

a recognition of the rights and achievements of others. His choice of the word ἡγοούμενοι (*hēgoumenoi*, “considering/regarding”) is significant, for the same verb will be used again in v. 6 of the attitude of Christ.

Verse 4 provides a parallel contrast between concern for one’s own interests and concern for the interests of others. The NIV translation includes two words that are not in the NRSV: “only,” which is not in the Greek, and “also,” which represents the Greek word καὶ (*kai*) and is found in some Greek mss but not in all. The addition weakens the contrast, and the passage seems to make better sense without it; others may have thought so, too, and so omitted it, which means that the word may well have been part of the original text. If that is the case, then Paul was perhaps more realistic than his later “corrector,” and his instruction to be concerned with the

interests of others *as well as* one’s own is in line with the commandment to love one’s neighbor *as oneself*. The shorter text, on the other hand, seems to agree with 1 Cor 10:24. But we should, perhaps, understand the *kai* as having the meaning “rather.” That is, they should be looking to the interests of others *rather* than their own. What are the “interests” with which Christians are concerned? Paul does not specify. Indeed, there is no noun in the Greek, merely the definite article, followed by the words “your own” and “of others.” Perhaps he is being intentionally vague; the phrases could refer to possessions, to rights, to spiritual gifts, or to points of view.

The themes of these four verses all lead into the “hymn” that follows. Christ’s actions provide not simply an example for believers to copy but also the foundation of their Christian existence. (See Reflections at 2:12-18.)

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11, THE MIND OF CHRIST

NIV

⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
⁶Who, being in very nature^a God,
did not consider equality with God
something to be grasped,
⁷but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature^b of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
⁸And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above
every name,
¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee
should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under
the earth,
¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ
is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

^a Or: *in the form of* ^b Or: *the form*

NRSV

⁵Let the same mind be in you that was^a in Christ Jesus,
⁶who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
⁷but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
⁸he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.
⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the
earth,
¹¹and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

^a Or: *that you have*

COMMENTARY

Origins of the Christological “Hymn.” Philippians 2:5 introduces one of the best known and most influential passages in the Pauline corpus. It is commonly referred to as a hymn (and for the sake of convenience it will be referred to as such here). Whether or not it was composed as a hymn is uncertain. Its style is solemn and rhetorical, and thus it has a certain poetic quality, reflected in the fact that both the NIV and the NRSV set the passage as poetry. However, its structure does not conform to the rules of Greek poetry. Its pattern of regular stresses and the use of parallelism remind us of Hebrew poetry (as in the psalms); thus it has been suggested that it was originally composed in Aramaic. Its lines can be arranged in many different ways, and the very fact that this is possible should warn us to beware of imposing our own ideas of poetic structure onto the material. In particular, it is dangerous to do what some commentators do, and excise one or more lines as “Pauline additions” to an original passage, on the grounds that they do not fit the expected pattern.

It is, nevertheless, possible that Paul is quoting an earlier composition at this point. Certainly the introductory ὅς (*hos*, “who”) in v. 6 suggests that what follows is a creedal statement of some kind—though we must beware of thinking that it is any kind of formal creed. Who, then, composed the passage? One possibility is Paul himself. We know from his other letters that he was capable of using colorful language as well as the rhetorical devices of parallelism and chiasm that are employed here. With his Jewish background, he was obviously capable of writing in a “Semitic” style. Another possibility is that it was a pre-Pauline composition that he took over and used. In support of this theory, we should note that the hymn contains many unusual words, some of which are not found in Paul’s other writings or even elsewhere in the NT. This, of course, may be due to its poetic style, but many commentators believe that this passage, in fact, reflects the beliefs of the Christian community before Paul. But in that case, why should Paul quote it here? Was it something that was known to the Philippians? Or was it simply particularly appropriate to his purpose here? Certainly it was

the latter, for, as we shall see, whatever its origin, Paul has used the passage in a very Pauline way, and its theology is much more Pauline than a superficial reading might suggest. A third possibility is that the “hymn” was originally not a Christian composition at all, but was “gnostic,” celebrating the descent and exaltation of a redeemer figure, and that Paul took it over and adapted it. This view, at one time very popular, has almost nothing to be said for it. There is no evidence that the myth of the heavenly redeemer existed in pre-Christian times or that Paul was confronted by gnostic ideas at Philippi. Even if such a gnostic composition existed, it seems unlikely that it would be Semitic in form or that Paul would have made use of it. A final suggestion is that the “hymn” might have been composed by a member of one of Paul’s churches (possibly even at Philippi), which would explain why the ideas are so similar to his, even though the language is somewhat different. Whether Paul actually composed these lines, however, he has used them, and by using them has made them his own.

Ideas. More important than the origins of the passage are the ideas it contains and their relevance to Paul’s argument. But what are these ideas? And what is their background? Here again, we find widely diverging views.

