

Christos, Caesar, Vindication, and Ethics:

A fresh reading of Philippians 2:5-11 in light of recent research
Dustin Smith

It has been nearly 2000 years since the Apostle Paul penned his letter to the congregation in Philippi. One might think that nearly two millennia would be more than ample time to bring the scholarly community to come sort of consensus of what exactly Paul was trying to convey to his readers. Yet it would seem that even in 2009 the discussion is more lively and exciting than ever before. Scholars, expositors, historians, and Bible students alike continue to discuss, dialogue, and debate on a range of topics concerning this epistle. If the 2008 addition to the *Philippians* commentary pool from *Anchor Bible*¹ is any indication, then the 500+ sources in the general bibliography alone points to a bright future of interpretations.

Those who have a strong belief of the authority of Scripture and a high regard for biblical scholarship will understand the continual need to engage the text from many angles. To sit idle and ignore what others in the community of believers and scholars are saying is to forget that God has equipped the Church body with teachers. We must combine the best of believing scholarship with fresh thinking and humble prayer in order to hear what the Scriptures are speaking to this generation. We cannot simply continue to live off the coattails of past interpreters, no matter how influential. Perhaps we need to be reminded that the diligent Bereans continued to search the Scriptures *daily* to see if what they heard was true, meaning, they did not stop once they found what was thought to be a comfortable answer.

The Christ-hymn of Phil. 2:5-11 continues to be a hotbed of academic interaction. More attention is being given to previously overlooked areas of context, such as the flow of the overarching argument of the epistle, specific social-economic factors, and more recently: Paul's subversive interaction with the rising imperial cult. Questions are being raised and new hypothesis are being advanced. How might these new findings shed light on the controversial Christ-hymn, where the supposed preexistent Jesus took on the form of a servant, died a shameful death, and was subsequently vindicated to heaven? Is there really anything more than can be said about Phil. 2:5-11 that is not already yesterday's news?

This essay intends to examine four pieces of fresh context related to the Christ-hymn of Phil. 2:5-11. First, it will be argued that Paul understood and wrote his epistle to a diverse community of Philippi who were suffering economically (with various social implications). Secondly, Paul's pastoral strategy for church unity will be mapped as a three-fold parallel between the ethical examples of Christ, Paul, and the exhortation to the Philippians. Thirdly, specific word studies and exegesis will occur now that the Christ-hymn has been properly set in

¹ John Reuman, *Philippians*, AB33B (New Haven: Yale, 2008), pp. 21-50. After the first occurrence, sources will be cited by name and author alone.

the context of the situation at Philippi as well as the climax of the hopes of the Jewish people. Fourthly, Paul's intentional subversions of the emperor by Christ will be mapped out and examined. Fresh conclusions will be drawn after all of the contextual pieces of the puzzle are in place.

1- Philippi in context

Although one might be eager to jump head first into the Christ-hymn, we must exercise the fruit of patience and first set the stage with the proper context. Once this is accomplished, then the text at hand will be much more likely to be understood with the intentions that Paul had for his original readers (an aim that past interpreters, both at the popular level and the scholarly level, have seemed to miss). Therefore, a survey of the location of the intended readers is due.

Philippi was founded in 358 BCE by the father of Alexander the Great, Philip II of Macedon. After becoming a part of the Roman Empire in 168 BCE it was subsequently secured from civil war by Octavian Augustus. He furthermore converted it into a Roman colony and established a military outpost therein. It was not long before it was heralded by many as a reproduction of Rome.² Due to the increasing problem of overpopulation in the capital city of Rome and the desire to spread the imperial culture throughout the land, military veterans from the Roman army were offered prominent land and property in Philippi as motivation to settle there. It is incredibly important to note that they were promised all of the same privileges and benefits of being a citizen of Rome as incentive to move.³

Since Philippi had a multicultural history involving various empires and rulers, the social makeup was quite diverse. Peter Oakes, having done extensive research⁴ on the population model based on the latest archeological evidence available, sets forth his standard scenario:

	Service	Slaves	Colonist farmers	Poor	Elite	Roman	Greek
Town	37%	20%	20%	20%	3%	40%	60%
Church (with slant for social accessibility)	43%	16%	15%	25%	1%	36%	64%

² G. F. Hawthorne, *Philippians* (Waco: Word, 1983) xxxiv.

³ N. T. Wright makes the following observation: "The point was that, if things were getting difficult in one's colonial setting, the emperor would come from the mother city to rescue and liberate his loyal subjects, transforming their situation from danger to safety." See *Paul's Gospel and Caesars Empire*, extracted in Richard Horsley's *Paul and Politics* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000) 175-6.

⁴ Peter Oakes, *Philippians: From People to Letter* - Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 110 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 1-54, with the cited table on p.61.

The purpose of this survey is to map out the social situations within Philippi to which Paul was addressing. We must remember that when Paul penned letters to his churches that they were ‘occasional’ in nature. He had heard either from members within that community or from one of his messengers of a particular problem that needed to be addressed. When we take this social data into account along with the internal evidence from the letter itself, we can almost certainly conclude that the issue which the Philippians were dealing with was one of suffering.⁵ Consider the following:

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents-- which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that *too*, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me. (1:27-30)⁶

Paul relates their situation to the sufferings of Christ:

Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (2:8)

that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; (3:10)

Epaphroditus, Paul’s emissary, is also spoken of in terms of suffering:

But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me. (2:25-30)

⁵ The issue of suffering was a prevalent one facing early Christians as shown in at least twenty of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. A number of texts refer to possible or actually death (Matt. 10:21 [and parallels]; 24:9; John 21:18-19; the entirety of 1 Peter; Rev. 2:13; 6:9, 11; 11:7-10; 13:10, 15; 18:24). Torture is predicted in Matt. 24:9 and imprisonment is spoken of in Luke 21:12 and Rev. 2:10. Evidence of actual imprisonment is seen in Heb. 10:34 as well as the repeated discussions in Paul’s letters as well as the book of Acts. The author of Revelation was possibly exiled on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9). Paul was beaten (1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 11:23-5) as well as having been stoned (2 Cor. 11:25; Acts 14:19). Mod violence is reported in Acts 14:19; 17:5-9). Suffering was also seen in forms of expulsion (Suetonius, *Claudius*, 25, 4). In 112 AD, Pliny asks Trajan about putting Christians to death (Pliny, *Ex. 10*, 96-97). In 155 Polycarp was burnt (*Martyrdom of Polycarp*, xv-xvi).

