Rivals, Opponents, and Enemies: Three Kinds of Theological Argumentation in Philippians

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Paul has been a highly controversial figure throughout the history of Christianity. Such was also the case during his lifetime. From the beginning of his apostolic career, Paul was faced with critics and opponents.[1] Consequently, readers of his letters always ask a standard question: with what kind of adversaries are each of these texts grappling?[2] In Philippians the matter is not so clear, and scholars have proposed various hypotheses, some of which are not overwhelmingly plausible. In this paper my intention is not so much to add a new variant to this repeatedly disputed matter. In agreement with many other scholars, I will take the view that we have to reckon

1. See esp. Matthias Konradt, "Antipaulinismus und Paulinismus im neutestamentlichen Schrifttum," in *Paulus Handbuch*, ed. Friedrich W. Horn, WUNT 238 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 552–57. About later developments see Andreas Lindemann, *Paulus im ältesten Christentum: Das Bild des Apostels und die Rezeption der paulinischen Theologie in der frühchristlichen Literatur bis Marcion*, BHT 58 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1979), 101–9; 367–71; Gerd Lüdemann, *Paulus, der Heidenapostel*, vol. 2, *Antipaulinismus im frühen Christentum*, FRLANT 130 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983); Jürgen Wehnert, "Antipaulinismus in den Pseudoklementinen," in *Ancient Perspectives on Paul*, ed. Tobias Nicklas, Andreas Merkt, and Joseph Verheyden, NTOA 102 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 170–90.

2. For a general overview, compare Jerry L. Sumney, *Identifying Paul's Opponents*, JSNTSup 40 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990); and Stanley E. Porter, ed., *Paul and His Opponents*, Pauline Studies 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2005). For the historical possibility of an orchestrated antimission, see my "Kreuzfeuer: Paulus und seine Konflikte mit Rivalen, Feinden und Gegnern," in *Receptions of Paul in Early Christianity: The Person of Paul and His Writings through the Eyes of His Early Interpreters*, ed. Simon Butticaz, Andreas Dettwiler, and Jens Schröter, BZNW 234 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 649–76.

with different types of dissenters (used in a wide sense) in Philippians. Apart from the identification of several kinds of opponents, what deserves attention is the way that Paul is arguing with regards to these boundaries. I am going to urge that in Philippians at least three kinds of opponents have to be taken into consideration and that Paul is modeling his arguments specifically with regards to their various positions. Throughout this essay my basic assumption is that Philippians is only one coherent letter.[3]

1. Rivals Although Brothers (Philippians 1:15–18)

The first passage we have to deal with is Phil 1:15–18. In this introductory section of his letter, Paul sketches different attitudes toward his person and, especially, to his situation as a prisoner. His chains result in a considerable missionary success, prompted not only by himself but also by other "brothers" (and sisters?!). He postulates, then, a difference in *motivation* among these preaching Christians. We have, on the one side, "envy and rivalry," "selfish ambition" (or whatever ἐριθεία in v. 17 might mean),[4] and being "not sincere." Paul denigrates this motivation with the damning term *pretense*. By contrast, on the other side, which is entirely positive in orientation, we have "goodwill" and "love": all this is characterized by the term *truth*. We already note here that Paul probably does make use of *friendship* terminology.[5] Friends and nonfriends (they need not necessarily be enemies) are distinguished this way. This distinction is very evident for the negative side: envy, strife, and pretense contradict the fundamentals of true friendship. On the positive side, we do not have direct pagan-Greek parallels to goodwill and love, but we might easily find analogies, such as *prothymia* and *philia*.[6]

However, Paul sets all that aside. What matters only is the proclamation of Christ "in every way" (v. 18). This statement is important for the

3. See the discussion and main arguments recently offered by Paul A. Holloway, *Philippians*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 10–19, esp. 18–19.