The first thing to strike us is the fact that the passage falls into two main sections, the first dealing with Christ’s voluntary humiliation, the second with his exaltation. This pattern is familiar from other passages in Paul’s letters, though there are interesting differences. To begin with, the treatment of the theme is much more extended than usual. Second, the emphasis throughout the first section is on Christ’s self-giving. Elsewhere, Paul usually speaks of God as the one who sends or gives his Son, though it is not unknown for him to refer to Christ’s giving himself (cf. Gal 2:20 with Rom 8:32), and there is an interesting parallel with his reference to Christ’s obedience in Rom 5:18-19. In Phil 2:6-8, the focus is on Christ’s action. His exaltation in 2:9-11 is, however, the work of God, and here we have the third interesting

difference from parallel Pauline expressions, for the language is of exaltation, rather than of resurrection. Where Paul speaks of exaltation elsewhere, it is something that *follows* resurrection (Rom 8:34; 1 Cor 15:27); that is, his usual contrast is between death and resurrection. Elsewhere, too, the confession of Jesus as Lord is linked with the belief in his resurrection (Rom 10:9-10; cf. Rom 1:3-4, where he is declared to be Son of God by resurrection from the dead).

Philippians 2 is the earliest passage in the Pauline literature to raise in our minds serious questions about the pre-existence of Christ. Already Paul has made statements implying a change in status on Christ's part, notably in 2 Cor 8:9, where Christ, who was rich, became poor for our sake—this is the language of incarnation. Now we find Christ, who was in the form of God, emptying himself, taking the form of a slave, and becoming *man*; his subsequent obedience to death is apparently the second stage in the process of self-emptying.

It is not surprising to find Christ being thought of here as pre-existent. In Jewish thought, to speak

of something or someone in this way was to affirm that they were part of God's plan. Thus in Eph 1:4, Christians are said to have been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. Earlier Jewish writers, moreover, building on Genesis 1, where God speaks and the world is created, had described the role of God's Word (identified with wisdom and with the law) in creation (e.g., Prov 8:22-31; Wis 7:22-26; Sirach 24). For Paul, Christ is wisdom (1 Cor 1:24, 30) and the fulfillment of the law (Rom 8:3; 10:4); he represented God's nature and purpose from the beginning (2 Cor 4:4, 6). In 1 Cor 8:6 we find hints that Christ was being seen as the agent of creation, an idea elaborated later in Col 1:15-20. In Philippians 2, however, Paul is not concerned with Christ's activity in his pre-existent state, but with the idea, found already in 2 Cor 8:9, of his change in status. In Philippians 2 Paul spells this out more fully and goes on to describe Christ's subsequent exaltation. For the first time, therefore, we have a pattern that may be depicted in *Fig. 16*:

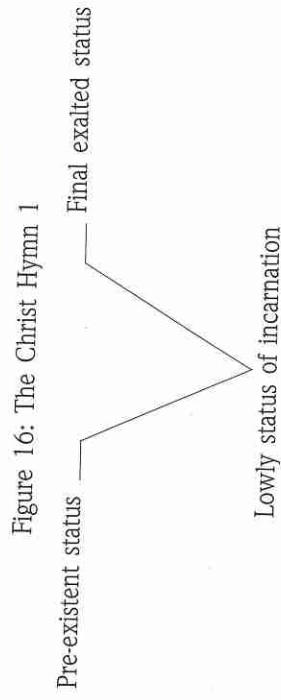


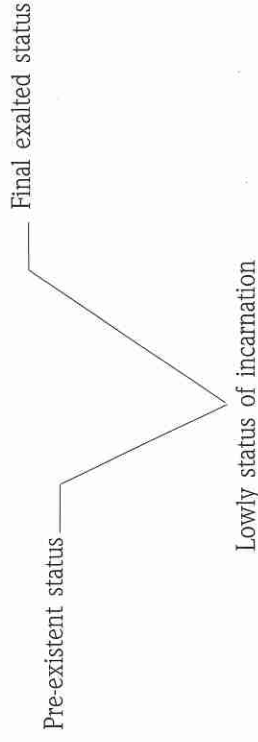
Figure 16: The Christ Hymn 1

We should note that Philippians 2 does not attempt to deal with questions about what the pre-incarnate Christ was *doing*; it is not until we come to Col 1:15-20 that this kind of problem is tackled. Nevertheless, we have moved a step beyond statements that "God sent his Son" to an emphatic declaration that Christ's incarnation was a deliberate act of self-emptying.

The turning point in the pattern is marked by the emphatic *διο* (*dio*, "therefore") in 2:9. Be-

cause Christ acted in this way, God has highly exalted him. What is meant by the expression "highly exalted" (*ὑπερυψώσεν* *hyperypsōsen*)? Does the *ὑπέρ* (*hyper*) element indicate something more exalted than the status Christ enjoyed before? If it is only now that Christ is given "the name that is above every name," does this mean that the one who "was in the form of God" did not enjoy "equality with God" in his pre-existent state? If so, we must amend the diagram as follows:

Figure 17: The Christ Hymn 2



To answer these questions, we must look closely at the text, but before we do so we must consider the question of background.

