



Journal *for the* Study of Paul *and his* Letters

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Introducing the *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters*

The Apostle Paul stands as an incredibly important figure within the religious and intellectual history of Christianity and Judaism in the first century. The study of Paul (the historical person, author, tradition, and legend) and the Pauline letters (content, context, authenticity, theology, and reception) continue to capture the fascination of scholars, students, religious communities, and even the media. A number of journals geared toward New Testament studies in general often contain a disproportionate number of articles dedicated to the study of the Pauline corpus. There is a never-ending avalanche of Ph.D. theses written about Paul and about the countless approaches and methods used to analyze the Pauline materials. Indeed, the study of Paul and the Pauline letters appears to be an almost inexhaustible field of investigation. Therefore, we think it time that Pauline research should have its own dedicated journal as a specific conduit for Pauline research as it is broadly practiced. In light of these considerations, it is my pleasure to present to you the *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* (JSPL).

The *JSPL* will present cutting-edge research for scholars, teachers, post-graduate students, and advanced undergraduates related specifically to study of the Apostle Paul and cognate areas. It is proposed that the many and diverse aspects of Pauline studies be represented and promoted by the journal, including:

- Pauline chronology and biography
- The Pauline corpus, including its collection and textual transmission
- The historical, cultural, literary, and social context of Paul and the Pauline writings
- Diverse perspectives, such as post-colonial interpretation and critical theory
- Studies in Pauline theology and theological interpretation of Paul's letters
- The reception of Paul in the early church
- Studies in the history of Pauline research
- The relation of Pauline texts to practical theology
- Essay-length reviews of significant new publications in Pauline studies
- Issues dedicated to particular themes

The purpose of the journal is to advance discussion on these areas of Pauline research. As such we invite submissions on the above mentioned topics that make a significant and original contribution to the field of Pauline studies.

The inaugural issue of *JSPL* includes a contribution by one of its editorial board members, Dr. Susan Eastman of Duke Divinity School (USA) on “Philippians 2:6–11: Incarnation as Mimetic Participation.” Delving into the Christ-Hymn, Eastman argues for a close link between imitation and participation in Paul’s explication of his gospel to the Philippian audience. The first regular issue of *JSPL* will include studies such as Paul Foster, “Eschatology in the Thessalonian Correspondence”; Michael Gorman, “Justification and Justice”; Richard Bell, “Paul’s Theology of Mind”; and a review of Douglas A. Campbell’s *The Deliverance of God* by Christopher Tilling and Michael Gorman, with a further response from Douglas Campbell.

MICHAEL F. BIRD (*Editor*)

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Guidelines for manuscript submission and charter subscription information are found on the inside back cover.

*Philippians 2:6–11:
Incarnation as Mimetic Participation*

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INTRODUCTION

Some roles can really get under an actor's skin. Playing Hamlet would surely put you in an existential mood. Macbeth could bring out a guy's paranoid streak, even without that fabled curse said to attend productions. But playing the son of God has got to be the trickiest assignment of all. Hanging up there on the cross every night—twice on matinee days!—could give a guy a serious persecution complex, no?¹

Thus begins a review of the New York debut of *Passion Play*, by contemporary playwright Sarah Ruhl. In it, she depicts three productions of the traditional village passion play, beginning with a setting in Elizabethan England, moving to Oberammergau in 1934, and concluding in Spearfish, South Dakota, during the years of the Vietnam War until the time of Reagan's presidency. Thus, it is a series of plays within a play that uses enactments of Christ's passion to explore the troubling, provocative intersections between religion, politics and social mores, as the amateur actors wrestle with questions of anti-Semitism, faith, sexual identity, and, last but not least, the interplay between the their own lives and the roles they play. As the reviewer, Charles Isherwood, notes, "For the actors who play key roles in the pageant in all three time periods. . . . impersonating these symbols of human suffering and purity and sin is an honor and a burden."² In addition, because the New York production is staged in a former church Sunday school room, with no clear demarcation between the performers and the audience, the spectators potentially assume a participatory role.

1. Charles Isherwood, "The Intersection of Fantasy and Faith," *The New York Times* (May 13, 2010), 13. Cited May 15, 2010. Online: <http://theater.nytimes.com/2010/05/13/theater/reviews/13passion.html?>

2. *Ibid.*, 13.

