by Paul, a call that runs through the letter until its climax at 3,17.

Thus, the oppositional definition at work in *Philippians* concerns

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[32] Stephen E. Fowl labels the discussion beginning at 3,2 as one focused on «negative examples». *Philippians* (THNTC), Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2005, 145.

not the character of those outside the community. Rather, the contrast is between Christ-believers who practice the φϱόνησις of Christ (Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus) and those who do not (Euodia, Syntyche, the troublemaking preachers of Christ in Paul's context, and possibly the "evil workers" calling for Philippian males to undergo circumcision). True outsiders (likely the Philippians' opponents) are mentioned only insofar as they serve the role of allowing Paul to portray this practice for his auditors.

IV. Synthesis

Paul's *Letter to the Philippians* thus displays a moment in the process of identity formation among his auditors. Paul's varied arguments and exhortations are components of his efforts to socialize a group of people into a shared self-understanding, rooted in the story of the gospel and worked out in the community's attitudinal and behavioral norms. This is not a static identity, but one they must discern how to embody in their daily interactions with one another as insiders as well as in their engagements with outsiders.

In closing, I will attempt to synthesize what I see as the "theologic" structuring the world depicted by Paul's letter. This is the world in which the Christ-followers in Philippi must define themselves, a reality the Philippians must inhabit as they «work out their salvation» (2,12).

For Paul, the hard realities that give determinative shape to all others, the realities that define the Philippians' world, is that Jesus, being in the form of God refused to exploit that status for his own advantage, choosing instead to obey God humbly until meeting death on a cross. God then raised Jesus from the dead and enthroned him as Lord over all other names and powers (2,6-11). These events, along with their numerous repercussions, constitute the "gospel". Of the four events depicted in this story of Jesus (manner of life, death, resurrection, enthronement), different ones will come to the fore at various points in the letter. Paul calls on the Philippians to model themselves after Jesus' manner of life. But the entirety of Paul's appeal, in fact of the story line as a whole, hinges on Jesus' resurrection by God and enthronement as Lord.

1. Paul's auditors in Philippi, who have placed themselves under this exalted Lord, join others as part of the subjects of this ruler. In Paul's words, their "citizenship" (πολιτεύμα) is within Jesus' realm (and no other; 3,20).

2. Paul's auditors, therefore, must conduct themselves in a manner commensurate with such citizenship within the realm of the supreme Lord (1,27). Paul defines such citizenly activity in terms of the pattern of attitudes and actions found in their Lord's own refusal to exploit what

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was his own by right, but rather in sacrificial humility to serve others (2,6-11). The Philippians can find exemplars of such citizenly behavior not only in Christ, but also in Paul, Timothy (2,19-24) and Epaphroditus (2,25-30). Paul labels such behavior, should the Philippians embrace it, as «working out their own salvation» (2,12) or exercising the «mindset [φρόνησις] of Christ» (2,5).

3. This form of community life will enable to Philippians to endure in the midst of their present suffering until God brings God's good work among them to completion at the day of Christ (1,6). These attitudes and behaviors demonstrate proper "citizenship" in Jesus' kingdom. In other words, these attitudes and behaviors function as community-defining norms.

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