Background. If the roots of Paul's ideas in this passage are to be sought in Judaism (and not in Gnosticism), then where should we look to find them? Two main suggestions have been made, the first of which finds the background to Philippians 2 in the so-called Servant Song of Isaiah 53. The terminology is somewhat misleading. Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is the last of four passages that have been labeled "songs" by modern scholarship. In fact, there is nothing to isolate these passages from their context. Nor is there a distinct individual who is known as "my Servant." Rather, the phrase is used from time to time to refer to Israel or to a group within Israel, sometimes (possibly) to one individual. The parallels between Isaiah 53 and Philippians 2 have been found in the term "servant," in the idea of voluntary submission to suffering, and in the reference to death. On further investigation, however, these links prove to be illusory. The word used in the LXX of Isaiah 53 for "servant" is *παῖς* (*pais*), not *δoulos* (*doulos*), as in Phil 2:7. Moreover, the phrase "my servant" in Isa 52:13 is a title of honor—the very opposite of the degradation implied in the reference to a slave in Phil 2:7. It is true that the person described in Isaiah 52-53 dies a shameful death, but that is *in spite of*, and not *because of*, his status as God's servant. Moreover, it is by no means certain that the figure described in Isaiah 53 was understood to have suffered voluntarily. He suffered without protest (Isa 53:7); but that is not to say that he did so willingly, any more than a slaughtered lamb can be considered to be a willing victim. The assumption that Isaiah 53

describes voluntary sacrifice is the result of Christian interpretation of that passage, and the question at issue is whether that Christian interpretation is already reflected in Philippians 2. Finally, the phrase "he poured out himself/his life to death" in Isa 53:12 is often said to be reflected in the words *ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν* (*heauton ekenōsen*), "he emptied himself" (v. 7), and *μεχρὶ θανάτου* (*mechri thanatou*), "unto death" (v. 8). As we shall see, however, not only are these words widely separated in the Greek, but they refer to two distinct actions on Christ's part: the action of the pre-existent Christ in emptying himself and becoming man and the action of the human Jesus in being obedient even to death. There is no justification for piecing them together and seeing them as an echo of Isa 53:12 (where the LXX verb is in any case quite different).

The alternative suggestion regarding the background of the passage is that it is based on the story of the fall of Adam in Genesis 3. Links have been found in the phrase "in the form of God," which is reminiscent of Gen 1:26, and in the contrast between Adam, who grasped at equality with God, and Christ, who did not grasp at/cling to/exploit that equality. Whereas Adam was stripped of his privileges, Christ deliberately emptied himself, becoming what Adam had become—a slave, subject to death. Adam's rebellion (though Adam himself is not named in Philippians 2) is thus contrasted with Christ's obedience. In favor of this interpretation we may point to Paul's use of Adam elsewhere (most clearly in Rom 5:12-21 and 1 Cor 15:21-22, 42-50) and to the language Paul uses at the end of Philippians 3 (where the implications of the "hymn" for Christians are, as we shall see, worked out), language that echoes that which he uses elsewhere to

describe our restoration to the glory Adam lost (Rom 8:18-30, 39; 1 Cor 15:35-57; cf. 2 Cor 3:12-4:6). This interpretation has been objected to not only because the phrase ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ (*en morphē theou*), "in the form of God," in v. 6 is not used in the LXX of Gen 1:26, but also because the word μορφή (*morphē*) is not synonymous with the word εἰκών (*eikōn*), "image," which is used there and which is used by Paul elsewhere (see in particular Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:4; Col 1:15; 3:10). Moreover, although some have tried to exclude the idea of pre-existence from Philip-
pians 2 and have argued that it is the actions of the human Jesus that are contrasted with those of Adam,¹² it is difficult to make sense of v. 7 without acknowledging that it was the *pre-existent* Christ who became man. How, then, can we have a figure who is described in Adamic terms, who then *becomes* man and takes on Adam's likeness?

The idea that Christ became man is found elsewhere in Paul, and it is perhaps wise to begin looking for an answer to this conundrum there. Particularly interesting is Rom 8:3, since the background of this verse is the idea of the renewal of creation and the restoration of the glory lost by Adam. God, we are told, sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh; the result is that men and women are delivered from slavery and themselves become children (lit., "sons") of God (Rom 8:14-17). The same ideas are expressed in Gal 4:4-7. In both these passages, however, unlike Philippians 2, the initiative is taken by God, who sends the one described as God's Son. A parallel to Christ's self-emptying in Phil 2:7 is found in 2 Cor 8:9, where he is said to have become poor for the Corinthians' sake, with the result that they have been made rich. All three passages describe what we may term "incarnation," and in all three, the result of Christ's becoming man is that human beings are made what he eternally is.

