

PAUL AND CHRISTIAN UNITY: A FORMAL ANALYSIS OF PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4

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The extension of form-critical principles to Paul's epistle to the Philippians has concentrated on the topic of the *carmen Christi* of 2:5-11, the original source, structure and redaction of which are matters fraught with special difficulty.¹ Despite these problems, this line of investigation has been beneficial to demonstrate the special place form analysis has in the field of Pauline interpretation, both in opening a window on the literary structure and style in the Pauline documents and in throwing light on the form, setting and contents of any structural subsetting in terms of the whole letter.

Recognition of the hymnic features of Phil 2:5-11 has, however, tended to so affix scholarly attention upon this one specimen of early Christian liturgy that the rest of the letter has suffered from much neglect in comparison.² At least one other pericope lends itself to *Formanalyse* and strophic arrangement. This passage comprises 2:1-4, which is a call to harmony and humility in the face of factiousness and which immediately precedes the Christological hymn in 2:5-11. Ernst Lohmeyer, whose epochal work on the *carmen Christi* marked the departure point for current exegesis of the hymn,³ was also a pioneer in the task of isolating these verses and arranging them into strophes. Later discussion has suggested a modification of his arrangement, but to date there has been no intensive or comprehensive attempt to recast the wording of 2:1-4 and to explain it in terms of the intent of the author. The purpose of this study, therefore, is (1) to set down these verses so as to best reproduce their literary structure and (2) to inquire for which purpose Paul decided to use this arrangement in connection with his pastoral appeal to the saints, overseers and deacons in Philippi (1:1).

I. THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF PHIL 2:1-4

Among the few scholars who have acknowledged the unusual literary character of 2:1-4 there exists no unanimity as to the best method of arranging

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¹See the thorough study by R. P. Martin, *Carmen Christi. Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

²An exception is the form-critical analysis by R. Russell, "Pauline Letter Structure in Philippians," *JETS* 25 (1982) 292-306.

³E. Lohmeyer, *Kyrios Jesus: Eine Untersuchung zu Phil. 2,5-11* (Heidelberg: Akademie der Wissenschaft, 1928).

these verses into strophes. Lohmeyer was the first to call attention to the literary and rhetorical devices in this passage and to note that the unusual language, rhythmical patterns and solemn style are all features that betray the presence of a studied composition.⁴ His own analysis, however, is open to the criticism that it destroys the arrangement of the fourfold repetition of *ei tis/ti* (2:1) by dividing the verses into five strophes of three lines apiece.⁵ Disagreeing with Lohmeyer but following his lead, Gnilka produces a threefold division of 2:1–4: strophe 1 of four lines (v 1), strophe 2 of four lines (v 2), and strophe 3 of six lines (vv 3–4):⁶

- (1) Wenn es also eine Ermahnung in Christus gibt,
wenn einen Zuspruch der Liebe,
wenn eine Gemeinschaft des Geistes,
wenn herzliche Liebe und Erbarmen,
- (2) so machet meine Freude voll:
Seid einmütig gesinnt,
indem ihr die gleiche Liebe habt,
einträchtig das gleiche bedenkt!
- (3) Nichts aus Streitheit
nichts aus Prahlerei,
vielmehr in demütigen Gesinnung
schätzt einander höher ein als euch selbst!
Nicht achte jeder auf das Eigene,
sondern jeder auch auf das der anderen!

There is much to commend this threefold strophic arrangement and little for which to criticize it, Barth's complaint notwithstanding.⁷ Gnilka improves on Lohmeyer's earlier arrangement not only by retaining the obvious correspondence between the *ei tis/ti* clauses in v 1 but also by emphasizing another distinguishing feature—namely, the definite progression from v 1 to the climax of the theme found in v 4 (note the use of exclamation points). We propose a modification and amplification of Gnilka's overall analysis, which appears to be essentially correct. Rather than arrange vv 3–4 into six lines we may instead think of the third strophe as forming a brief series of couplets in two pairs and arranged in a way that maintains the parallelism between all three strophes. The text of 2:1–4 thus may be printed in such a way as to produce a paragraph of three strophes, each with four lines:

⁴E. Lohmeyer, *Der Brief an die Philipper, an die Kolosser und an Philemon* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1953) 80–82.

⁵Lohmeyer's predilection for arranging texts into three nicely-balanced lines (*Dreizeiligkeit*) has also been criticized in relation to his analysis of 2:5–11 (cf. Martin, *Carmen Christi* 36, 40).