4. See BDAG, s.v. "ἐριθεία": "Its meaning in our lit. is a matter of conjecture"; Ceslas Spicq, *Lexique théologique du Nouveau Testament* (Fribourg: Cerf, 1991), 580–81. See the discussion in John Reumann, *Philippians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYB 33B (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 181–82.

5. See the material offered by Reumann, *Philippians*, 206.

6. The negative motives themselves are not specific. In Pauline literature Christians are warned of envy, rivalry, selfishness, and pretense. Selfishness may lead directly to hell (Rom 2:8; Gal 5:20).

interpretation of the whole passage. Paul places his friends and his non-friends under the same umbrella: they preach the gospel, they all proclaim Christ, and they all seem to be brothers (v. 14). This means that there is a basic community between all of them, irrespective of their motivation. The apostle displays in this case an open heart—regardless of whether people are seeking their own interests or those of Jesus Christ (to put it in the terms of 2:21). This attitude of Paul renders it unlikely that the dissenters in our passage do have any connection to those whom he accuses of perverting the gospel, as in Galatia, or also in Phil 3 (we will come back to this point later). There seems to be a common foundation in terms of the Christian life as well as in terms of theological orientation—regardless of the tensions among the Christians and especially in their relation to Paul.

What is behind all this? Paul is so brief in his narration that we cannot easily detect what was really going on inside and outside in terms of the precise circumstances of his imprisonment.[7] The data given in verse 17 that the dissenters "intend to increase my suffering in my imprisonment" leave us with many questions. Scholars have asked whether Paul's appeal to his Roman citizenship had led to debates within the Christian community.[8] But the text does not support any speculation of this kind. We can only state that Paul interpreted the intention of the dissenters as a case of aggression against him as a prisoner—but this personal view should not be mistaken for the real behavior of these people. We receive also no help for an identification of the locality of Paul's prison. Dissent and dissonance within the community, and especially in its relation to the prisoner Paul, would fit well either with Ephesus, which was not founded by the apostle, or with Rome, where the author of 1 Clement mentions "envy and strife" as the reason for the martyrdom of the apostles Peter and Paul (5:2–5).

Having established the difficulty of discerning the apostle's specific circumstances from his brief comments in the text, I turn now to the theological argumentation, which I will unfold along four lines.

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7. I do not see any convincing reason to build a bridge to the dissonance of the two women, Euodia and Syntyche, in 4:2–3, rightly refuted by Holloway, *Philippians*, 182 n. 5. Such was the argument, also due to his literary-critical operations, of Christoph Kähler, "Konflikt, Kompromiss und Bekenntnis: Paulus und seine Gegner im Philipperbrief," *KD* 40 (1994): 58–61.

8. See Jean-François Collange, *L'épître de saint Paul aux Philippiens*, CNT 10A (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1973), 25–26, 51–52.

1. *Polis*: Apart from *friendship*, the terms that Paul uses also point to the *political* domain. Envy, strife, and pretense were a constant feature of first-century city life. Conversely, the same can be said for a more positive involvement in the ancient city: a loyal and solid citizen displays "goodwill" and "love," that is, *prothymia* and *philia*.

2. *Reference to an external divine power*: here Paul is stressing a *Christocentric* attitude. All circumstances for the apostle, no matter their difficulty, are about Christ and his proclamation (v. 18).

3. *Distance*: Complementary to this Christocentric perspective, Paul's argument is characterized by a programmatic indifference: "What then?" he asks. For the apostle only one matter counts: the nonessentials are marked with εἴτε—εἴτε. Indifference, however, does not mean insensibility—neither in the case of Paul nor among Hellenistic moralists (referring here mainly to the Stoics). Rather, paradoxically, Paul's attitude to his difficult circumstances becomes for him a source of *joy*.

Both lines, his Christocentric orientation and programmatic indifference, are continued and deepened in the following passage, that is, verses 19–26.[9] As far as the Christocentric orientation, the "proclaimed Christ" reappears in the Christ who "will be exalted in my body, whether I live or die." The apostle becomes the instrument of Christ, who reveals himself in his life or in his death.