Elsewhere, we find this same idea that men and women are conformed to what Christ is, and so become what they were meant to be. In 2 Cor 3:18, Christians see the glory of the Lord reflected in the face of Christ and are transformed into the same image; in 2 Cor 4:4 we learn that Christ is

12. Notabily J. D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (London: SCM 1980) 113-21.

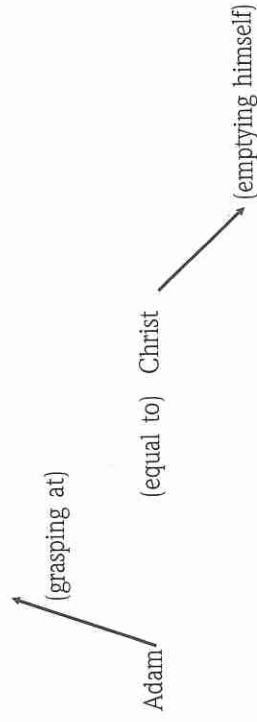
himself "the image." Similar ideas are developed in Colossians, where Christ is described as "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15) and where Christians are said to have taken off "the old man" and to have put on the new, which is being renewed after the image of its creator (Col 3:9-10). All these passages make use of Adamic language, since Adam was created after the image of God and was understood to have reflected the glory of God before the fall. Similar ideas seem to lie behind the passage at the end of Philippians 3, where we are told that the Lord Jesus Christ will transform our bodies of humiliation and conform them to his own body of glory.

There are two passages in which the comparisons between Adam and Christ are made explicit. In Rom 5:12-21, the comparison is the climax of the argument in the preceding chapters, where we are told that what happened in Christ was in many ways *not* the equivalent of what happened in Adam (Rom 5:15-17) because in Christ the grace of God was at work. The nature of this grace was spelled out in the opening verses of the chapter, where we were told that Christ died "for us" (Rom 5:8) and that we have been reconciled to God through the death of the Son (Rom 5:10). In 1 Cor 15:21-24, Christ stands over against Adam as the one who brings life instead of death and who is then identified as the Son who reigns until he hands everything over to his Father. Later in the chapter, Adam is described as the first man, who became a living soul (1 Cor 15:45, quoting Gen 2:7), whereas Christ is the second Adam, who is a life-giving Spirit. The first man is from the dust, the second man from heaven. Just as human beings have borne the image of the first man, so also they may bear the image of the second. The point of Paul's argument here is the nature of the future resurrection, when Christians will share the glorious body of Christ. In both these passages, Christ is understood to have reversed the effects of Adam's fall, and the reason why he is able to do so is because he is both man and Son of God. The relationship between Adam and Christ is not that of two successive competitors in a task, the first of whom fails while the second succeeds. Rather, Christ has to *undo* the failure of Adam, reverse his disobedience, and bring life where Adam brought death. Christ is thus greater than Adam.

The use of Adamic imagery elsewhere encourages us to suppose that it underlies Philippians

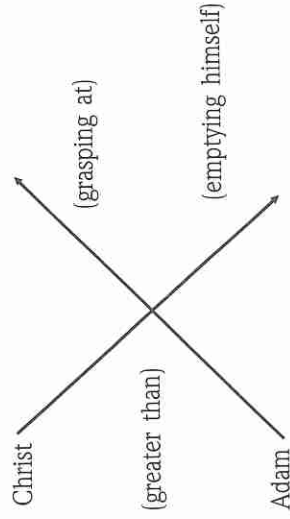
2-3, where we have similar ideas of Christ's becoming human, with the result that men and women become what he is. How, then, are we to deal with the objection that Phil 2:6 cannot be intended as a contrast between Adam and Christ, since the *result* of Christ's action is that he became man and took on human form? It is and Christ diagrammatically, the pattern would not be that found in equating Adam with Christ to the problem. As has already been noted, Paul does not regard Adam and Christ as equals, since

Figure 18: Adam Compared to Christ
Adam Not Equal to Christ



BUT

Christ Greater Than Adam



To make sense of the parallel with Adam, therefore, we have to understand Christ to be the pattern of what humanity was meant to be: the perfect image of God and the reflection of God's glory. If Paul uses the phrase *en morphē Theou* rather than the one used of Adam in Genesis, that is with good reason, for it would make no sense at all to say that one who was created "after the

image of God" (i.e., a man) became man! Christ is himself that image after whom Adam was created.

The fact that Paul does not use the word "image" here is thus no reason to reject the reference to Adam. The logic of the passage demands a contrast—between "the form of a slave," which expresses the condition into which Adam

fell, and "the form of God," which expresses the condition of the one who is greater than Adam. Why, then, in Philippians 2 does Paul use the particular term *morphē*, whereas similar statements in Romans 8 and Galatians 4 refer to God's Son? The basic meaning of the word seems to be "visible form," and since children are often like their parents, it has been suggested that the phrase is comparable to the title "Son of God."¹³ This visible form is perhaps to be identified with God's glory, which features in OT theophanies (e.g., Exodus 32). Or perhaps it is the expression of the inner reality that is at one and the same time concealed by and revealed by the glory. This presumably lies behind the NIV's "in very nature God," a translation that is nevertheless misleading (see below). The idea that God has a "form" that cannot be seen by humans is found in various Jewish writings.¹⁴ Particularly interesting is the passage in the Talmud that interprets Gen 1:27 as meaning that God created Adam "in the image of the likeness of his form."¹⁵ We do not know how early this particular interpretation came to be, but the fact that it distinguishes "the image" from "the form" is significant. A parallel idea is found in Philo (a contemporary of Paul) who uses the term "image" to describe what is closest to God. So God is the pattern of the image (who is also God's Word) and this image is in turn the pattern for humanity, since "God made the Man after the image of God."¹⁶ In later Judaism, we find the hope of future restoration, when men and women will again be like God. Thus *Gen. Rab.* 21:7 interprets Gen 3:22 as referring to the world to come, when God will say, "Behold, the man *has become* as one of us."