⁶ All biblical references are from the NASB unless otherwise noted.

Paul's imprisonment, which certainly would fit under the category of suffering, relates⁷ further to the Philippian situation:

and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. (1:14)

But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me. (2:17-18)

Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. (4:14)

Since Paul links the suffering of the church with the exhortation to stand firm in 1:27-30, it would be fair to infer an allusion to suffering in the call to stand firm in 4:1.

The specific *type* of suffering is also important for our study. With the social population surveyed and the issue of suffering verified by the letter, we are now in a place to make some educated historical guesses on the question of *why* this suffering occurred. What exactly was Paul specifically addressing when he talked about 'suffering for Christ'?

Let us start with the largest social group identified within Philippi: service workers. Imagine for a moment a Greek family of bakers prior to their conversion to the Christian faith. They would undoubtedly be among those who financially made just enough to get by. When they would not be working, they would be enjoying dinners at the local cultic temple, spending free time with their pagan friends, or relaxing at one of the local festivals honoring the emperor Nero.

Once they converted to the Christian faith, what life changes would take place? The family would no longer attend dinners at the pagan temple, which would in turn raise suspicion from the locals. Some might question the nature of this new religious cult that the Greek family has joined which mandated the separation from all other gods and goddesses. Since Christianity was regularly associated with one of the sects of Judaism, some might accuse the family of becoming Jews (which were not looked well upon in the wider Roman world). Perhaps some of their friendships, which regularly involved trading for goods and services, would be ended. If the bakers benefited from a discount on flour due to one of these friendships, that financial advantage would no longer be present. Some of their friends would ostracize the family from their social networks and attempt to boycott their bakery. Homage to the Emperor and his royal family would no longer be paid. This in turn would label the family with public shame and would result in a decrease in the sales of their bakery goods.⁸

⁷ Peter Oakes argues that, "for Paul to draw the Philippians into a sphere of suffering which can be categorized with his, probably means that he sees them undergoing harsh treatment for the sake of the Gospel, as he did." See his *Philippians*, 79-80 for a fuller treatment.

⁸ On the subject of "honor and shame," see Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: John Knox, 2001) chs. 1-3.

All in all, the most obvious and life-altering change which Christianity would bring to this ordinary, lower class Greek family would be an economic suffering. Similar scenarios could be played out over other service workers, such as carpenters or fishermen. Each group, in their own ways, would suffer heavily financially. These service workers consisted of 43 percent of our model. Colonist farmers with their families and slaves made up a further 15 percent. What might suffering mean for these families?

The majority of colonist farmers by the middle of the first century CE were not land owners. They would be renting their fields from others and using the sale of their crops to pay the rent. Their elite landlords would pay little attention to the religious activities of their tenants. However, if trouble arose with the local magistrates, they would start to take a sudden interest. Most of the elite landowners would have received their property and positions as a patronage gift from the Roman officials. In return, they would honor the Caesar cult with worship and loyalty. If it was discovered that their tenants were dishonoring the local gods or the Caesar cult, then the hammer would drop in either cancelation of tenancy or foreclosure on any remaining debt that the family owed. The suffering for this social group would again be economic in nature.⁹

Other examples and possible scenarios could be formulated, but the trend of economic suffering among the various social classes which converted to Christianity seems to make the best case for the situation at Philippi. Peter Oakes summarizes his findings:

We know that the Philippian Christians were suffering. If in the Philippian context, the most serious long-term component of suffering would be economic, then Paul's intertwining of material on suffering and unity in the letter has particular force.¹⁰

How does this fit into the overall picture? We must remember that the ethical examples of both the Christ-hymn and Paul's own pastoral counsel are given as a direct response to the particular set of problems which the Christians at Philippi are facing. Therefore, the issue of economic suffering becomes a valuable piece of context for interpreting how the example of Christ might be seen in the eyes of Paul as a solution.

Before moving on, the historical question of *how might the Philippian community be tempted to solve their economic dilemma* must be explored. As we have seen in both the examples involving our Greek bakery family as well as the colonist farming family, the increasing polemic involving the Caesar cult which would be a primary reason for all of their economic suffering. As

⁹ Other text within the New Testament which report economic suffering include Heb. 10:34 (plundering of possessions), 1 Cor. 7:12-16 (the economic consequences of divorce), and perhaps Rev. 13:17 (prevention of trade).

¹⁰ Oakes, *Philippians*, 96.

long as they remained attached to a religious group the demanded absolute loyalty and obedience they would no longer reap the financial benefits involving the imperial cult. Rather, they would continue to suffer financially from their loss of honor, relationships, and privileges. Furthermore, these Christians would be pressured by their starving families to revert back to the pluralistic tendencies they once enjoyed under paganism, where they would not be limited to worshipping only one deity. They would heavily consider not only being a part of the Christian community meeting on Sundays, but also participating in the emperor worship, festivals, and celebrations on the side. Rejoining the Caesar cult would remove the majority of their economic hindrances which they faced as well as regaining the family honor which was previously lost. As we can see, the economic, social, and religious pressures would weigh heavily on the suffering community at Philippi.

Paul saw this possibility (or perhaps he heard that it was already occurring) and knew that the Christ-centered community was in serious danger of compromise. The church which was formed around the worship of the one God of Israel, who had raised the crucified Messiah from the dead, was now turning into something which represented a combination of Christ and the Emperor. Paul knew firsthand that if Jesus is Lord, then Caesar is not.¹¹ If this compromise continued, it would distort the identity of the community as the redeemed family of the one true God and the body of Christ. Therefore, Paul exhorts the Philippians to unite as this family in order to help those within the community who were suffering. Note the crucially important introduction to the Christ-hymn:

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:1-5)

By sharing resources,¹² funds, and patronage relationships within the community of believers, Paul hopes to establish a clear identity within the church as the family of God/body of Christ. He feels that if this is accomplished then it will also remove their temptations to returning to the Caesar cult. This is Paul's pastoral strategy. We shall now move on to see how Paul develops his counsel within the specifics of the epistle and within the overall argument.