⁶J. Gnilka, *Der Philipperbrief* (HTKNT 10; Freiburg: Herder, 1968) 102.

⁷"Der Abschnitt zeigt eine gehobene Sprache. . . . Es wäre jedoch überzogen, wollte man deshalb den ganzen Abschnitt in Strophen aufgebaut finden; nur so viel lässt sich sagen: er atmet ein gewisses Pathos, das die Eindringlichkeit der Bitte unterstreicht." G. Barth, *Der Brief an die Philipper* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1979) 39.

Analysis

- (1) A *ei tis oun paraklēsis en Christō*
 B *ei ti paramythion agapēs*
 C *ei tis koinōnia pneumatos*
 D *ei tis splachna kai oiktirmoi*
- (2) A *plērōsate mou tēn charan hina to auto phronētē*
 B *tēn autēn agapēn echontes*
 B *sympsychoi*
 A *to hen phronountes*
- (3) A *mēden kat' eritheian mēde kata kenodoxian*
 B *alla tē tapeinophrosynē allēlous hēgoumenoi hyperechontas heautōn*
 A *mē ta heautōn hekastos skopountes*
 B *alla kai ta heterōn hekastoī*

Translation

- (1) A Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ,
 B if there is any consolation of love,
 C if there is any fellowship of the Spirit,
 D if there is any affection and compassion,
- (2) A fulfill my joy by being of the same mind,
 B maintaining the same love,
 B united in spirit,
 A intent on one purpose.
- (3) A Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit,
 B but with humility regard one another as more important than yourselves.
 A Do not look out for your own interests
 B but also for the interests of others.

This is perhaps the simplest way in which the verses can be arranged under the three headings of (1) the grounds for Christian unity, (2) the results of Christian unity and (3) the expressions of Christian unity. This arrangement, however, obviously presupposes the results of our own exegetical study of 2:1-4, to which we now turn.

Strophe 1 (2:1) consists of four brief statements that form the basis of the apostle's appeal that all divisiveness in the church be resolved. The connecting particle *oun* ("therefore") is thus transitory, marking a shift from the subject of the church's struggle with its external enemies (1:27-30) to the equally threatening problem of a disunited church. Each of the four grounds of appeal is introduced by the particle *ei* conjoined to the indefinite relative pronoun *tis/ti*. This construction may be understood as expressing the apostle's confidence that these matters are already realities in the lives of the Philippians, and it should therefore be rendered "if, as indeed the case is, there is any."⁸ All enmity

⁸On the Greek construction see J. L. Boyer, "First Class Conditions: What Do They Mean?", *Grace Theological Journal* 2 (1981) 75-114. Boyer's inductive study of the three hundred NT instances of the first-class condition has shown that this construction could be interpreted as obviously true only thirty-seven percent of the time. Clearly, however, the occurrences in Phil 2:1 belong to this category, as Boyer himself states (cf. p. 106).

in the church should cease, writes Paul, in view of the "encouragement in Christ," the "consolation of love," the "fellowship of the Spirit" and the "affection and compassion" that flow from the Philippians' participation in Christ. It is because of these realities of God's grace, common to all believers, that Paul can call upon the Christians in Philippi to be of one mind.

Strophe 2 (2:2) partly repeats the thought of v 1 but goes on to express explicitly the adjustments needed to be made in the Philippian church. The fourfold appeal of v 1 is to lead to the fourfold result expressed in v 2. On the basis of filling his cup of joy to overflowing Paul exhorts them to "be of the same mind" (to be one in intent and disposition), "having the same love" (the *agapē* that flows from God), "united in one spirit" (literally "one-souled"), and finally "intent on one purpose" (having a life directed toward a single aim). To stress the need for unanimity the apostle piles up an impressive collection of expressions that bear upon the subject: *to auto*, *tēn autēn*, *sym-*, *to hen*.