Ideas such as these may well lie behind Paul's use of Adamic language. For him, Christ is the true "image of God" (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15), the one who is "in his form," whereas Adam, who was created "after" God's image, became subject to sin and death because of his disobedience (Rom 5:12-21) and is now only a distorted copy of what he was meant to be. Those who have borne the image of the first Adam may, in turn, bear the

13. C. A. Wanamaker, "Philippians 2:6-11: Son of God or Adamic Christology?" *NJS* 33 (1987) 179-93.
14. See M. Bockmuehl, "The Form of God" (Phil. 2:6): Variations on a Theme of Jewish Mysticism," *JTS* NS48 (1997) 1-23.
15. *b. Ket.* 8a.
16. Philo *Allegorical Interpretation of the Law* III.96.

image of the last Adam (1 Cor 15:42-49)—last, not in the sense that he came into existence last, but because he represents the eschatological goal of humanity, God's original purpose for creation.¹⁷ He is the one through whom all things exist (1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:15-16), the embodiment of God's glory, according to whose image men and women are being restored (Rom 8:28-30; Col 3:9). If Phil 2:6 uses the phrase *en morphē Theou* rather than "the Son of God," this may well be precisely because the contrast of Christ with Adam is fundamental to the theme of the passage.¹⁸

2:5. The key to understanding how and why Paul uses this passage is found in v. 5, which reads literally: "Think this among you which also in Christ Jesus." Once again, we find that a missing verb has to be supplied after "which." What should that verb be? In v. 1, it made little difference whether we supplied "to be" or "to have," but here these two verbs can be interpreted in very different ways. The traditional interpretation was to understand the verb as "to be," as in the King James translation: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus"; this interpretation is reflected in both the NRSV and the NIV. The Philippians are urged to have in themselves the disposition that Christ showed. It has been argued, however, that Paul's appeal in these verses (like his ethical appeals elsewhere) is not to the example of the earthly Jesus, but to the events of the saving kerygma.¹⁹ In other words, Paul is not urging the Philippians to imitate Christ, but to be what they already are, "in him," to think among themselves what they think "in Christ." In this interpretation, the missing verb is once again *φρονέω* (*phroneō*), which is used at the beginning of the verse and which occurred twice in v. 2; we should understand Paul's command to mean "show among yourselves the attitude that arises from the fact that you are in Christ." In support of this view, we may note the use of Paul's customary phrase "in Christ" and

17. If 1 Cor 15:47 describes Christ as "the second man," that is surely because, as man, Adam preceded Christ; in terms of our own experience, also, we share in the physical body of Adam before we are transformed into the spiritual body of Christ.
18. See further Morna D. Hooker, "Adam *Redivivus*: Philippians 2 Once More," in *The Old Testament in the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J. L. North* (Worthington, ed. Steve Mayes, JSNTSup 189 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000) 220-34.
19. Notably by E. Käsemann, "Kritische Analyse von Phil 2:5-11," *ZThK* 47 (1950) 313-60; English trans., "A Critical Analysis of Phil 2:5-11," *JThC* 5 (1968) 45-88.

the fact that if Paul is referring simply to the behavior of Christ as a model, then vv. 9-11 are strictly irrelevant. Syntactically, it is also much more natural to supply *phroneō* from the first part of the verse than the verb "to be" and to translate *ἐν ὑμῖν* (*en humin*) as "among yourselves" rather than "in yourselves."

The choice, then, is between a command to have the attitude that was in Christ Jesus and a command to have an attitude that belongs to those who are in him. This antithesis between imitation and kerygma, however, is too stark. It is true that ethical behavior is never simply a question of imitating Jesus, but it is not true that Paul does not appeal to the example of Jesus Christ when giving ethical exhortations (cf. Rom 15:1-3, 7; 2 Cor 8:9). Of course, the Philippians' behavior depends on the fact that they are in Christ, and the fact that they are "in Christ" depends on the saving events of the gospel. But the attitude that is appropriate to those who are in Christ is that shown by the historical person whom they know as "Jesus," and the very fact that they are in Christ is the result of that attitude.

It is, perhaps, no accident that the phrase Paul uses in v. 5 is not "in Christ" but "in Christ *Jesus*," as though to remind the Philippians of what the one they now call Lord was like. The best translation of this verse, therefore, is one that conveys the whole extent of Paul's appeal, which is *both* to the attitude shown by Christ Jesus *and* to the attitude that is therefore appropriate to those who are "in him."²⁰ The NRSV's marginal note, which suggests the translation "Let the same mind be in you that you have in Christ Jesus," though probably intended to represent the kerygmatic interpretation, in fact best represents this ambiguity.