¹¹ Acts 17:6-7.

¹² This seems to be a characteristic quality of the early church. Note how the believers in Acts 2-5 would pool together their possessions in order that those who had need would be taken care of. Paul has already developed this strategy in 1 Cor. 11 where the factious groups are called to unite as the body in order that those who had nothing to eat at the Eucharist would now be able to participate.

2- Three-fold pattern in Philippians

Paul's pastoral response to the Philippians' suffering provides the most important thematic element in the construction of the letter, that of a three-fold ethical parallel drawn between Christ's suffering, Paul's suffering, and the Philippians' suffering. These passages (2:5-11; 3:4-14, 15-21) are the three pillars which hold the entire argument of the letter together. Passages of such foundational significance need to be outlined at this point.

In 2:5-11 (which will be discussed in detail in section 3), Christ is put forth as the ethical example for the believers in Philippi. He gives up his status and privileges by taking the form of a servant and suffers to the point of death. God subsequently vindicates him with resurrection life and exaltation. In 3:4-14 Paul speaks of his former life as a blameless Jewish Pharisee, who gave up his list of privileges in order to follow the example of Christ's suffering, even to the point of death if need be. Paul also speaks of the hope of resurrection and vindication as the goal of this way of life. In 3:15-21 Paul urges the Philippians to follow in his example as he followed in the footsteps of Christ. They too are to give up their status and privileges and live lives worthy of attaining to the transformation of the body which will occur when the savior Jesus Christ returns from heaven. These accounts each involve three substantial details:

- 1 - giving up their status and privileges,
- 2 - taking on a life of suffering,
- 3 - the promised bodily resurrection as vindication for the life lived.

The ethical call for unity within the body of Philippian believers in the midst of suffering is directly related to the Christ-hymn of 2:5-11. Although the parallels are not as visible in the English translations, they are quite clear in the Greek text:

μορφή (“form,” 2:6, 7)

σύμμορφον (“conform,” 3:21)

ὑπάρχων (“existing,” 2:6)

ὑπάρχει (“is,” 3:20)

σχῆματι (“likeness,” 2:8)

μετασχηματίσει (“change the likeness,” 3:21)

ταπεινωσεν (“humbled,” 2:8)

ταπεινόσεως (“humble state,” 3:21)

πάντα καὶ μόνοι (“every knee will bow,” 2:10)
all things to

ποτέξαι αὐτὸν παντα (“subject himself,” 3:21)

κύριος ἡσόντος Χριστός (“Jesus Christ is Lord,” 2:11) κύριον ἡσόντον Χριστόν (“the Lord Jesus Christ,” 3:20)

δόξαν (“glory,” 2:11)

δόξης (“glory,” 3:21)

Once we see that Paul obviously intends his readers to see a deliberate three-fold parallel involving Christ, himself, and the Philippians, then we can examine the similarities in a way that sheds exegetical light onto the Christ-hymn itself. This greatly helps in reducing the number of critical issues involved with its interpretation. Furthermore, every option which would seem to weaken Paul's tightly argued three-fold structure of the letter can now safely be ruled out. I propose this approach as the only way to have any confidence in the critical exegetical choices involving the Christ-hymn, which usually is interpreted apart from the wider study of the purpose of the letter as a whole.

3- Exegesis

a. Word studies

One of the reasons that there is quite a lot of scholarly debate and discussion of Phil. 2:5-11 is due to the occurrence of some rather rare Greek words/phrases within the Christ-hymn. Even the slightest change in definitions can turn the passage into an entirely different interpretive direction. Here is the passage in full with the rare words indicated when they occur:

⁵Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,
⁶who, although He existed in the form of God (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ παρέχων),
did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped (πραγμάτων),
⁷but emptied (κένωσεν) Himself,
taking the form of a bond-servant (μορφῶν δοῦλου),
and being made in the likeness of men.
⁸Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself
by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.
⁹For this reason also, God highly exalted Him,
and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,
¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW,
of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

The subtlety of παρέχων can be very significant. Within the Christ-hymn is it a present participle, warranting a translation of “existing.” Many translations render this word as if it was in the aorist, which would begin to point Christ back into history.¹³ As James D. G. Dunn correctly points out, the assumption of preexistence should not be *assumed* coming to the text.¹⁴ The correct understanding of παρέχων brings the text to the example of the historical man Jesus Christ. This understanding fits perfectly well with the ethical example of Paul as well as the exhortation to the Philippians, neither of whom are spoken of in preexistent terms.

¹³ Note the unwarranted interpretive move by Justin Martyr, who used προπαρέχων (pre-existing) of Jesus, a verb which is found nowhere within the New Testament.

¹⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 114.

Verse 5, which actually is the beginning of the sentence involving $\square\pi\Box\rho\chi\omega\nu$, points to the moral example of the human Jesus whose words and deeds could be reasonably imitated. Paul does not elaborate on what it is exactly about Christ which he desires his converts to follow after. It can be strongly argued that Paul elsewhere never speaks about the supposed preexistent life of Christ Jesus. On the other hand, he writes quite often about the historical life lived, as dictated within his gospel message.¹⁵ Since Paul elsewhere encourages his readers to embody¹⁶ the gospel message within their lives, it can be reasonably concluded that the idea of a preexistent Jesus would be highly unlikely as a motivating force for Christian ethics.

Bypassing the twin occurrences of $\mu\omega\rho\phi\Box$ (in verses 6 and 7) for a moment, we are now in a better position to understand $\square\rho\pi\alpha\gamma\mu\Box\zeta$. This word used to baffle expositors because it is a *hapax legomenon*. It is completely absent from the LXX and only shows up rarely in extra-biblical Greek (with most instances being Patristic quotations or allusions to the Christ-hymn). N. T. Wright in his essay in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* maps out ten different ways in which this one word has directed the interpretations of various scholars over the years.¹⁷ Each of the options can be simplified into two groups:

- (a) something not possessed but which is grasped at
- (b) something which is in possession, but is not utilized

According to 2:6, the verb $\square\rho\pi\alpha\gamma\mu\Box\zeta$ modifies the phrase ‘equality with God.’ This choice could turn the hymn in two entirely different directions. Did Christ grasp at some sort equality with God? Or did he possess it in some sense and refuse to use it? One further wants to inquire about the nature of “equality” and what it might denote in the mind of Paul. How can we make sense of this, with very little evidence to go by?