Passion Play nicely sets the stage for this article's exploration of Phil 2:6–11, widely known as the "Christ-hymn":

- [5. Have this mindset (τοῦτο φρονεῖτε) among yourselves, which is in Christ Jesus,]
 6. Who, being in the form of God,
 did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited,
 7a. but made himself as nothing,
 7b. taking the form of a slave (μορφὴν δούλου),
 7c. being born in the likeness of human beings (ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων);
 7d. and being found in the trappings of a singular human being (κατὰ σχήματι εὑρεθείς ὡς ἄνθρωπος),³
 8. he became obedient to the point of death,
 death on a cross.
 9. For this reason (διὸ) God highly exalted (ὑπερύψωσεν) him,
 and gave him the name above every name,
 10. that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
 11. and every tongue confess (ἑξομολογήσῃται) that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.⁴

Few passages in the New Testament have sparked as many debates as this one has.⁵ One of those debates concerns whether it should be interpreted primarily as "kerygmatic," portraying the drama of salvation, or "ethical," presenting Christ as an exemplar for the Philippians to follow.⁶ A growing chorus of schol-

3. The KJV, RSV, and NASB move v. 7d to the beginning of v. 8. For discussion of the issues, see Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 226; Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (BNTC; London: Black and Hendrickson, 1998), 137; Gordon Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 214 n. 2.

4. My translation.

5. As is evident from my title, I join the majority of interpreters in reading Phil 2:6–11 as describing Christ's movement *from* a prior existence with God, *to* his incarnation. James D. G. Dunn argues that Phil 2:6–11 refers only to Jesus' earthly life as a second Adam ("Christ, Adam, and Preexistence," in *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* [ed. R. P. Martin and B. J. Dodd; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998], 74–83). As O'Brien points out, the verb γενόμενος deals a fatal blow to Dunn's argument: "The *contrast* clearly expressed between 'being in the form of God' and 'becoming in the form of human beings' is very odd if it is only between two stages in the career of a human being" (*Philippians*, 267, emphasis original).

6. A purely "kerygmatic" interpretation was argued forcefully by Ernst Käsemann, "A Critical Analysis of Philippians 2:5–11," *JTC* 5 (1968): 45–88 (German, "Kritische Analyse von Phil. 2, 5–11," *ZTK* 47 [1950]: 313–60); followed by Ralph P. Martin, *Carmen Christi: Philippians 2:5–11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 294–296,

ars rightly claims that this sort of dichotomy is foreign to Paul's thought.⁷ I share this view; nonetheless, a great deal depends on whether the kerygmatic or the ethical sense of the passage receives priority in its interpretation. In what follows, I read Phil 2:6–11 kerygmatically as the drama of Christ's redemptive participation in human existence, which in turn empowers transformed behavior among the Philippians. Specifically, I argue that this passage, with a long history of interpretation as a call to imitate Christ, in fact displays a reverse-mimetic movement in which Christ plays the role of enslaved and condemned humanity on the stage of human history.⁸ Rather than human actors performing the character of Jesus, here the incarnate Christ takes their part.

309–311. Among many who view Phil 2:6–11 as primarily exemplary, see Larry W. Hurtado, "Jesus as Lordly Example in Philippians 2:5–11," in *From Jesus to Paul: Studies in Honour of Francis Wright Beare* (ed. P. Richardson and J. C. Hurd; Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1984), 113–126; William S. Kurz, "Kenotic Imitation of Paul and of Christ in Philippians 2 and 3," in *Discipleship in the New Testament* (ed. F. F. Segovia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 103–26; Wayne Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Paul's Letter to the Philippians," in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester* (ed. Birger Pearson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 329–36; O'Brien, *Philippians*, 253–62; N. T. Wright, "Jesus Christ Is Lord: Philippians 2:9–11," in *The Climax of the Covenant* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 56–98 (esp. p. 93); Fee, *Philippians*, 196; Stephen Fowl, *Philippians* (Two Horizons New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 106–7; Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 121–25. Troels Engberg-Pedersen claims the primary motif of the letter is "that of Paul modelling Christ to the Philippians," in *Paul and the Stoics* (London: T. & T. Clark / Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 91, emphasis original. See pp. 81–130 for a full discussion.