As far as indifference, it reappears in the attitude that Paul displays either to his surviving or to his dying. Again, it does not matter: his personal outcome will serve Christ in either case (indicated in v. 20 again with εἴτε—εἴτε). Both, dying and living, have their own inherent goodness, and each will have a positive outcome—but in a different way for Paul, on the one hand, and for the addressees, his community, on the other hand. The comparison of death and life in verses 21–26, designed in the form of a rhetorical comparison (*synkrisis*), aims at working out the teleology of both options.

4. *Competition*: Here, in Phil 1, all missionary success that is achieved by the brothers is generated by the apostle's chains.

In sum, Paul distances himself from his own opinions and displays a certain kind of conciliatory tolerance. In giving something much greater space, he performs a specific theological movement: his focus shifts away

9. For details, see my article, "Die Waagschalen von Leben und Tod. Phil 1,21–26 vor dem Hintergrund der antiken Rhetorik," in *Horizonte neutestamentlicher Christologie*, WUNT 144 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 237–61.

from his own subjective attitude to the divine position. The positive counterpart to Paul's indifference is his desire to enhance the greatness of God and his Christ.

Do we have analogies to this theological figure elsewhere in Paul's writings? Indeed, 1 Cor 15:9–11 shows a quite similar movement. Compared to the great apostles of Jerusalem Paul is, on the one hand, "the least of the apostles," whereas, on the other hand, he had "worked harder than any of them." But all this does not count (see again the εἴτε—εἴτε): totally central is the proclamation. As in Phil 1, "friendly competition" is in sight.[10] Again the focus shifts from the human subject to the divine. Paul underlines that all is performed by "the grace of God that is with me." Our passage here is linked with a highly competitive thrust. The apostle was an extremely competitive character, and he lived in a world in which competition was a fundamental pillar of the whole culture. The advice of old Peleus to his son, characteristic of the Greco-Roman nobility, has become formative for the ancient cultural world: "ever be bravest, and pre-eminent above all" (Homer, *Il.* 11.784; 6.208).[11]

2. Exponents of This World (Philippians 1:27–30)

We turn now to the next passage where Paul mentions others whose position is contrary to his own and to the Christian communities, that is, Phil 1:27–30. Verse 28 refers to "opponents" (ἀντικείμενοι). In a construction, the grammar of which is not definitely clear, the apostle links these opponents with future destruction,[12] whereas the Philippian Christians might expect "salvation." There is nowadays little doubt that these opponents have to be identified with the representatives of the pagan environment of the Philippian community and here are probably to be identified with especially the Roman authorities. The term itself does not point to a specific semantic

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10. For the difference between friendly competition and hostile competition, see Thomas Schmeller, "Paulus und die Konkurrenz," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 67.2 (2004): 163–78.

11. Compare to the corresponding nobility code: Joachim Latacz, "Achilleus: Wandlungen eines europäischen Heldenbildes," in *Homers Ilias: Studien zu Dichter, Werk und Rezeption*, Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 327 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 267–346, esp. 310–12.

12. For ἀπώλεια, see Matt 7:13; Rom 9:22; 2 Pet 2:1; Rev 17:8; Albrecht Oepke, "ἀπώλεια," *TDNT* 1:396–97; Moisés Silva, "ἀπώλεια," *NIDNTTE* 1:359–60; and the excursus "The Fate of the Wicked according to Paul," in Holloway, *Philippians*, 107–8.

field (military or political) but relates much more to biblical language in general (see, e.g., Exod 23:22; Isa 66:6). The Philippians should "in no way be intimidated" by their opponents. The fearlessness of the Christians in the present (v. 28a) will become an important eschatological "sign": the upright attitude of the Christians in the face of their opponents indicates the future "destruction" of their opponents and testifies to their own "salvation" as the eschatological outcome (v. 28b). In verse 29, Paul elaborates on further considerations for the Philippian readers as they adopt this fearless attitude in the face of considerable difficulties: the believers are invited to interpret their (possible) suffering as a gift of God, experienced for the sake of Christ. Paul links the suffering of the Philippians with his own struggle (*agōn*) and with Christ's own suffering (v. 30).