If one looks at the Patristic references, it would seem that the evidence points in the direction of option *a*. Yet Wright is correct to point out that the Fathers who talked about Phil. 2, the Latin Fathers and among the Greeks Chrysostom in particular, were too concerned about combating Arianism in order to give a fair reading of the meaning.¹⁸ Most of the English translations in the past have adopted this option because of the, albeit small, evidence from the Patristic Fathers.

Wright goes on to cite references from Eusebius’ *Historia Ecclesiae* which seem to point in the other direction. In Book 5.2 Eusebius quotes from a letter circulating within the churches of his

¹⁵ Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; Gal. 2:20; etc.

¹⁶ 1 Cor. 4:8-13; 6:20; 9:12; 11:23-26; 2 Cor. 4:10-11; Gal. 6:2.

¹⁷ ‘ $\square\rho\pi\alpha\gamma\mu\Box\zeta$ and the meaning of Phil. 2:5-11’, *JBL* 37 (1986) 342-3. This article has now become the standard treatment of the word.

¹⁸ ‘ $\square\rho\pi\alpha\gamma\mu\Box\zeta$ ’, 348.

time. This letter describes how the martyrs, who despite their incredible sufferings, refused to be recognized as martyrs in a way that would bring honor and glory to them for their deeds. The letter talks about these martyrs and their behavior in the following words:

"So eager were they to imitate Christ, who though He was in the form of God did not count it a prize to be on an equality with God...they neither proclaimed themselves martyrs nor allowed us to address them by this name...For they gladly conceded the title of martyr to Christ"

It would seem that the martyrs did not regard their sufferings as something to take advantage of, which seems to follow option *b*. In Book 8.12.1 Eusebius describes the various persecutions occurring in Antioch. Some of the martyrs, in order to avoid torture, committed suicide, regarding their death as something to be taken advantage of stealing a march on their persecutors. The Greek which is employed here is $\tau\bar{\nu}\ \thetaav\bar{\nu}\tauov\ \bar{\rho}\piayma$. Although Phil. 2 is not noted, the theology is almost certainly in mind.

Option *a* is championed by the Patristic Fathers while option *b* is used by Eusebius. Within our study, option *b* seems to fit rather nicely with the three-fold ethical argument of the letter already discussed. If Paul did not use his Jewish privileges to his own advantage, and if the Philippian church is to give up their status for the sake of unity, it would seem fitting to take $\bar{\rho}\piaym\bar{\zeta}$ in a way which would make these ethical examples flow smoothly. Simply put, the three-fold exhortation does not work if we take $\bar{\rho}\piaym\bar{\zeta}$ to denote something grasped at. Option *b* seems to be the most obvious choice.¹⁹ The NRSV has adopted this interpretation within their translation, transitioning from the former found in the RSV.

We can now confidently move onto the phrases $\muopf\bar{\nu}\ \thetaeo\bar{\nu}/\muopf\bar{\nu}\ \deltao\bar{\nu}\lambdaou$.²⁰ These examples are two of only three instances found throughout the New Testament.²¹ Various options have been presented to explain what precisely $\muopf\bar{\nu}$ means. Such options include "form" as presented within the relevant Greek literature of the time.²² Others suggest $\delta\bar{\nu}\xi\alpha$ ("glory") by comparing the equivalent external radiance of God found within the Old

¹⁹ Cf '] $\bar{\rho}\piaym\bar{\zeta}$ ', in *TDNT* 1:474, where Foerster concludes after surveying the options that, "Against all expectation, Jesus did not regard equality with God as a gain to be utilized." Colin Brown feels the same way: "This interpretation of $\bar{\rho}\piaym\bar{\zeta}$ as not "taking advantage of" is fully consistent with treating Phil. 2:6 in terms of the narrated history of Jesus' life and activity." See his 'Ernst Lohmeyer's *KYRIOS JESUS*, in Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) 29.

²⁰ Note how even this rare word is modified in a way which enhances our three-fold argument: $\sigma\muopf\bar{\nu}\mueno\bar{\zeta}$ (of Paul in 3:10), and $\sigma\muopf\bar{\nu}\muovo\bar{\zeta}$ (of the Philippians in 3:21).

²¹ Elsewhere in Mark 16:12, which is part of the disputed longer ending of Mark. Most scholars feel that this ending is not original to the authorship of the Evangelist.

²² See the references in BAGD, *morphe*, 528.

Testament. Still others see it as synonymous with εἰκὼν²³ (“image”) in light of the Adam/Christ comparison frequently used by Paul.²⁴ Finally, the imagery of “status” or “position” is another possibility.²⁵ To make things even more slippery, the phrase is governed by the preposition ἐν (in, inside, in the sphere of?). While all of these options are available and possible, the further context of chapter 3 will later be brought in to help bring us to a conclusion.

J. Behm rightly makes the warning that the antithesis between μορφὴ θεός and μορφὴν δοῦλου “can be understood *only* in light of the context.”²⁶ If we take the more probable line that Paul is referring to the historical life of the human Jesus, then this helps us better understand what our options are. The temptations of Jesus, both in the wilderness as well as in the garden, put difficult choices against him. In the wilderness, Jesus is tempted to take the easy way out of his fasting, reveal himself publically as the Messiah, and to attain all the kingdoms of the world without succumbing to the torturous death on the cross. In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus struggles whether or not to take on the cup of suffering laid before him. In both instances, Jesus chooses to follow after the will of God (which eventually leads to a life of suffering and death), rather than an easy life directed by his own desires.