2:6. If the basic meaning of the word *μορφῇ* (*morphē*) is "visible form," then the NRSV's "in the form of God" is preferable to the NIV's "in very nature God." There is a certain (and necessary) anomaly in the expression, since the form of God cannot be seen. Similar ideas are expressed in Col 1:15, where Christ is described as "the image of the invisible God," and in John

20. See M. D. Hooker, "Philippians 2:6-11," in *Jesus und Paulus, Festschrift für Werner Georg Kümmel zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. E. Earle Ellis and Erich Grässer (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975) 151-64; reprinted in M. D. Hooker, *From Adam to Christ* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 88-100.

1:18: "No one has ever seen God: the only Son [or the only God], who is in the Father's bosom, he has made him known."

The meaning of the word *ἀπαργμῶς* (*harpagmos*), "something to be exploited/grasped" (v. 6), has proved even more contentious than that of the word *morphē*. From the time of the church fathers, there have been many different interpretations of it. The main dispute has been about whether the word referred to something Christ already possessed, but did not cling to, or whether it referred to something he did not yet possess, but might have clutched at. These two interpretations are represented in the two diagrams in Fig. 18, on page 505.²¹ If "equality with God" is regarded here as something the pre-existent Christ already possessed, then how are we to explain the language of the second part of the "hymn," which suggests that God has now bestowed on Christ a status that he did not enjoy before? If, on the other hand, he did not yet possess equality with God, could he truly be said to be "in the form of God"?

It now seems, however, that the most likely interpretation of *harpagmos* is that it refers to "something to be exploited."²² In this view, equality with God was something that Christ already possessed, but which he chose not to use for his own advantage. The implication of this passage is that God bestowed on him the status and honor he had not claimed for himself. (Christ's voluntary humiliation and the bestowal of this status of honor upon him are best represented by Fig. 18, 505.) There is another interesting parallel with the Fourth Gospel in the phrase "equality with God," since a very similar phrase is used in John 5:18, where Jesus is accused of making himself equal to God. His opponents regard his claim to be God's Son as a usurpation of a role that does not belong to him.

Verses 6-11 are unique in the Pauline literature in telling us what Christ did *not* do, before spelling out what he did. Why do they include this negative emphasis? One suggestion is that there is a reference here to Lucifer, who is said

21. For a full discussion of the various possibilities, see N. T. Wright, "ἀπαργμῶς and the Meaning of Philippians 2:5-11," *JTS* NS 37 (1980) 321-52; reprinted in revised form in *The Climax of the Covenant* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991) 62-90.
22. See R. W. Hoover, "The *Harpagmos* Enigma: A Philological Solution," *HTR* 64 (1971) 95-119.

to have rebelled against God and to have attempted to make himself like God (Isa 14:12-14). Lucifer, however, was never "in the form of God," nor was he created "in the image of God," and all the objections to a contrast with Adam (and none of the arguments in favor) apply to him. The most likely explanation of the negative is that it is intended as a deliberate contrast with Adam, who desired to be like God (cf. Gen 3:5, 22). Logically Genesis presents us with a contradiction by affirming both that Adam was created "in the image and likeness of God" (Gen 1:26) and that he was tempted to become like God (Gen 3:5). This tension between *being* like God and *desiring* to be like God is due to the fact that different sources have been combined there, but can nevertheless be seen as expressing two aspects of the truth, since men and women are both *like* God, yet distant *from* God as well. Verse 6 perhaps reflects this tension and provides a christological solution: Christ, who was "in the form of God," might well have claimed the privileges of equality with God as his right, but did not do so. What Adam desired, Christ was content to forgo.

2:7-8. Whatever precise meaning we give to the first statement concerning what Christ did *not* do, the next verb, *κενόω* (*kenōō*), is clearly intended to describe the very opposite: "he emptied himself/made himself nothing" (v. 7). The NIV translation avoids raising the awkward question, Of what did he empty himself? This question led, in the nineteenth century, to the so-called kenotic theory of the incarnation, which held that in becoming man, Christ emptied himself of the attributes of divinity, such as omnipotence and omniscience. Paul shows no interest in such matters, and the verb (which he uses elsewhere in the sense of "to nullify"; Rom 4:14; 1 Cor 1:17; 9:15; 2 Cor 9:3) was probably chosen to stress the contrast between the possibility Christ rejected, of claiming what was rightfully his, and his abandonment of his privileges. Once again, there may also be an intended contrast with Adam, who, as a result of the fall, was stripped of his power.

The contrast between what Christ did and did not do is seen much more clearly in Greek than in either of the English translations, for (in spite of earlier warnings about imposing a pattern on

the material!) there does seem to be a shape to vv. 6-7a. Literally, the passage reads as follows:

Who, being in the form of God,
Did not consider as something-to-be-exploited
Equality with God,
But made himself nothing,
Taking the form of a slave!