It is both interesting and instructive that Paul uses two very similar phrases in v 2 to set forth the ideal of Christian unity. In the first place he writes *to auto phronein*, in the second place *to hen phronein*. William Barclay and others have observed that the verb *phronein* does not merely mean "to think" but rather describes a person's entire attitude and disposition of mind.⁹ For example, to have a flesh-dominated mind is described by Paul in Rom 8:5 as *to tēs sarkos phronein*. This is to have the flesh as the dominating principle of one's life. Similarly Paul can describe a prideful attitude as *hypsēla phronein* (Rom 2:20), a worldly minded disposition as *ta epigeia phronein* (Phil 3:19), and (on the positive side) a mind that is set on Christ as *ta anō phronein* (Col 3:2). Thus *to auto phronein* in Phil 2:2 "is to have a mind whose disposition is harmony."¹⁰ When this general disposition is then brought to bear on one particular issue or decision it may be described as *to hen phronein*, as the special case of Euodia and Syntyche illustrates (4:2).¹¹

Strophe 3 (2:3-4) both expresses the spiritual problem facing the church and points out its only remedy, and thus forms a fitting climax to the first part of the paragraph. With a strong adversative (*alla*) Paul twice calls attention to the evils that menaced the Christian community in Philippi: "selfishness," "empty conceit" and "looking out for your own interests." But he goes on to reveal the proper attitude of the Christian, which consists in a total lifestyle of *tapeinophrosynē* ("humility of mind") expressed by (a) a proper regard and respect for each other and (b) a selfless concern for the interests and welfare of others. Thus having urged humility upon his readers, and having described

⁹W. Barclay, "Great Themes of the New Testament—I. Philippians ii. 1-11," *ExpTim* 70 (1958) 4-7; W. Hendriksen, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962) 99; R. Gromacki, *Stand United in Joy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980) 86-87.

¹⁰Barclay, "Great Themes" 5.

¹¹It has sometimes been suggested that the attempted distinction between *to auto* and *to hen* goes too far since the two expressions are often used synonymously (see e.g. M. R. Vincent, *The Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon* [ICC; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1897] 55). This may be true, but the fact that a number of manuscripts have assimilated *hen* to the preceding *auto* suggests that the two expressions were not always considered to be synonymous in the present context.

the proper expressions of Christian humility, Paul now turns to the supreme example and illustration of these characteristics in 2:5-11.

Such, in brief, is the basic pattern of the first four verses of this chapter. In addition to these general observations we may also set forth several more specific aspects of the passage.

The transition particle *oun*, although postpositive in Greek, probably should be translated first, as it both looks back to 1:27 and forms a bridge between 1:30 and 2:1.

"Fulfill my joy" (*plērōsate mou tēn charan*) in the second strophe is the sole Greek imperative in this passage and as such points to the intensely personal quality of the writer's exhortation. Joy as the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) is the possession of Paul the prisoner (cf. 1:4; 4:1, 10), but it can be enhanced by the evidence of a community in which the well-being of others and the health of the whole church is paramount. That is to say, the confident joy of the apostle is dependent not only upon the Lord but also upon the Philippians' response to Paul's call in vv 1-4. Hence the suggestion that "joy" in Philippians always denotes an attitude that is oblivious of external circumstances unduly narrows the scope of the word. The tenor of this passage rather suggests that only when the health of the church in Philippi, so diseased by strife and self-interest, is restored can Paul truly be filled with joy. This emphasis upon the united experience of joy is also seen in 2:17-18, where the apostle employs the compound verb *syn-chairein* in describing the link between them and him. This usage perhaps justifies paraphrasing slightly the well-known dictum of Bengel: *summa epistolae: gaudeāmus*, "The sum of the epistle is 'Let us rejoice'."

Although each strophe contains four lines, the fourfold construction is different in each one. Strophe 1 is characterized by synonymous parallelism as seen by the fourfold repetition of *ei tis/ti*, the placement of two substantives in each line, and the great similarity in meaning of all the lines together. Strophe 3, on the other hand, is an example of antithetic parallelism: Here the first and third lines (the negative side to Paul's argument) are contrasted with the second and fourth lines (exhortation on the positive level). Finally, a chiasmic arrangement is suggested in strophe 2, in which the first and last (A) and the second and third (B) lines are virtually synonymous. These features not only argue against a triadic arrangement (Lohmeyer's original suggestion) but also effectively eliminate any idea of reverting back to a third strophe of six lines (Gnilka's suggestion). It is a characteristic of this paragraph that in each strophe the pattern is *vierzeilig*, the first and third strophes apparently being based on an OT pattern (parallelism), the second strophe on a Greek one (chiasmus).

Traces of homoioteleuton can be detected in strophe 2 (*echontes, phronountes*, both of which stand in final position) and in strophe 3 (*eritheian, kenodoxian*).

The contrast between self-exaltation and self-denial is highlighted by the series of alliterative pronouns in strophe 3: *heautōn—heautōn—hekastos—heterōn—hekastos*.