Do these scenarios provide ample foundation in order to make Jesus an ethical example for both Paul and for the Philippians? They most certainly do.²⁷ Furthermore, they bear echoes of the temptation of Adam, which becomes an attractive option due to Paul’s affinity for Adam/Christ comparisons. Adam’s temptation to reach out and grasp at equality with God (ἢ θεός, Gen 3:5 LXX) resonates well with the temptations before Christ (τὸ εἰκὼν τοῦ σα θεός, Phil. 2:6b).

One must remember that Adam was created in the image of God (εἰκὼν αὐτοῦ θεός), which designated him as the king who was to exercise dominion over God’s creation.²⁸ Christ was anointed as the Son of God directly prior to his temptation in the wilderness, a title denoting

²³ cf. Gen 1:26-27 LXX.

²⁴ Rom. 5:18-19; 1 Cor. 15:22, 45-47.

²⁵ See Karl-Josef Kuschel. *Born Before All Time? The Dispute over Christ’s Origin*. Tr. J. Bowden (New York: Crossroads, 1992) 606 n 46, and John Reuman, *Philippians*, 344.

²⁶ ‘μορφὴ’ in Behm’s *TDNT* 4:751. Emphasis mine. Reumann rightly states, “The two uses of *morphe* interpret each other.” (*Philippians*, 348).

²⁷ The gospels dictate that Christ often openly spoke of taking the role of a servant. These references have nothing to do with an idea of incarnation, but interestingly enough hint at Isa. 53. See Mark 10:45; Luke 22:27; John 13:4-16.

²⁸ Gen. 1:26-28.

kingship and representation of God.²⁹ Jesus, being anointed as God's kingly representative, did not use this status to his own benefit, but rather chose the life of obedience, which ultimately lead to his death.³⁰ The contrast from kingly representative of God to the obedient servant fits nicely with μορφὴ θεός and μορφὴν δοῦλου. It would seem that Paul sees the notions of "image" and "status" as overlapping in a very significant way.

Now we can move onto 2:7, where Christ emptied himself (ἀυτὸν κακωσεν).³¹ The more prominent interpretations are founded on the presupposition of incarnation, so that "emptying" refers to the preexistent Christ becoming human at his birth.³² Some of the Patristic Fathers understood this as a giving up of his divine attributes.³³ Modern scholars have pointed to the indirect reference to Isa. 53:12, where the Suffering Servant "poured out himself to death." J. Jeremias argues for a clear connection:

The link between Phil. 2:6-11 and Is. 53 is apparent once it is realized that, whereas the hymn follows the LXX in v. 10f., in 6-9 it makes use of a christological terminology drawn from Is. 53 HT... The decisive proof of the thesis...lies in the fact that the expression κακωσεν (Phil. 2:7), which is not attested elsewhere in Gk. And is grammatically extremely harsh, is an exact transl. of נפְשׁוּ... הַנּוּרָה (Is. 53:12). Furthermore, we are referred to Is. 53 by other verbal echoes, the contrast between humiliation and exaltation, the willingness to be humbled, and the mention of obedience unto death.³⁴

The allusion to Isaiah is an attractive one once we also see that Paul is almost certainly drawing on the Servant motif³⁵ when describing μορφὴν δοῦλου as well as the direct quote in Phil. 2:10 of Isa. 45:23. One could also see a link between Phil 2:9, where the resurrected Christ is "highly exalted", and Isa. 52:13 ("He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted"). If we keep with the direction in which our other word studies have pointed us, then it would suggest that

²⁹ See Psalm 2:7 and Isa. 42:1.

³⁰ Pace Colin Brown, 'Ernst Lohmeyer's *KYRIOS JESUS*, in Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2*, 26-28.

³¹ Colin Brown translates this as "sacrificed himself".

³² One question which all orthodox christologies have to face is: How is it that Christ "empties himself" but also "assumes human nature"? How is it that the act of losing something, when pressed, really means gaining something else?

³³ Colin Brown rightly argues that this line of thinking is problematic. He states, "The attributes of omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence are in fact essential attributes to divinity. God would not be God without them. If Christ be divested of essential divine attributes, it is difficult to see how the doctrine of his divinity could still be maintained." See 'empty', *NIDNTT* 1:549.

³⁴ J. Jeremias, 'παρός θεός', *TDNT* 5:711-712.

³⁵ See Isa. chs. 42; 49; 50; 52-53.

seeing ὅκωνωσεν as a reference to the self-sacrificial life of Christ, which culminated on the cross,³⁶ would be the path of least resistance. He chose the life of a servant, arguably *the Servant* described by Isaiah, rather than living his life as a king. Again it must be pointed out that this line of interpretation flows well with Paul's three-fold ethical argument presented in the Philippians letter.

b. Relationship to the situation at Philippi

It has been argued all along that the specifics of the Christ-hymn should not be merely seen as a Christological statement but also, if not primarily, giving a solid ethical example which was intended to be imitated (Phil. 2:5). Paul, and his Philippians converts were to model the life of Christ. While he had the status and role of the messianic Son of God, which denoted him like Adam as the vice-regent over God's creation, Jesus chose to set it aside in order to seek after the will of his Father. Instead of using his great privileges to his own advantage (in the temptation narratives), he laid them aside and chose to serve and suffer. Many Jews were expecting a regal Messiah who was to rule in the midst of their enemies. Christ did not take on that expectation as his own, but rather suffered the most humiliating death known to the ancient world.

This is the ethical model in which Paul and the Philippians were to follow. If they imitated this style of life, then it may very well lead to suffering, difficulty, loss of honor, or even death. Yet the promise of vindication via resurrection to immortality is promised to the faithful. Christ was exalted to a glorious position for his sufferings and life of obedience. Paul seeks to attain to the resurrection of the dead by conforming to the death of Jesus (Phil. 3:10-12). He exhorts his followers to have this same attitude (Phil. 3:15) and to follow in his example (Phil. 3:17) so that their bodies will be changed at the return of Jesus (Phil. 3:21).

The ethical links as well as the foundational three-fold argument becomes absolutely necessary in expounding the Christ-hymn. Past expositors who have overlooked the ethical model have domesticated Phil. 2:5-11 into abstract comments about preexistence and incarnation, which are often too blurred to even prove a solid point.³⁷ We should be far more careful to not force Paul to answer our own questions but rather allow him to dictate his own.