7. See Fowl, *Philippians*, 106–8; idem, "Christology and Ethics in Philippians 2:5–11," in *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (ed. R. P. Martin and B. J. Dodd; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 140–53; Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 123–25; idem, "'The Form of God' (Phil 2:6): Variations on a Theme of Jewish Mysticism," *JTS* n.s. 48 (1997): 1–23 (esp. p. 5 n. 11). Engberg-Pedersen also argues that Paul's ethics and theology cannot be separated but effectively collapses theology into a construal of Stoic ethics: "It is the radically cognitive . . . construction of the human mind in Stoicism, together with their focus on identity ('self-cognition') that constituted the framework for Paul's thought about the Christ event and its consequences" (*Paul and the Stoics*, 65). The priority of God's saving activity in Christ and the union of soteriology and ethics are argued by Brian J. Dodd ("The Story of Christ and the Imitation of Paul in Philippians 2–3," in *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* [ed. R. P. Martin and B. J. Dodd; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998], 154–61); see also David Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: a Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 206–14; J. Ross Wagner, "Working Out Salvation: Holiness and Community in Philippians," in *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament* (ed. Kent E. Brower and Andy Johnson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 257–74; and Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 9–39.

8. For exploration of this sort of mimetic reversal in relationship to ancient *paideia*, see my "Imitating Christ Imitating Us: Paul's Educational Project in Philippians," in *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays* (ed. J. Ross Wagner, C. Kavin Rowe, and C. Katherine Grieb; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 427–541.

His performance truly does “get under his skin,” as his full participation in the human plight is crowned by his crucifixion. Furthermore, God’s subsequent exaltation of Jesus reveals that his humble obedience is in fact a theophany, through which his performance also gets under the *audience’s* skin. Hence, the story of Jesus, as it is re-presented in Phil 2:6–11, evokes a mimetic response in its auditors. As in Sarah Ruhl’s *Passion Play*, here there are no offstage dressing room and no safe distance between the production and its addressees. As they hear, visualize, and perhaps even sing the dramatic narrative, the Philippians also are caught up into the drama of salvation. In this way, the priority of Christ’s participation in the human plight, which in turn awakens and enlivens humanity’s participation in Christ, brings together the kerygmatic and ethical aspects of Phil 2:6–11.⁹ This union of kerygma and ethics, proclamation and action, happens in the realm in which Jesus Christ is κύριος of all.¹⁰

Such a “theatrical” reading of the Christ-hymn involves three subsidiary proposals: (1) Philippians 2:7–8 depicts Christ’s incarnation as a mimetic “performance” that culminates in crucifixion, thereby enacting Christ’s complete involvement in the human condition. (2) The vocabulary of both the hymn and the Philippians’ anticipated response depicts this participation as a theophany, from start to finish. (3) This theophany has mimetic effects among its recipients, so that they also show forth God’s redemptive incursion in the world.

9. Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 123–24. Most instructive are the observations of Robert Tannehill, “Participation in Christ: A Central Theme in Pauline Soteriology,” in *The Shape of the Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2007), 223–37: “participation is first of all divine participation in the human plight, which makes possible human participation in God’s Son” (p. 229) and *passim*. Gorman also discusses the centrality of participation in Phil 2:6–11, which he calls “Paul’s Master Story,” although his emphasis falls on the notion of participation in Christ via faith, more than on Christ’s participation in the human plight. Gorman’s description of faith as “co-crucifixion with Christ” gets at this idea of participation; I emphasize Christ’s humiliation and death as his prior “co-crucifixion” with enslaved and condemned Adamic humanity. See Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, 40–104. See also Douglas Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 756; in the context of discussing “faith” in Rom 1–4, Campbell notes that “Christian faith” is “isomorphic with Christ’s own ‘faith’ . . . it ultimately makes little sense to speak of a comprehensive mimetic relationship (i.e., of a thin analogy between Christ and the Christian). More likely is a participatory relationship, the Christian being caught up into Christ’s story in the deeper sense of being caught up into Christ himself.” As will be clear below, I am arguing for a “thick,” participatory account of a *reciprocal* mimetic relationship initiated and sustained by Christ.

10. Käsemann, “Critical Analysis,” 76–83, 86–88; Martin comments: “These verses, cast in lyrical and liturgical form, portray a soteriological drama. . . . As befits a drama, the language is picturesque and set in the form of a story. . . . The ‘plot’ is told in spatial terms and by the use of kinetic imagery” (*Carmen Christi*, 295–96).