If we take the *antikeimenoi* in verse 28 in the broad sense of "opponents of God and his people," it is attractive to build a bridge to 2:15. There, the Christians are depicted "as lights in the world" "in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation." The notion is here even more general, with its allusions to apocalyptic traditions and especially to Dan 12:3. This "wicked generation," which we are familiar with from Jesus's sayings (Matt 17:17 // Luke 9:41; see also Acts 2:40), refers no longer to Israel (Deut 32:5) but to humankind in general. All those who are outside the Christian community are the lost ones, like darkness opposed to light.

These two references to the outsiders are scattered throughout the central part of Philippian, starting with 1:27. At first glance, these references to opponents seem to be quite marginal. But the whole picture changes if we interpret large portions of Philippians as an implicit reflection on the identity of the Christian community within the Roman colony of Philippi. If verse 27 is read as a programmatic admonition to the Christian community in general, it is depicted as a political body with its own constitution, its own reign, and its own rules of behavior and citizenship. It has often been argued that the letter to the Philippians models the church in terms of a *polis*, that is, of an ideal *polis*, as indicated by the meaning of *politeuesthai*. This word should not be taken as referring to the generalized walk and conduct of the believer, but, rather, much more as an admonition to "live as citizen."[13] This view fits well with the call for unity in verse 27–30

13. See, e.g., my article: "Politische Theologie im Philipperbrief?," in *Paulus und Johannes*, ed. Dieter Sänger and Ulrich Mell, WUNT 198 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 457–69; Angela Standhartinger, "Die paulinische Theologie im Spannungsfeld römisch-imperialer Machtpolitik. Eine neue Perspektive auf Paulus, kritisch geprüft

and 2:1–4, where Paul is echoing the political rhetoric of *homonoia*. The praise of Christ might be easily interpreted this way; it offers a pattern not only for an ideal ruler but also in general for Christian behavior in the *ekklēsia*. Finally, the political associations are supported by the reference to the *heavenly politeuma* at the end of chapter 3.

Seen from this perspective, our whole passage might be read as an exposition of a counterimage to the Greco-Roman society and its cities in general, and, specifically, to the Colonia Iulia Augusta Philippensis. Paul makes clear where and how Christian life collides with patterns and standards of its cultural environment. On the other hand, the Christian community realizes everything that Greco-Roman society imagines to be the ideal city. The *polis* of the believers, therefore, surpasses the real cities here on earth; it is rooted in heaven, with its divine city.

We return to our question about the opponents and about Paul's approach to them. I will, again, unfold this along the four lines mentioned above.

1. *Polis*: Apart from the specific terminology, it seems quite clear that the city is threatened from the outside by *enemies*. This threat calls for the unity and solidarity of its citizens; they need to be united in their defense. We might refer not only to 1:27–2:4 but also to the blamelessness of the "children of God" in 2:15, which offers no weak spot for any attack from an enemy.

2. *Reference to an external divine power*: At first glance we do not encounter this notion here. Rather, what we are observing is a striking shift in focus from a selfish perspective to the perspective of the *others*: "Be concerned not only about your own interests, but about the interests of others as well" (2:4). The whole passage calls for this kind of Christian solidarity. But when we combine this call to humility with the praise of Christ in 2:6–11, it is quite attractive to read Paul's hymn as a counterprogram to the pagan endeavor toward status and prestige—a basic cultural orientation of the ancient urban elites, which might have been even intensified by the Roman profile of Philippi, especially when the Greeks in the city and its territory took over the values of the Roman upper class. Christian life, therefore, is not about prestige because it consists essentially in an abandonment of status. But this renunciation is only one side of the coin:

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anhand des Philipperbriefs," in *Religion, Politik und Gewalt*, ed. Friedrich Schweitzer, Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie 29 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006), 364–82.

humility is complemented by divine elevation. Christ's *kenosis* frees space for God's activity. The immediate implications of the hymn of Christ found in 2:12–13 are put in terms of paradoxical rhetoric that results in a theocentric statement ("it is God who is at work in you"). So, when the focus shifts from the subject to the others, there is room for divine activity. One may detect a glimpse of this theocentric notion in 1:28, where Paul is referring to God's salvific activity ("and this from God").