Here we see yet another clear contrast: between being in the form of God and taking the form of a slave. The OT name for God is "LORD"—the name that Christ himself is given in vv. 9-11. Had Christ exploited his equality with God, he might have been acknowledged as such from the beginning. Instead, he took the form—and status—of a slave. These final words shock us because of their incongruity: This is not what we expect of one who is in the form of God and who could, if he had wished, have claimed equality with God. There could be no greater contrast than this. Yet we should not think of this process as some kind of exchange. Christ did not cease to be "in the form of God" when he took the form of a slave, any more than he ceased to be the "Son of God" when he was sent into the world. On the contrary, it is *in his self-emptying and his humiliation that he reveals what God is like*, and it is through his taking the form of a slave that we see "the form of God." The NRSV's "though" in v. 6 is misleading. There is no conjunction in the Greek, but if we supply one, then it should perhaps be "because." There is an interesting parallel once again in the Fourth Gospel, where the glory of Jesus—and therefore of God—is revealed in the cross.

The condition of being a slave is now identified with that of being human, which suggests that the contrast between Adam and Christ is continuing. According to Gen 1:26, 28, Adam was intended to have dominion, as God's representative, over the earth, a dominion that he lost at the fall, when he was condemned to a life of servitude (Gen 3:17-19). Elsewhere, Paul describes the condition of men and women as that of slavery to cosmic forces, from which the Son of God rescues them (Gal 4:3-7; cf. Rom 8:15). In Romans 5-7, these forces are named as sin, the law, and death, and in various passages Paul speaks of Christ as coming under the power of all three (sin, insofar

as he was "in the likeness of sinful flesh," Rom 8:3; law, Gal 4:4; and death, Phil 2:8). Christ deliberately identified himself with humanity, in bondage to evil forces (a similar idea is found in Heb 2:14-15). Whether Paul is thinking of these powers here we do not know; what is clear is that to adopt the form of a slave (with all the dishonor and lack of privileges that implies) is the complete opposite of claiming the status and privileges of equality with God.

Adam was created after the image and likeness of God, but now Christ is born "in human likeness" (ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων *en homoioōmati anthrōpōn*) and is found in human form. The word translated "form" or "appearance" here is not *morphē* but *σχῆμα* (*schēma*). None of the three terms, *morphē*, *en homoioōmati anthrōpōn*, or *schēma*, is meant to suggest that Jesus was not truly human; they indicate, rather, that he shared fully in our human existence. If we are correct in understanding Paul to be thinking of Christ as the true image of God, according to whose image and likeness Adam was created, then there is a deep irony here. The true man now identifies himself with the condition of fallen humanity, and in place of the stark contrast in the first few clauses of the "hymn" we have two clauses in parallel. And the next line, "he humbled himself" (which corresponds to Christ's action of emptying himself in v. 7), introduces, not a contrast with his humanity, but its logical outcome: death (v. 8). Christ, however, was "obedient to the point of/to death"—and with that one word, "obedient" (ὁπήκοος *hypēkoos*), contrasts with Adam leap once again to mind. Adam was disobedient to God's command, and it was his disobedience that led to death for all (Rom 5:12-19). But to whom is Christ obedient? Paul does not say. The word "to" (μέχρι *mechri*) means "as far as." He was presumably obedient to the laws to which he was now enslaved, which decreed the universal rule of death; but ultimately he was obedient to God. Whereas for Adam death was the result of his disobedience, for Christ it was the result of his obedience in identifying himself totally with the human condition. Moreover, in his case this death was by crucifixion, the punishment reserved in the Roman world for rebels and disobedient slaves, thus marking the reality of Christ's self-identification with those who are slaves.

The last phrase in v. 8 is often excised as a Pauline addition to the original "hymn," because it is said to spoil the structure, but we should not amend the structures to suit our expectations. Moreover, the logic of the passage seems to demand this nadir of humiliation that, paradoxically, was for Paul the climax to the first half of the passage. More than two thousand years of Christian piety have obscured from us the shock and horror with which these final words would have been heard by their original audience. Crucifixion was the cruelest and most shameful of deaths, and there could be no greater contrast with the opening lines of the "hymn," or with the exaltation that follows.

There is, in fact, an interesting similarity between the first five lines (see above) and the five lines just examined. It is true that the structure is different (AABBC instead of ABABC), but that is because the content is different; these later lines explore what it meant for Christ to be human, rather than what it meant for one who was in the form of God to take on the form of a slave. For that reason, they use parallelism rather than contrast. But in this second group of lines, as in the first, the punch line comes at the end, with the shock of the reference to crucifixion:

having become in human likeness,
and being found in human appearance,
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to death,
even death on a cross! (author's trans.)

2:9-11. In the rest of the passage, we move into a totally different mood—and into a different structure again. The triumphant "Therefore" in v. 9 introduces the action of God, who now responds to Christ's self-emptying and humiliation. This final section appears to fall naturally into three shorter sections, each of three lines, coming to a climax in v. 11c:

Therefore God has highly exalted him,
and given to him the name
that is above all names,
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!* (author's trans.)

Throughout these final lines of the passage, the emphasis is on the superlative. The name given to Jesus is "the name that is above every name." The statement that "every knee" should bow or bend is further spelled out with the description of those to whom the knees belong and who are "in heaven and on earth and under the earth." Every living creature, including spiritual and demonic powers, will acknowledge Jesus as Lord; the adjective translated "under the earth" may well include the dead as well.