PERFORMANCE, PARTICIPATION, PERCEPTION

As many have noted, the pattern of Phil 2:6–11 is one of descent, marked as humiliation, and ascent, marked as exaltation.¹¹ Christ’s downward mobility in the first half of the plot tracks through the aorist active finite verbs of which Christ is the subject: he “emptied” or “nullified” himself (ἐκένωσεν), and he “humbled” himself (ἐταπείνωσεν).¹² The upward movement (vv. 9–11) tracks through aorist active finite verbs of which God is the subject: “highly exalted” (ὑπερύψωσεν) and “gave” (ἔχαρίσατο). Within the poetic structure established by these finite verbs, the three parallel participial phrases of v. 7 form a triad that amplifies the meaning of ἐκένωσεν in terms of Christ’s public appearance in human form: taking the form of a slave (μορφήν δούλου λαβών), becoming (or being born) in the likeness of human beings (ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος), and being found through his outward aspect as a singular human being (καὶ σχήματι εὑρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος).¹³ Operative here is a close connection between performance, participation, and perception, conveyed through the language of “form” (μορφή), “likeness” (ὁμοίωμα), and public appearance (σχῆμα), that describes Christ’s actions in Phil 2:7.

At the same time, the introductory καὶ in 2:7d suggests the beginning of a new clause, linking καὶ σχήματι εὑρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος with the following phrases as well. In effect, then, the clause functions as a Pauline bridge, summing up what precedes and introducing what follows: Christ’s assumption of the form of a slave and his assimilation to the human condition are the σχήματα through which his singular identity is made known. Consequently, that singular identity manifests itself in his self-humbling, the display of which is explicated by the fourth participial phrase: “becoming obedient to the point of death (γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου).”

This transitional placement of the third descriptor of Christ’s appearance, in 2:7d, encourages us to look at it closely as a guide for our interpretation of Christ’s actions in 2:7–8. But because μορφήν δούλου in 2:7b antithetically

11. Fowl calls it “the basic ‘down-up’ story” (“Christology and Ethics in Philippians,” 143). See also Meeks, “Man from Heaven,” 329–30.

12. The verbal links connecting the phrases throughout the libretto are so striking that they defy attempts to divide it into neat strophes. Here I am following Morna Hooker, who suggests a division into two main strophes, related chiasmally: vv. 6–8 depict Christ’s kenotic incarnation and crucifixion, and vv. 8–11 depict his exaltation and enthronement. See “Philippians 2:6–11,” in *From Adam to Christ* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 158–59. Hooker’s schema maintains the verbal links between μορφή θεοῦ and μορφήν δούλου, the parallels between ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων and σχήματι ὡς ἄνθρωπος, and the contrasting correspondence between Christ’s actions (ἐκένωσεν and ἐταπείνωσεν) and God’s actions (ὑπερύψωσεν and ἔχαρίσατο). See also O’Brien, *Philippians*, 192–93; Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 125–26.

13. Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 133; O’Brien, *Philippians*, 217; Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, 17.

echoes ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ in 2:6a, the meaning of μορφή has dominated discussion of the terms, with ὁμοίωμα and σχῆμα treated largely as add-ons.¹⁴ Stephen Fowl states the rationale clearly: “[V.]6 is crucial for the way one reads the entire passage. . . . The key issue concerns what it means to speak of Christ as being ‘in the form of God.’”¹⁵ Hence, Christological concerns inevitably come into play in discussion of the terminology of Phil 2:7, as the emphasis on an essential identification of Christ with God, on the one hand, and with humanity, on the other, guides most interpretations.¹⁶ For example, in Bockmuehl’s words, the terms cumulatively “stress that Jesus humbled himself to become human, and indeed lowly, *through and through*.”¹⁷ At the same time, Bockmuehl and many other commentators rightly argue that in becoming human “*through and through*,” Christ also remains “in the form of God.”¹⁸ The tension between these two claims expresses the ambiguity of the terminology itself, which traverses the spectrum between difference and equivalence.

That spectrum comes into view even more clearly in the parallel clauses of Phil 2:7b–d. Each clause denotes some sort of relationship between two distinct entities: “form” is always the form of something else; “likeness” signifies both similarity and difference between one thing and another; “outward appearance” implies the existence of something or someone “behind” the appearance. This is the language of mimetic representation, which inevitably raises questions about the relationship between appearances and reality. No wonder Morna Hooker called the language of Phil 2:7 “shadowy.”¹⁹

14. See, e.g., Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, who devotes eight pages to discussing “form” (pp. 126–29, 131–33, 134–37) and two paragraphs to “likeness” and “appearance” (pp. 137–38). O’Brien, *Philippians*, spends nine pages on “form” (form of God, pp. 207–11; form of a slave, pp. 218–24) and three on both “likeness” and “appearance” (pp. 224–27). J. B. Lightfoot’s commentary proves the exception to the rule, with seven pages devoted to a comparison of μορφή and σχῆμα (*St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* [London: MacMillan, 1913; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1953], 127–32).