3. *Distance:* Again we do not meet indifference in our passage but quite the opposite: suffering. In fact, this suffering of the Philippians might imply social and financial marginalization as opposed to robust or heavy treatment. But Paul calls for a new understanding of suffering and makes it possible, therefore, to overcome its negative and depressive force: it is suffering for Christ's sake, and it is a gift of God. And here, again, it becomes the source of *joy* (2:17–18).

4. *Competition*: This element is, again, not obviously on the surface of the text, but nevertheless it is an important one. In 1:26 Paul refers once more to the last judgment and is proud of being an agent of the Philippians' honors. In 2:16 he expresses hope that he himself would be honored by God thanks to his community. And even in the admonition to unity in 2:3, competition (ὑπερέχειν) is converted to humility.

3. Traitors in Their Own Ranks (Phil 3:2–21)

We turn to the last passage where dissenters are mentioned: Phil 3:2–21. The passage deals with adversaries who are called "dogs," "evil workers," "mutilators" (v. 2), and "enemies of the cross of Christ" (v. 18). The whole passage is as rich as it is difficult, and we will focus only on the elements that are most important for our guiding question. Paul's evaluation of these rivals is extremely negative: their eschatological fate is "destruction," the same outcome as for the pagan adversaries (1:28). The portrait of the opponents is mainly designed as a counterpart to his own apostolic person. Because Paul himself pursues the goal of a kind of self-praise—combined with a call to imitate him (v. 17)—the question arises as to whether his image of the opponents still has any historical traits.[14] Despite all the styl-

14. See Christine Gerber, "ΚΑΥΧΑΣΘΑΙ ΔΕΙ, ΟΥ ΣΥΜΦΕΡΟΝ ΜΕΝ … (2 Kor 12,1). Selbstlob bei Paulus vor dem Hintergrund der antiken Gepflogenheiten," in *Paul's Graeco-Roman Context*, ed. Cilliers Breytenbach, BETL 277 (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 238–42, referring to Brian Dodd, *Paul's Paradigmatic "I": Personal Example as*

ization, however, there are some special features that reveal the historical profile of the opponents.

There is clear evidence that the opponents are Judeo-Christian missionaries. What is decisive is the keyword *circumcision* in verse 2c, which certainly has to do with their theological or ecclesiological self-image, completely independent of the question whether they explicitly tried to enforce it on pagans. Circumcision represents, as a title of dignity, the election of Israel as God's own people; Paul turns over the mark of honor to shame ("mutilation"), here following an anti-Jewish topos (see also Gal 5:12). Probably the apostle, with the equally polemical topos in verse 19, namely with "belly" and "shame," also alludes to the importance of food commandments and circumcision in their proclamation.[15] Paul countered their excellent Jewish origins with his own ethnic excellence (vv. 5-7). The "workers" (v. 2b) point to Christian missionaries; even the violent invective makes followers of Christ more likely than non-Christian Jews. There is substantial reason to identify these opponents with Jewish Christian missionaries of the same type as in Galatia. What is more, it seems that Paul does not react to real activities of such missionaries but that he leads a preemptive strike, that is, he reckons with the future possibility of such interventions. The hypothetical opponents are, therefore, "phantoms."[16]

Once again we apply our catalogue of four dimensions to this passage.