The verb *ὑπερυψώσεν* (*hyperypsōsen*), "highly exalted/exalted to the highest place," emphasizes the magnitude of the honor bestowed on Christ. The *hyper* element does not necessarily imply "higher than before," but since Christ made no claims for himself and is now exalted to the highest position possible, it does, in effect, mean that. He is now universally acknowledged to be "equal with God." The idea that the risen Jesus is given a status that he did not have before is implied in Rom 1:3-4 and 10:9 as well as in non-Pauline texts such as Matt 28:18 and Acts 2:36.

To give someone a name is to give him or her status and power. The name bestowed on Jesus here is "the name that is above every name," which is clearly the name of God (v. 9). Perhaps the fact that this name is not clearly specified is deliberate. By tradition, the name of God could not be spoken or written. Challenged by Moses to give a name in Exod 3:14, God replies, "I am who I am." But since the LXX commonly uses "the Lord" as a substitute for the divine name, we are not surprised to find in v. 11 the universal proclamation that "Jesus Christ is Lord." It is puzzling, then, to find the passage continuing with "that at the name of Jesus" (v. 10). In spite of what some commentators have occasionally argued,²³ the name that is given to Christ at his

23. Notably C. F. D. Moule, "Further Reflections on Philipians 2:5-11," in *Apostolic History and the Gospel: Festschrift for F. F. Bruce*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin (Exeter: Paternoster, 1970).

exaltation cannot be the name "Jesus," for that is the name he has already borne throughout his human life. Why, then, is it mentioned here? Presumably to emphasize that it is the one who came in the likeness of men (Jesus) who is now proclaimed as Lord. When the name of Jesus is mentioned, then all creation should acknowledge that "Jesus Christ is Lord" (cf. Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3). In the Roman city of Philippi, where the cult of the emperor was so important, the proclamation of *Jesus* as Lord would be seen as a challenge to political loyalties. But the pattern of behavior that Paul had placed before the Philippians would have been just as much of a challenge to the whole Roman social ethos.

There is an obvious contrast between Christ's proclamation as Lord and the earlier references to his taking the form of a slave and dying a slave's death. There are possible contrasts with Adam also: in the declaration that Christ will be acknowledged "in heaven and on earth and under the earth," since Adam was given dominion over the earth alone, and in the final line, which declares that what is now done is "to the glory of God the Father." At the fall, Adam failed to honor God and ceased to reflect God's glory—an idea that may well have influenced Rom 1:23 and 3:23. What Adam failed to do, the one who became man and is now proclaimed as Lord is able to do. The exaltation of Jesus, far from diminishing God's own position and honor, actually resounds to God's glory. The words "every knee shall bow/bend . . . and every tongue confess" are taken from Isa 45:23, where they refer to the worship of God. Here, knees are bent at the name of Jesus, and the confession made in v. 11 is of the universal lordship of Jesus Christ—but the end result of offering praise to him is the glory of God. Once again, the final phrase takes us by surprise and forms the punch line of the stanza—and of the hymn. Yet we should not be surprised, for whoever honors Jesus must also glorify God, because in Jesus we see the one who is "in the form of God" and who mirrors God's glory. (See Reflections at 2:12-18.)

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18, OUR NECESSARY RESPONSE

NIV

¹²Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

¹⁴Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe ¹⁶as you hold out^a the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. ¹⁷But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. ¹⁸So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

^a16 Or hold on to

NRSV

¹²Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

¹⁴Do all things without murmuring and arguing, ¹⁵so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world. ¹⁶It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. ¹⁷But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you— ¹⁸and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me.

COMMENTARY

2:12-13. Paul now continues with his appeal concerning the way in which the Philippians should behave, picking up many of the themes discussed in 1:27-2:4. As in 1:27, he urges the Philippians to live in a way that is appropriate to the gospel, whether he is present or absent. The introductory "therefore" shows us that this appeal is based firmly on what he has just said about Christ. He addresses his readers as "beloved" or "dear friends," another indication of the cordial relationship between them. There is no hint that the Philippians are not doing well. They have always been obedient, he says; so now, let them work out their own salvation with fear and trembling—not simply when he is with them, but even more when he is absent. Paul does not say to whom the Philippians were obedient; the NRSV assumes that it was to Paul himself, and there is some support for this in the references to his presence and absence. Ultimately, however, it is God to whom they owe obedience, and Paul is

simply the one through whom God's commands are channeled.

The word used for "presence" (*παρουσία*) also has the sense of "coming" and was used by Paul of his own hoped-for return to Philippi in 1:26. It is not clear whether Paul is referring to his presence with them in the past or to a possible future visit (cf. 2:24). Another possibility is that he is thinking of "presence" and "absence" in the more radical sense, discussed in 1:23-25, of remaining in this life or departing from it. If his intent is the latter, then his quotation in v. 15 from Moses' "farewell discourse" to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 32 is given added poignancy. It will certainly have occurred to Paul that this letter may well be his own farewell discourse to the Philippians. There may, indeed, already be an allusion (though not a linguistic one) to Deut 31:27, where Moses says that if the Israelites have been rebellious during his lifetime,