Some have been content to leave the study at this point. The rest of the hymn is straightforward: Christ, who humbled himself³⁸ to the point of death, is highly exalted and given a name deserving of worship. Yet there are some other key motifs which Paul is implicitly

³⁶ Pace Brown, *NIDNTT* 1:549; "The emptying of v. 7 is the outpouring of himself in life and also on the cross."

³⁷ Note the tr. of the NIV which goes far beyond the limits of the Greek: "Who, being in very nature God..." (2:6).

³⁸ The various descriptions in verses 7-8 should not be seen as successive acts in the life of Jesus. James Dunn argues that they should be read more or less as synonymous, as different ways of describing the "character of fallen Adam" (*Christology*, 117).

teaching within this hymn, that of Christ taking on the role of the Suffering Servant as well as dealing with the sin of Adam.

c. Relationship to Jewish expectations

i. Israel as the Suffering Servant

I have already tried to argue that Paul had the Isaianic Servant in mind when he wrote that Jesus took the μορφὴν δολοῦ upon himself. The Servant passages in Isaiah clearly spell out who they are referring to: Israel as a nation.³⁹ It was their obligation to fulfill the covenant promised to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). This covenant stated that through Abraham's seed, the whole world would be blessed.⁴⁰ The Servant passages in Isaiah are clear as to the vocation of Israel:

And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations (Isa. 42:6)

I will also make you a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth. (Isa. 49:6)

Behold, I will lift up My hand to the nations and set up My standard to the peoples (Isa. 49:22)

For a law will go forth from Me, and I will set My justice for a light of the peoples (Isa. 51:4)

This was the God-given role and purpose of the nation of Israel, to be the nation through whom God blessed the fallen world. Due to their disobedience to the covenant and subsequent exile, all hope seemed to be lost. Yet God is faithful to His covenant and will fulfill His promise to bless the whole of creation through the seed of Abraham. This is where Christ comes in. He takes the role and vocation of Israel, the servant of God, and embodies it in a real way. As Israel's representative, he takes the sin of Adam to the cross and extinguishes it with his death. Therefore, Christ was faithful where the nation of Israel was faithless. This is one of the many meanings Paul has when he states that Christ took the form of a servant⁴¹ – his thoroughly Jewish theology of the elected purpose of Israel as the servant of God was embodied and fulfilled in the life and death of the Messiah.⁴²

ii. Adam

³⁹ Isa. 44:1, 21; 45:4; 49:3.

⁴⁰ If one pays close attention to the breakdown of chapters in Genesis, ch. 12 becomes the significant turning point of the fall of mankind as described in chs. 3-11. Abraham and his descendants who were to be the people through whom God fixes the problem of Adam.

⁴¹ See also Rom. 15:8.

⁴² For an extended study, see chapter 2, "Adam, Israel, and the Messiah", in N. T. Wright's *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

If it was the vocation of Israel to fix the sin of Adam, then he certainly should be brought into the picture. I have already argued that Adam, as the one who grasped at equality with God, is implicitly referenced in Phil. 2:6, where Christ did not succumb to temptation. We also saw how Adam, being made in the image of God, shed light on the definition of μορφή, which we suggested was related to the idea of kingly status as well as image. It was also pointed out that Paul makes significant comparisons with Adam and Christ within his letters.⁴³

It should not be too much of a stretch, but actually rather likely, that Paul intends for the Christ-hymn to depict Christ choosing to be faithful where Adam was unfaithful. A moment's notice will show this to be the case. Adam sinned and was therefore enslaved to corruption and sin. This was one of the specific purposes of Jesus' death on the cross – to deal with the sin of Adam which has enslaved humanity.⁴⁴ Adam was tricked by the serpent while Christ passed the testing of the Devil. Adam held the rank and status of king as the head over the Genesis creation, exercising dominion over the birds of the air, fish of the sea, and animals on the land.⁴⁵ Once he fell to temptation, he was cursed. Christ, on the other hand, lives the lowly life of a servant and is subsequently highly exalted. At his name, every knee will bow, interestingly paralleling Adam's dominion, of those in heaven, on the earth, and under the earth.⁴⁶

Paul is pointing out that Jesus did not follow in the footsteps of his predecessors Adam and the Israelites, who both took advantage of their positions, thereby relinquishing their invested vocations from God.⁴⁷ Adam reached out and took the forbidden fruit in defiance of God. Israel followed suit when she reached out to pagan nations in defiance of the LORD. Jesus did not abuse his authority. He did not reach out at the many temptations offered to him. Remember that Jesus refused all the kingdoms of the world, fame, glory, and even the basic needs of food when Satan confronted him in the wilderness. Likewise Jesus was tempted in the garden to not go through with his suffering, which he knew was the most difficult part of his life. Jesus had the opportunity on multiple occasions to take advantage of his position as God's chosen Messiah, but he chose rather to maintain a life of obedience and suffering on behalf of others. This was the only way to deal with the sin of Adam, fulfill the role of Israel, and to represent God fully to a fallen world. Jesus showed what it's like to represent the true people of God in a way which Paul as well as the Philippians could imitate.

⁴³ 1 Cor. 15:21-22, 45-49; Rom. 5:12-21. See further in James Dunn's *The Theology of the Apostle Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 79-101.

⁴⁴ Noting that *adam* means "man" in Hebrew.

⁴⁵ Gen. 1:28.

⁴⁶ Phil. 2:10.

⁴⁷ It is not surprising that Adam, the nation of Israel, and Christ are all three called "Son of God" within the Scriptures. See Ex. 4:22; Hos. 11:1; Matt. 2:15; Luke 3:38.