1. *Polis*: The climax of our passage, formulated in elevated style (vv. 19–21), consists in the opposition of "earthly things" and the "citizenship in heaven." The opponents of chapter 3 are neither rivals (i.e., under the umbrella of the shared and common gospel) nor external enemies,

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Literary Strategy, JSNTSup 177 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 171–95; Eve-Marie Becker, "Polemik und Autobiographie. Ein Vorschlag zur Deutung von Phil 3,2–4a," in *Polemik in der frühchristlichen Literatur*, ed. Oda Wischmeyer and Lorenzo Scornaienchi, BZNW 170 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 233–54.

15. This opinion, shared by many researchers, is not refuted by the observation that Paul also uses a well-known polemical topos with the "belly," which is especially directed against the Epicureans. See Karl Olav Sandnes, *Belly and Body in the Pauline Epistles*, SNTSMS 120 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Against Sandnes (159–64), it is not necessary to understand this polemical tradition as an alternative to the reading of Jewish rituals.

16. Thus the wording of Morna Hooker, "Philippians: Phantom Opponents and the Real Source of Conflict," in *Fair Play: Pluralism and Conflicts in Early Christianity; Essays in Honour of Heikki Räisänen*, ed. Ismo Dunderberg et al., NovTSup 103 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 377–95.

but, rather, they are internal destroyers of the community and betrayers of the gospel (see also Gal 1:6). For any city this is the worst type of possible adversary.

2. *Reference to an external divine power*: This basic figure can easily be picked up in three arguments and formulations, respectively. First, Paul speaks about the leap from "*my own* righteousness" to "the righteousness *from God* based on faith" (v. 9). Second, "dynamics" is much better than the acquisition or maintenance of status: the metaphor of running in verses 12-14 builds up an impressive counterimage to the ethnic privileges of verses 4–7, which are rooted in the flesh (v. 3). This dynamic movement, which includes letting go all these privileges, is based on the communion with Christ, along with his resurrection and his passion (v. 10). Third, our passage ends with an epideictic reference to Christ's "power by which he is able to subject all things to himself" (v. 21).

3. *Distance*: The whole passage works with an "Umwertung aller Werte," a fundamental reshaping of all values. There is much pathos in Paul's argument, especially in the terminology of verses 7–8. Paul offers himself as a pattern for Christian behavior (v. 17). One has to abandon all privileges based on ethnos or on the achievement and maintenance of status.

4. *Competition*: Our passage is one of the most obvious expressions of Paul's competitive character (vv. 3–6). All his former strife for ethnic and personal excellence is denigrated in extremely negative manner. But, on the other hand, the apostle hopes to be honored at the last judgment (v. 14).

There are several analogous passages in Paul where he is engaged in a severe dispute with "false brothers," "false apostles," and "deceitful workers." Apart from Galatians—with a discourse about justification that could be correlated to the one in Phil 3 about God's justice—the Fool's Speech (2 Cor 11–12) deserves special attention. We meet in this passage an analogous combination of hard rejection and polemics, of personal ambition (11:13–15, 22–29), of a deep break with self-praise and, instead, a strong advocacy of the inhabitation of an external divine power (12:9–10).

4. What Makes a Rival a Traitor? Some Conclusions

Finally, we come back to a question that was raised at the beginning in view of Philippians: while Paul is tolerant toward his opponents in Phil 1, nevertheless he draws a strict line regarding a different set of oppo-

nents in Phil 3. Where is this only a matter of rivalry or (more or less) friendly competition for him, and where does it become a fundamental issue, acquiring, so to speak, the *status confessionis*? Looking at Paul's understanding of the gospel, it can be said that where a different gospel is proclaimed other than the gospel that he himself represents, there is no possibility of tolerance. According to his testimony, this is the case in Galatia (Gal 1:6) and in Corinth (2 Cor 11:4), and analogously, as we have seen, at least in two instances in Philippi (Phil 1:27–30; 3:2–21), but not where he introduces his letter (1:15, 17–18). What is, therefore, the otherness of the gospel that generates a self-destructive effect, according to Gal 1:7?