The position of the adjective *sympsychoi* (strophe 3) in the middle of the passage is of particular importance.¹² This expression, which is found only here

¹²The centrality of *sympsychoi* was first recognized by Lohmeyer (*Philipper* 81): "Aber das spezifisch urchristliche Stichwort, das in der genauen Mitte der Periode steht, bleibt dennoch: *sympsychoi*."

in the NT and means something like "together in spirit" or "being in one accord," precisely summarizes the intent of the apostle's parenthesis in 1:27–2:11 by stressing the need for the Philippians to have a common purpose in their community life. Moreover, according to the chiasmic arrangement there is a close link with the foregoing expression, "having the same love," as though the apostle wished to make it clear that, in the realm of their corporate life, love was to play the major role. Such amity and unity are possible because they are grounded in the "consolation of love" and the "fellowship of the Spirit" (2:1) that are already realities in the experience of these believers. Hence Paul does not describe Christian unity in terms of a confession or organization but in terms of a spirit of goodwill, which, as Reicke observes, expresses itself in loving service one to another: "Paul's view is that the mutual service of believers ought to confirm their unity. He does not insist upon a particular form of confession or organization."¹³

Recently J.-F. Collange has drawn attention to the assonance between the verb *phronein* and the noun *tapeinophrosynē*.¹⁴ To a Greek reader the relationship between the two words would be obvious. With typical succinctness Martin writes: "The message would be clear to the readers: let your attitude to and regard for others (*phronein*) be humble (*tapeinos*), and that means a total life-style of *tapeinophrosyne*."¹⁵ In classical Greek thought "humility" was a term of opprobrium, but in Paul (drawing from the OT) it has become a characteristic Christian virtue. It is, as Hendriksen says, "the happy condition which arises when in a church each member counts the other to be better than himself."¹⁶ This usage of the *tapein*-root clearly anticipates the illustration of the Lord's example in 2:8, where it is stated that "he humbled himself" (*etapeinōsen heauton*) in undeflected submission to the will of the Father. Thus like the One who was "meek and lowly [*tapeinos*] in heart" (Matt 11:29) these believers are "in lowliness of mind" to live their lives in such a way that their ultimate goal is the good of others.

The linguistic affinities between vv 1–4 and vv 5–11 are not insignificant and may be set down as follows:

<i>Phil 2:1–4</i>	<i>Phil 2:5–11</i>
(2:1) <i>en Christō</i>	(2:5) <i>en Christō Iesou</i>
(2:2) <i>phronēte . . . phronountes</i>	(2:5) <i>phroneite</i>
(2:3) <i>hēgoumenoi</i>	(2:6) <i>ouk harpagmon hēgēsato</i>
(2:3) <i>kenodoxian</i>	(2:7) <i>heauton ekenōsen</i>
(2:3) <i>tapeinophrosynē</i>	(2:8) <i>etapeinōsen heauton</i>

¹³B. Reicke, "Unité chrétienne et diaconie, Phil. ii 1–11," *Neotestamentica et Patristica* (ed. W. C. van Unnik; Leiden: Brill, 1962) 212.

¹⁴J.-F. Collange, *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Philippians* (London: Epworth, 1979) 79.

¹⁵R. P. Martin, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 89.

¹⁶Hendriksen, *Philippians* 100.

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PHIL 2:1-4

Having examined the literary structure of these verses and having set them down in as objective a way as possible, we must now inquire into the significance of the passage within the setting of the epistle. It is here that the chief interest lies, as well as the greatest difficulty. The three special concerns are with (1) the place and purpose of these verses within 1:27-2:18, (2) the authorship of this section, and (3) its relation to the Christological hymn in 2:5-11.

Within the context of 1:27-2:18, which forms one closely-knit section of the epistle, 2:1-4 clearly functions as a call to unity, love and humility. Since it stands at the crossroads between 1:27-30 and 2:5-11, both of which are exhortatory, it is generally recognized to have been included with a hortatory purpose in mind. But if we press our inquiry further to ask about the specific reasons for Paul's concern about the lack of these three qualities in the Philippian church we are left to hypothesis and conjecture.