4- Parody of the Emperor

Despite past attempts to make the Christ-hymn into merely a Christological statement, the context of the letter, as well as relevant social and political contexts surrounding the Philippians have shed more light than readers of the past have ever expected. Peter Oakes has composed eight significant links between the Christ and the Emperor which he feels were deliberately intended by Paul.⁴⁸ If Oakes is right on this, then exegetes should begin to read Phil. 2:5-11 as a deliberate allusion and parody to the Caesar and his imperial cult. I will briefly sketch out his arguments:

a. Links with 3:20-21

As I have already argued above, Paul's usage of rare words which show up in both of these passages strongly suggests an intentional connection. Key to the wording of 3:20-21 are significant related words to the Christ-hymn ($\pi\lambda\rho\xi$, $\o\lambda\rhoav\o\zeta$, $\sigma\mu\omega\rho\phi\o$). It is also striking that Paul utilizes and structures his ethical exhortation of the letter by forming a pair of climactic, heavily Christological passages near the start and end of the main argument (1:27-4:1). Recent readers have started to see a deliberate parody of Caesar in 3:20, where it is Christ and not the Emperor who is the savior⁴⁹ and lord, coming to change the struggling situation of the Philippians into one of glory.⁵⁰

b. Christ given universal authority

The climax of the Christ-hymn states that Jesus received the Name above every name and that all knees will bow to him. Every tongue will confess that he is the $\kappa\rho\xi\o$. A Graeco-Roman hearer would most likely hear this as a comparison with the Emperor. Note the relevant inscription from the same time period:

$\tau\o\pi\pi\alpha\nt\zeta\k\sigma\mu\o\k\rho\xi\o\N\pi\rho\omega\pi$

Nero, the Lord of all the world.⁵¹

Emperor Nero, the reigning Caesar during the writing of Philippians, demanded allegiance from the entire world. He received this dominion by being the ruler over all of the conquered lands. Christ, who chose to be a servant, received lordship and dominion because of his sufferings. As the exalted and vindicated $\kappa\rho\xi\o$, he now supersedes the authority of the Emperor (even presumably the Emperor's own knee will bow to Christ).

⁴⁸ Oakes, *Philippians*, 147-174.

⁴⁹ Paul uses $\sigma\omega\tau\pi\alpha$ very rarely, this being the only occurrence in the undisputed letters.

⁵⁰ For further reading, see Peter Oakes, 'Re-mapping the Universe: Paul and the Emperor in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians', *JSNT* 27:3 (2005) 319.

⁵¹ Details of the inscription are in Oakes, *Philippians*, 149.

c. Authority granted for a reason

Christ's authority is granted to him, granted by a competent authority, and granted for a reason. All of these points are directly parallel to the ruling emperors. Christ is the one who emptied himself but it was God who exalted him. Christ did not resurrect himself, raise himself to power, or crown himself. It was God who granted Christ authority. The idea that the reigning emperors had their authority granted to them was a significant element of imperial ideology. The Emperor did not have the ability to gain his authority on his own. Rather, it was the Senate and the citizens of Rome who voted the Emperor his power and authority. One should not push too hard for similarities between God and the Senate but the main point is that both Christ and Caesar had their authority conferred on them by a proper second party who had the ability to do so.

Both Christ and the Emperor were granted authority for a particular reason. The emperors were granted power to perform a saving task (cf. 3:20-21). Rome was constitutionally a democracy and thereby ruled by those elected by the people. It was through their approval which technically put the Emperor on his throne. He is merely the interpreter of the will of the people. Tacitus remarks that it is the consensus which ensures the *libertas* of the people.⁵² Exegetes have found the δικαίωσις in 2:9 problematic in the past. It makes better sense if the Emperor is allowed to be the appropriate parallel: verses 6-8 provide a reason for God granting Christ his authority.

d. Universal submission and the central Imperial saving task for the world

In Phil. 2:10, every knee bows to Jesus. If this submission and the acclamation in v. 11 involve a salvation of all concerned, then Jesus' role here is unavoidably paralleled to the Emperor. The various Caesars were proclaiming peace, salvation, and liberty to all who confessed him as Lord. Philo describes how the Emperor was seen as rescuing the world and bringing order in the midst of wars:

so that very nearly the whole race of mankind would have been destroyed by mutual slaughter and made utterly to disappear, if it had not been for one man and leader, Augustus, by whose means they were brought to a better state, and therefore we may justly call him the averter of evil...This is Caesar, who calmed the storms which were raging in every direction, who healed the common diseases which were afflicting both Greeks and barbarians...This is he who did not only loosen but utterly abolish the bonds in which the whole of the habitable world was previously bound and weighed down. This is he who destroyed both the evident and the unseen wars which arose from the attacks of robbers...This is he who gave freedom to every city, who brought disorder into order, who civilized and made obedient and harmonious, nations which before his time were unsociable, hostile, and brutal. This is he...the guardian of peace...who never once in his whole life concealed or reserved for himself anything that was good or excellent...And yet if ever there was a man to whom it was proper that new and unprecedented honors should be voted, it was certainly fitting that such should be decreed to him...⁵³

⁵² Tacitus, *Hist.* 1:16.

⁵³ Philo, *De Legatione ad Gaium*, 144-149, tr. C. D. Young.

Seneca writes in fear of the vast multitude of people who would be wiped out were it not for the ruler's wisdom.⁵⁴ The emperors promised peace throughout the empire if allegiance was universally given to him. Christ promises salvation, peace, and liberty to all nations if believing obedience is offered. The risen lord, in this way, trumps the claims of Caesar and of imperial ideology.

e. The use of Isaiah 45 in 2:10-11

There can be no doubt that Paul wanted to bring Isa. 45:23 with the accompanying context into the mix of the description of the exalted Christ. Isaiah speaks to Israel while they are in exile under the Babylonian empire. They are encouraged by a portrayal of Israel's God enthroned with all the nations streaming to him in order to worship. They acknowledge him as the only one who can save and rescue. All of the other gods are futile and powerless.