15. *Philippians*, 91. Fowl dismisses discussion of ὁμοίωμα and σχῆμα with the comment that they “do not have sufficient precision to help” with the question of the “precise nature of Christ’s humanity” (p. 98).

16. Fowl frankly acknowledges the theological concerns that unavoidably drive interpretation of these verses (*Philippians*, 98–99). To sharpen the point, we may compare the interpretations of ὁμοίωμα in Phil 2:7 and in Rom 8:3. In the former instance, stress often falls on Christ’s full identification with humanity; in the latter, on maintaining a distinction between Christ and “sinful flesh.” See, e.g., O’Brien, *Philippians*, 225. For discussion, see Vincent Branick, “The Sinful Flesh of the Son of God (Rom 8:3): A Key Image of Pauline Theology,” *CBQ* 47 (1985): 246–62 (esp. pp. 248–50).

17. Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 138.

18. *Ibid.*, 134–38; Wright, “Philippians 2:6–11,” passim; O’Brien, *Philippians*, 214–16. Thus Christ’s “self-emptying” through “taking the form of a slave” is not a putting aside of divinity but precisely an expression of God’s character, consonant with the witness of Israel’s Scripture.

19. “Philippians 2:6–11,” 98–99.

I suggest that further attention to the language of “likeness” and “appearance” is indicated by the structure and order of Phil 2:7. The meaning of μορφή is not only explicated but constrained by ὁμοίωμα in the subsequent clause. Ὅμοίωμα in turn admits of a broad range of possible meanings; yet insofar as καὶ σχήματι εὐρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος introduces a new sentence by summarizing the preceding one, it guides the interpretation of the passage as a whole. For this reason, this investigation of Phil 2:6–11 will begin with the Pauline bridge, “and being found through the σχῆμα of a singular human being.”²⁰

“APPEARANCE”

The word σχῆμα (Lat., *habitus*) is the least philosophically laden of the three terms under discussion, and yet in some ways it is the most troubling theologically, precisely because it emphasizes outward appearance rather than “essential” identity.²¹ Liddell and Scott list the following meanings:

form, shape, figure; appearance (opp. the reality), show, pretence; bearing, air, mien; fashion, manner, dress, equipment; character, role; characteristic property of a thing; a figure (in dancing), gestures, postures.²²

Seizing on the definition that focuses on the “characteristic property of a thing,” commentators have interpreted this term in Phil 2:7 as referring to “the way in which Jesus’ humanity appeared.”²³ This is indeed the case, but there is more to be said. If we look at the predominant meanings, most of them have to do with public performance, whether in specifically theatrical contexts or metaphorically on the “stage of life.” In Phil 2:7, the link with εὐρίσκω supports this context for interpreting σχήματι by requiring the presence of an audience that recognizes Christ’s human identity through his σχήματα.²⁴ Indeed, both the history and use of the term in a variety of settings and the pervasive theatricality of daily life in the Roman Empire suggest that the Philippians would have heard a performative reference in σχήματι ὡς ἄνθρωπος.²⁵

20. I read σχήματι as an instrumental dative, with Martin (*Carmen Christi*, 208) and O’Brien (*Philippians*, 227).

21. See Fee, *Philippians*, 215: “The primary sense of the word has to do not with the essential quality of something, but with its externals, that which makes it recognizable.”

22. LSJ 1745. See also the discussion in Lightfoot, *Philippians*, 127–33.

23. O’Brien, *Philippians*, 226, emphasis original. See also Martin, *Carmen Christi*, 207.

24. Martin, *Carmen Christi*, 208; followed by O’Brien, *Philippians*, 226–27; Fowl, *Philippians*, 98 n. 26.

25. For theatricality in the Roman Empire, see particularly Carlin Barton, *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans: The Gladiator and the Monster* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Richard Beacham, *Spectacle Entertainments in Imperial Rome* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 2–44 and passim; Anne Duncan, *Performance and Identity in the Classical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See further discussion below.