The answer must be differentiated: in view of the teachers active in the Galatian communities, content obviously plays a central role, in particular, the importance of the commandments of the Torah for belonging to the people of God. In Corinth, however, at least superficially, it is not fundamental theology that is called for, but rather a call to work at community relationships:[17] what is at stake is the unique biography of the community, which consists in the exclusive relationship between it and its founder. It is shattered by the foreign missionaries (see 2 Cor 11:1–3, where Paul appears almost as "bride" leader). But, in the case of the city where the Epistle to the Philippians was written, neither problem arises: neither is there a Torah-oriented proclamation, nor is it a church founded by the apostle himself whose relationship with his converts had been disturbed by rivals. In Corinth, one passes into the other: internal dissonances ("divisions," 1 Cor 1:10–13; 11:18–19), which do not shake the basis of the common gospel but nevertheless mutate under the influence of external actors into threatening cracks in the foundation—at least in the view of Paul writing 2 Corinthians.

In light of the differences of situation and approach outlines above, we come to some conclusions.

1. In all our passages we discovered ecclesiological motifs that were shaped from the world of *political* discourse and from the experience of ancient cities. Some of the motifs often attributed to the paradigm of friendship[18] are probably better placed in the sphere of political domain.

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17. See Reimund Bieringer, "Die Gegner des Paulus im 2. Korintherbrief," in *Studies on 2 Corinthians*, ed. Bieringer and Jan Lambrecht, BETL 112 (Leuven: Peeters, 1994), 181–221.

18. See, e.g., L. Michael White, "Morality between Two Worlds: A Paradigm of

Early Christians modeled their communities (ἐκκλησίαι) by means of political conceptions and discourses. The city pattern does not necessarily need to be an alternative to the paradigm of voluntary associations[19] because ancient associations duplicate in many respects city structures.

Our three types of opponents and dissenters, respectively, fit well in the category of the city life. (1) Within the field of politics, we meet rivals and adversaries negatively labeled by the other side. Nevertheless, they are accepted as fighting for the same city, its freedom and its constitution. (2) Each *polis* has enemies outside; there is an urgent need to stand firmly against this threat. (3) The most dangerous type of opponents is those who act from within as destroyers and betrayers.

2. The central basic figure that Paul is articulating in Philippians (as in other letters, at least partially) is the one that we might call an *eccentric* one. Christian life consists mainly in dedicating oneself to a divine reality or agent—namely, Christ and/or God—and, linked with that, devoting oneself to other human beings, especially to the community as a whole. This dedication transforms the notion of status and honor fundamentally. We might read, therefore, Philippians as an argument against the gravity of social status and prestige in a Roman colony.[20] The source and nature of real honor is a quite different one: several times Paul refers not by accident to the divine judgment, where he hopes and expects being honored by God, together with his community (1:6, 10–11; etc.).

This eccentric figure, comprehensible especially in the hymn of Christ in chapter 2, fits well with the strong presence of *epideictic* rhetoric in Philippians (esp. 2:5–11, 19–24, 25–30; 3:2–21).[21] All these encomiastic elements aim ultimately at the praise *soli Deo Gloria* (see Phil 2:11c).

Friendship in Philippians," in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, ed. David L. Balch, Everett Ferguson, and Wayne A. Meeks (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 201–15; Stanley K. Stowers, "Friends and Enemies in the Politics of Heaven: Reading Theology in Philippians," in *Pauline Theology*, ed. Jouette M. Bassler (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 1:105–21.

19. See Richard S. Ascough, *Paul's Macedonian Associations: The Social Context of Philippians and 1 Thessalonians*, WUNT 2/161 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

20. For the background see the instructive monograph of Peter Oakes, *Philippians: From People to Letter*, SNTSMS 110 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

21. See Ralph Brucker, *"Christushymnen" oder "epideiktische Passagen"? Studien zum Stilwechsel im Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt*, FRLANT 176 (Göttingen:

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