This passage is brought into the Christ-hymn in a very particular place. God grants Jesus the authority (v. 9) and God receives the glory (v. 11). God reigns and receives glory through Christ's reigning and receiving honor. Oakes does not see this primarily as a reference to worship but to the social and political consequences facing the Philippians who turn their allegiance away from the Emperor and towards the exalted Christ. Submission to any object of worship in the Graeco-Roman world involved far more than merely liturgy. While the Philippians were tempted to fall back into the imperial cult, Paul invokes Isa. 45 to show that it is this promise of eschatological salvation which should direct the lives of God's people. The Philippians, like Israel in exile, are to maintain their faithfulness to God in the midst of what seems at the moment to be troubling times.

f. The naming in verse 9

The giving of the name *Pater Patriae* (Latin for "Father of the Country") was a significant event of the process of ascension of an emperor. This name was exclusive to the Emperor of the period, clearly distinguishing him from even a co-regent. *Pater Patriae* was given to both Augustus as well as to Nero. It was considered in the Julio-Claudian period to be the 'name above every name.' The Philippians would immediately recognize what it was that Paul was trying to assert when he stated that this name has been given to Jesus Christ. This is one of the most deliberate results of Paul's counter-imperial theology shaped around the risen Messiah.

g. The title κυρίος

Scholars have understood for some time now that the title of κυρίος was one which the various emperors demanded for themselves. There are multiple surviving inscriptions/coins which bear witness to this fact. Some of the rulers who were labeled as the κυρίος were Augustus, Herod the Great, Herod Agrippa I, Herod Agrippa II, Caligula, Nero, and Domition.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Seneca, *De Clem*, 1:3:5.

⁵⁵ See discussion in *TDNT* 3:1049-50. At the most popular level, people in the eastern Mediterranean applied the term κυρίος to the Roman emperors from Augustus on. Everyone would have known who the title referred to and what sort of authority it carried. See Karl P. Donfried, 'The Imperial Cults and Political Conflict in 1

Nero, the reigning Emperor during the writing of *Philippians*, was widely described with the title ‘Lord of all the world.’⁵⁶ Paul knew exactly what he was doing when he applied this title to Jesus (cf. Acts 17:6-7).⁵⁷

h. A leader who defines his people’s ethics by example

The Hellenistic philosopher Philolaus stated that just as the universe is an expression of the activity of God, ‘In the same way the state here is a product of the character of the king’. It was widely understood in the ancient world that moral condition of the nation was a reflection on the ethics of their king. There are some clear instances of the idea of example from the early imperial period:

But just as a rule, if it is made rigid and inflexible makes other things straight when they are fitted to it and laid alongside it, in like manner the sovereign must first gain command of himself, must regulate his own soul and establish his own character, then make his subjects fit his pattern.⁵⁸

...fair play has now precedence over influence, and merit over ambition, for the best of emperors teaches his citizens to do right by doing it, and though he is greatest among us in authority, he is still greater in the example which he sets.⁵⁹

We are pleased to hope and trust, Caesar, that in large measure this will happen. That kindness of your heart will be recounted, will be diffused little by little throughout the whole body of the empire, and all things will be moulded into your likeness. It is from the head that comes the health of the body...⁶⁰

There was a general first-century appeal to leaders as examples to their subjects. This not only fits nicely with the ethics of the Christ-hymn but also with the entire three-fold ethical argument of *Philippians* as a whole. Christ gave up his privileges as an example which the Graeco-Roman world could appreciate due to their influence of imperial ideologies on leading by ethical example.

Concluding remarks

With such an extensive look at the Christ-hymn of Phil. 2:5-11, it has come to the point where we must step back and ask, “Where have we arrived?” First we looked that the

Thessalonians’, cited in Richard Horsley’s *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1997) 217.

⁵⁶ H. Bietenhard, ‘Lord’, *NIDNTT* 2:511.

⁵⁷ “In classical Gk. of the early period *kyrios* was not used as a divine title.” Cf. *Ibid* 510.

⁵⁸ Plutarch, *Ad Principem Ineruditum*, 780B, tr. H. N. Fowler.

⁵⁹ Velleius Paterculus, 2.126.4, on Tiberius.

⁶⁰ Seneca, *De Clem.* 2.2.1, on Nero.

context of the Roman colony of Philippi. It was seen that the social makeup was able to shed some light on possible historical reconstructions as to the nature of why Paul needed to pen the Epistle. Once this was added to the visible clues found from within the letter, we were able to suggest that the reason for all of the suffering within the church at Philippi was economic in nature. The Christians there would be tempted to either compromise the faith or to revert back into the imperial cult in order to help out with their dire financial situations.

Paul, being the pastor from a distance, calls the church to unity in order to keep the integrity of the body intact. His strategy is to make a three-fold ethical argument for his converts to identify with and follow after. The life of the historical man Jesus was lifted up as one who chose to not use his messianic status and rights to his own advantage. He instead chose to follow a life of obedience to the Father, which eventually ended him up on the cross. God vindicated him by resurrection and exalted him to the position of *kupoç*.

Paul too relinquished his life as a blameless Pharisical Jew in order to live a life of conformity to the death of Messiah. He too sought after the resurrection from the dead. He now calls his converts to give up their rights and privileges with the local imperial cult and unify together as they imitate Christ's life of suffering in anticipation of the future resurrection.

The Christ-hymn was analyzed with care and attempted to answer some of the lingering exegetical questions which it raises. The poem is not about a preexistent being giving up his right to be God, as if the Philippian church could possibly imitate that. Rather, as the Messiah designated from birth, he willingly chose to embody the vocation of the faithful Israelite Servant in order to deal with the sin of Adam once and for all. He humbled himself to the worst form of death known to the Roman world: crucifixion. God raised him from the grave and seated him at His right hand as the risen *kupoç*.

His example not only gives the struggling Philippians hope and direction but also parodies the exalted claims of the Emperor Nero. Paul carefully crafts the hymn in a way which nullifies the claims and authority which the emperors supposedly have and renders them to Jesus Christ, the true lord of the world.⁶¹

I strongly suggest that the often neglected contexts of Adam, the Suffering Servant, Philippian ethics, and the parody of the Emperor must each be taken seriously into consideration in subsequent readings of the Christ-hymn. I hope that these various pieces of

⁶¹ In light of the eight parallels to Caesar which Peter Oakes cites, I find it unconvincing that the Christ-hymn was a pre-Pauline formulation. Paul has to formulate it with every detail in order to convince a church who was facing hard choices on where their true allegiances lie. Therefore, I would have to argue that contrary to the book bearing the same title, Phil. 2:5-11 is not 'where Christology began.'

context help the reader better understand Phil. 2:5-11 in the way which the Apostle Paul *intended* it to be heard.