Early uses of *σχῆμα* and its cognates occur in discussions of mimesis, in which imitation as representational action happens through sounds and gestures.²⁶ As Greek theater developed, the word came to refer to the expressions and costumes through which actors displayed the identity of their character. In Euripides' *Ion* (236–38), for example, Creusa's royal stature is evident from her appearance (*μορφή*) and her bearing (*σχῆμα*). In Aristophanes' *Knights*, Demos's transformation is enacted by a change in apparel, as he appears in "old-time costume" (*ἀρχαίῳ σχήματι*).²⁷ Plato describes the professional entertainers who populate the luxurious city that he despises, including "the poets and their assistants, rhapsodists, actors, chorus-dancers, contractors," and "the imitators, many of them occupied with figures (*τὰ σχήματα*) and colors and many with music" (*Resp.* 373b).²⁸ Again, in Plato's description of poetic recitation, *σχῆμα* is joined with *ὁμοίω* to describe mimetic impersonation, which combines the notions of "likeness," "imitation," and "appearance": "to make oneself like someone else in voice or appearance is to imitate the person one makes oneself like" (*τό γε ὁμοιοῦν ἑαυτὸν ἄλλῳ ἢ κατὰ φωνὴν ἢ κατὰ σχῆμα μιμεῖσθαι ἐστὶν ἐκεῖνον ᾧ ἄν τις ὁμοιοῖ*).²⁹ Here, *σχήματα* are the mode of representation by which one imitates another, becoming like him or her. And because representations of this sort are "contagious," stirring up similar behavior in both performers and audience, Plato views them as powerful, confusing, and dangerous.³⁰

It is a long way from Plato to Paul's time. But Plato's critique of the poets sets out some of the issues at stake in later modes of mimetic representation. Indeed, evidence suggests that this ancient, dramatic aspect of mimesis as likeness and appearance that could either express or hide one's identity, flowered in a multitude of ways in the early Empire. In the upper classes, public life was

26. Hermann Koller, *Die Mimesis in der Antike: Nachahmung, Darstellung, Ausdruck* (Bern: Francke, 1954), 24–25, claims that mimesis first referred to liturgical dance in Dionysian cult drama; for critical discussion of Koller's thesis, see especially Göran Sörbom, *Mimesis and Art: Studies in the Origin and Early Development of an Aesthetic Vocabulary* (Bonniens: Svenska Bokförlaget, 1966), 11–21. Sörbom posits that the earliest meaning of *μιμεῖσθαι* was, "to behave like a mime actor" (p. 27). For a helpful overview of the issues, see Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *Mimesis: Culture—Art—Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 27–30.

27. Aristophanes, *Eq.* 1331 (Henderson, LCL). See Lightfoot, *Philippians*, 127

28. Plato, *Resp.* 373b (Shorey, LCL).

29. *Resp.* 393.c., trans. G. M. A. Grove, rev. C. D. C. Reeve, in *Plato: Complete Works* (ed. J. M. Cooper; Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 1031. For further discussion, see Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1963), 21–22.

30. See *Resp.* 395.b: The guardians of the city "mustn't be clever at doing or imitating slavish or shameful actions, lest from enjoying the imitation, they come to enjoy the reality. Or haven't you noticed that imitations practised from youth become part of nature and settle into habits of gesture, voice and thought?" (Grove, *Plato: Complete Works*, 1033). In this context, Gebauer and Wulf speak of "the epidemic quality of mimesis" (*Mimesis*, 47).

viewed as a performance, with attendant judgments of all sorts on that performance and its contagious power. On the one hand, many lament the hypocrisy of social climbers, for whom sycophancy replaces the classic Roman virtues of courage and honor.³¹ Tacitus, for example, bitterly observes, “The higher a man’s rank, the more eager his hypocrisy” (*Ann.* 1.7.1).³² And Seneca scorns “this drama of mortal life (*hic humanae vitae mimus*), in which we are assigned the parts which we are to play so badly” (*Ep.* 80.7).³³