Although the Philippians have already done much to bring joy to Paul, the spiritual state of their church continues to be a matter of concern. Apparently Paul had become disturbed by reports of internal dissension that threatened the unity of the Philippian community. This is indicated, explicitly or implicitly, throughout the letter: by his exhortation here to unity (2:1-4), by his appeal to the humble example of Christ (2:5-11), by his admonition to "do all things without murmurings and disputings" (2:14), by his entreaty that Euodia and Syntyche "be of the same mind" (4:2), by his exhortation to forbearance (4:5), and by his reference to the peace of God as the platform upon which a relationship of peace and harmony with others can be built (4:7).

Having alluded to Christian unity several times in chap. 1, Paul in 2:1-4 now presents in a formal manner the full argument for unity of mind and spirit, thereby continuing and deepening what he has just said with reference to the church's struggles with its enemies on the outside (1:27-30). The aim of heavenly citizenship (*politeuesthe*, 1:27) is not only steadfast resistance against all external opposition but also steadfast resistance against all forms of internal division. Unity of action in the face of opposition must rest on unity of intention and heart. This principle is expounded in 2:1-4 and then illustrated in 2:5-11, where the apostle presents in the classic passage on the subject the humiliation, obedience and exaltation of Christ. The chapter then closes with three additional examples—Paul himself, Timothy, Epaphroditus—all pointed illustrations of true servants of the gospel who in obedience to Christ exhibited the joy of unity, humility and concern for others (2:19-30). Thus, while this section is closely related to its context, in some respects it is the primary hortatory passage and the high point of chap. 2, for in the remainder of the chapter the apostle merely moves on to amplify what he has written in 2:1-4. Without going as far as Barth, who extols the ceremoniousness (*Feierlichkeit*) of the section,¹⁷ we observe that the force and literary form of this appeal are indicative that we are here dealing with more than a mere "overture"¹⁸ or "curtain-

¹⁷Barth, *Philipper* 39.

¹⁸Collange, *Philippians* 77.

raiser"¹⁹ to the Christological hymn in 2:5–11. Recognition of this is important as a double warning against regarding 2:1–4 as dispensable or else treating the verses merely as an introduction to what is surely one of the greatest Christological passages in the entire Bible.

This brings us to our second question, that concerning the authorship of these verses. The conclusion thus far of our formal analysis of Phil 2:1–4 has been to detect on the basis of style and language a studied composition with a definite progression and climax. This fact has been established by the following observations: the way in which the verses are constructed, with such notable features as parallelism, antithesis, chiasmus and homoioteleuton; the way in which a strophic symmetry and regularity can be attained; the way in which each strophe anticipates the next, and the way in which they all anticipate the contents of the hymn in 2:5–11; the way in which a rhythmical sense is ascertainable when the verses are read aloud in Greek; the way in which a definite correspondence between certain key words in 2:1–4 and 2:5–11 can be determined.

Together these points betray the existence of a carefully composed portion of the letter to the Philippians, a portion not unlike that of the *carmen Christi*. The existence of such a studied composition, whether intended as prose or poetry, presupposes an *auctor* who carefully set these verses down in rhythmical fashion. On this question there is clearly no inherent improbability of Pauline authorship, for nothing in the passage suggests that Paul is making use of the words of another author, nor is there any evidence of the editing of a now lost *Urschrift*. Since, however, Philippians is a genuine letter and not an artificial epistle, can it be imagined that the author would have paused in his dictation to compose this finely balanced section, and is it credible that writing *currente calamo* he could have so finely interwoven 2:1–4 with the thread of the letter's argument?

These questions raise the possibility—if not the probability—of the existence of this section independent of and antecedent to the rest of the epistle. Acknowledgment of the prior existence of these verses does not, of course, necessitate a denial that they are authentically Pauline, since the apostle himself could have written them for use on an occasion quite apart from his correspondence with the Philippians. We may assume without stretching the facts that our author had a certain picture in mind of what he intended to write long before he produced the letter. This would make possible the view that Paul composed these verses not *ad hoc* but on a particular occasion that called forth an appeal to unity couched in solemn and poetic terms. Moreover, if attention is paid to the fact that this passage contains themes that are equally applicable to the church in Rome, which also needed to be reminded of the priority of love in personal relationships (cf. Rom 12:9–10; 13:8–10; 14:1–15:13), a Roman *Sitz im Leben* may be accepted as a plausible solution to the problem of the general setting of the verses. Imprisoned in Rome for nearly two years, Paul would have had many opportunities to address the problem of disunity among the local Christians. This would explain why these verses are more definitely structured

¹⁹Martin, *Philippians* 90 (speaking of v 4 only).

than other portions of the letter, for there the writer wields the pen freely as his thoughts come to him, while in 2:1-4 he is involved with an earlier tribute to Christian unity that he now uses in his pastoral letter. Even, however, if 2:1-4 is an earlier composition of Paul it is so well integrated into the letter and so firmly set within the framework of this portion of Philippians that any attempt to break the continuity of this section at 2:1 should be deplored.

Our final question concerns the relationship of 2:1-4 to the section of the letter that immediately follows. The identity of the source of the hymn contained within 2:5-11 is a still-debated question, one that will find no final solution here. It is generally conceded today that Paul is deliberately quoting in 2:5-11 an early Christian hymn that he felt necessary to incorporate into his epistle at this point. In our view this is an extreme position in light of the apostle's poetic capabilities (cf. Rom 8:31-39; 1 Corinthians 13) and especially the formal and stylistic affinities between the hymn and its preceding context. Although Paul may have been using traditional material in 2:5-11, another possibility is that in 2:1-11 he is incorporating earlier compositions by his own hand. The first section, 2:1-4, as an example of formal prose may have had its origin in the preaching or teaching of Paul on the subjects of unity and humility, themes that would have become increasingly appropriate as his ministry expanded and deepened. On the other hand 2:5-11 may well have been a hymn composed by Paul for use in Christian worship, possibly in a baptismal or eucharistic setting. But whatever the specific origins may have been there is no need to attribute either section to a pre-Pauline creedal or liturgical setting.

Our study of 2:1-4 has shown that the existence of "studied" pericopes in the Pauline corpus does not automatically preclude Pauline authorship. This fact also has a bearing on the authenticity of 2:5-11. The existence of a Christological tribute set in rhythmical form, whose style and language reveal features uncommon to the "prosaic" Paul, may suggest but does not demonstrate that he is quoting a separate composition. As well from the literary as from the theological point of view, 2:1-11 combines into an exceedingly short passage considerable parenetic as well as doctrinal substance. Both of the smaller sections of which it is comprised are fully and carefully interwoven with ease and expertise. If therefore one is willing to allow for Pauline authorship of the first section (2:1-4), then perhaps it would be less arbitrary to also grant to the apostle the authorship of a hymn that reflects a genius he obviously possessed (2:5-11).

Whatever the origin of 2:5-11, however, it is important to emphasize again the close conceptual relationship between the content of 2:1-4 and the theme of 2:5-11. It is only in support of the first four verses of this chapter that Paul introduces in v 5 Jesus Christ as the supreme example of compassion, self-abnegation and humility. Although vv 5-11 are a great theological statement of what Christ did for us, they are primarily exhortation, inspiration and illumination of the argument presented in vv 1-4. It is the great risk of isolating the hymn from its context that Reicke addresses when he writes: "In particular it is necessary to point out that the exhortations in Phil 2:1-4 are the immediate background of the hymn about the Christ who took the form of a servant

in Phil 2:5-11."²⁰ Presented as an exhortation, 2:5-11 is nothing more—but also nothing less—than the natural fruit of the spiritual attitude the apostle is urging in 2:1-4.

III. CONCLUSION

Recognition of the literary and stylistic features of 2:1-4, as important as that is, pales in significance when compared to the great practical value found within them. The realization of Christian unity, so desperately wanting in the Philippian church, is a need that reaches far beyond the first century. In 2:1-4 Paul sets before readers of all generations the ideal—indeed, the reality—of “being one in Christ.” Essentially this entails a community of believers who think and act together, who live in love and kindness for the benefit of each other, who put away selfish ambition and self-valuations, and who concentrate on the needs of others as least as much as they attend to their own. Although organizational ecumenicity may never be achieved within the body of Christ, spiritual ecumenicity is a goal that must never be abandoned. True spiritual unity without schism of fellowship is not only the heart cry of Paul for his Philippian brethren but also the supreme badge of discipleship for Christ’s Church today (John 13:35).²¹

²⁰Reicke, “Unité chrétienne” 206. Cf. the similar complaint of J. A. Sanders: “Our debt to Lohmeyer is great, but we do not compliment or complement his work by ignoring the integrity of vs. 1-11 as Paul penned them” (“Dissenting Deities and Philippians 2, 1-11,” *JBL* 88 [1969] 290).

²¹This paper was originally prepared for doctoral examinations at the university of Basel in Switzerland. The inspiration and assistance of Professor Bo Reicke is gratefully acknowledged.