On the other hand, rulers as well as philosophers were taught that their personal lives were to set a moral example for the public.³⁴ Thus, Plutarch advised politicians to order both their public and private lives well, in order to “train the character of the citizens,” because “you are henceforth to live as on an open stage (ὡσπερ ἐν θεάτρῳ)” (“Rules for Politicians,” *Mor.* 800).³⁵ Within this context, outward appearance was all-important, and one’s *σχῆμα*, which included both attire and demeanor, was an important aspect of that appearance. Josephus, for instance, describes King Hezekiah taking off his robes of state, putting on sackcloth, and assuming a “humble demeanor” (*σχῆμα ταπεινόν*) at the news of Sennacherib’s invasion (*Ant.* 10.11; see *Isa* 37:1; *2 Kgs* 19:1).³⁶ Conversely, Cynics famously used their attire to convey a countercultural image. According to Diogenes Laertius, Menedemus “went about in the guise (*σχῆμα*) of a Fury” (6.102), and when Hipparchia married the Cynic Crates, she also adopted Cynic attire (*σχῆμα*; 6.97). In either case, outward appearance is intended, quite self-consciously, to convey something about one’s identity. In Anne Duncan’s words, “the impulse to seek more radical forms of mimesis caused a theatricalization of ‘real life.’ The self, under the Empire, was revealed as a theatrical role, or even roles.”³⁷

The Roman obsession with performance and theatrical productions of all kinds further amplifies the performative resonance of *Phil* 2:7d. In pantomimes, popular among the upper classes, one actor enacted the roles of famous characters from mythology, using elaborate costumes, masks, dance, and gestures, called *σχῆματα*. The actor remained silent as a chorus sang the plot to rhythmic

31. Barton, *Sorrows*, 11–46 provides an illuminating exploration of Roman “fascination” with gladiators, who embodied the ancient Roman virtues while “The world *outside* the arena, the political world, came to be perceived as a theatre where every word was studied, every emotion feigned” (p. 29).

32. Translation from Barton, *Sorrows*, 29–30.

33. Gummere, LCL.

34. At Augustus’s death, he purportedly asked how he had “played the comedy of life” and then answered himself: “Since well I’ve played my part, all clap your hands, and from the stage dismiss me with applause” (Seutonius, *Aug.* 99 [Rolfe, LCL]).

35. Fowler, LCL.

36. For other examples of *σχῆμα* used to denote demeanor, see also Diogenes Laertius 4.17 and 4.36.

37. *Performance and Identity*, 24

music, accompanied by pipes, flutes, and other instruments.³⁸ Hence, the actor “had to refine his gestures to such a high degree and perform his movements so expressively that in him alone one could see embodied now a god and now a goddess, now a hero and now a heroine.”³⁹ In the less rarified air of the street and the arena, all classes enjoyed various forms of public entertainment, from the humorous gestures of dancers in triumphal processions⁴⁰ to mimes who employed comic buffoonery to lampoon the vagaries of daily life.⁴¹ Typical is the epitaph of a mime named Vitalis: “I so formed the faces, the bearing (*habitus*), and the words of the speakers that you would believe that many were speaking from one mouth.”⁴²

Thus, in a diversity of settings, all the trappings of appearance, gesture, and expression were part of the equipment through which one enacted a role, whether in a theatrical production or metaphorically in a public position. These looks may have been used politically to present a counterfeit identity, or they could be understood to depict accurately one’s true character.⁴³ Within this ambiguous world of appearances, *σχῆμα* retains the sense of something changeable and therefore superficial—as changeable and superficial as the costumes and gestures employed by pantomime actors. There is, however, another factor in the theatricality of ancient Rome that encourages us to see Christ’s appearance in the trappings of a human being as fully participatory: the oc-

38. Marguerite Bieber, *History of the Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 235–38. For an overview of pantomime and mimes in Rome, see also Mary T. Boatwright, “Theaters in the Roman Empire,” *BA* 53 (1990): 184–92; Richard Beacham, *The Roman Theatre and its Audience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 117–53.

39. Bieber, *History of the Greek and Roman Theater*, 235.

40. For example, one of the musicians dancing in a triumphal procession recorded by Appian “caused laughter by making various gesticulations” (σχηματίζεται ποίκιλος ἐς γέλοτα; *Bell. civ.* 9.66, White, LCL).

41. Allardyce Nicoll, *Masks, Mimes, and Miracles* (London: Harrap, 1931), 17–134, is a rich source of information on both pantomimes and mimes, as is Hermann Reich, *Der Mimus: Ein litterar-entwicklungsgeschichtlicher Versuch* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1903). See also the helpful overview in Laurence L. Welborn, *Paul, the Fool of Christ: A Study of 1 Corinthians 1–4 in the Comic-Philosophical Tradition* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 1–14. Sörbom traces the ancient lineage and consistent popularity of mime (*Mimesis and Art*, 27). See also Barton, *Sorrows*, 133–75: “The mime was everyman; he was, quite literally, the *vox populi*” (p. 138).

42. *Anth. pal.* 1173. Quoted in Barton, *Sorrows*, 138.

43. Ancient orators were keenly aware of this connection. In “Gestures and Conventions: The Gestures of Roman Actors and Orators,” Fritz Graf comments, “the outward appearance of a person is an image of the inward personality and character—dress, gestures, walking, any motion, are significant of interior man” (in *A Cultural History of Gesture* [ed. Jan Bremner and Herman Roodenburg; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992], 36–58 [quotation from p. 40]). Graf quotes Cicero to illustrate the point: “Every motion of the soul has its natural appearance, voice and gesture; and the entire body of a man, all his facial and vocal expressions, like the strings of a harp, sound just as the soul’s motion strikes them” (*De or.* 3.216).

currence of public performances that culminate in death, enacting a complete melding of the destiny of the actor with that of the “onstage” character. These “performances” might occur in many settings, from private dinners at which the host commanded his slave to perform a theatrical suicide, to what Barton calls “snuff plays,” in which “condemned criminals (and an occasional aristocrat) act out the role which will end in their death and/or mutilation.”⁴⁴ Moreover, long before medieval passion plays, comedic mimes of crucifixions were a popular form of entertainment.⁴⁵ Sometimes, these performances crossed the line from role-playing to actual execution, all in the name of entertainment. Martial vividly describes a literal crucifixion incorporated into the performance of a popular mime:

As Prometheus, bound on a Scythian crag, fed the tireless bird with his too abundant breast, so did Laureolus, hanging on no sham cross (*non falsa pendens in cruce*), give his naked feet to a Caledonian boar. . . . What had been a play became an execution” (*de Spec.* 7–8).⁴⁶

The Roman fascination with death is most evident in the overlap between theater and public spectacle, in gladiatorial combat in the arena and in the staging of public executions as epic entertainment.⁴⁷ Tertullian describes Christian martyrs being forced to “put on” or “play the role” (*induunt*) of heroic characters in the farce leading to their execution (*Apol.* 15.4). Plutarch captures the confusion of identity enacted in similar spectacles:

But there are some people, no different from children, who see criminals in the arena, dressed often in tunics of golden fabric with purple mantles, wearing crowns and doing the Pyrrhic dance, and, struck with awe and astonishment, the spectators suppose that they are supremely happy, until the moment when, before their eyes, the criminals are stabbed and flogged, and that gaudy and sumptuous garment bursts into flames (*Mor.* 554b).⁴⁸

As Joel Marcus suggests, in these public executions, “the line between performer and role sometimes became blurred for both criminal and audience.”⁴⁹

44. Barton lists the *Mucius Scaevola*, the *Prometheus*, the *Actaeon*, the *Laureolus*, and *Pasiphaë and the Bull* (*Sorrows*, 61).

45. Nicoll, *Masks*, 110–11; Welborn, *Paul, the Fool of Christ*, 2. Barton, *Sorrows*, 168–69, links mimes of Jewish or Christian martyrs with the role of the mime as a societal scapegoat.

46. Shackleton Bailey, LCL. This incident is also described by Seutonius (*Calig.* 57), who claims it occurred on the day Caligula was murdered. See Duncan, *Performance and Identity*, 202.

47. Katherine M. Coleman (“Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments,” *JRS* 80 [1990]: 44–73) gives many examples of public executions staged as mythic reenactments, in which the condemned criminals were dressed in finery and forced to play a role that culminated in their own tortured death. See also Joel Marcus, “Crucifixion as Parodic Exaltation,” *JBL* 125 (2006): 73–87.

48. Translation from Coleman, “Fatal Charades,” 60.

49. “Crucifixion as Parodic Exaltation,” 82.

Within this “theatricalization of ‘real life,’”⁵⁰ Roman bloodlust led to the erasure of the line between “make believe” and reality, and this erasure is conveyed by the external costumes of the performers and the conclusion of the action with their death.

This is the world in which the Philippians lived. As the auditors of Paul’s letter to them, they might well hear *σχῆμα* as signifying the *mien, dress, equipment, character, gestures, and postures* through which Christ’s human character is recognized. Nor would they necessarily understand that “performance” as divorced from the reality of daily existence, because in their context, performance often implied participation. They saw street theater in which mimes ridiculed all aspects of daily life. Regardless of their social status, they encountered mimicry and buffoonery, including mimes of crucifixion, as a routine form of entertainment. In addition, they could have attended gladiatorial contexts crowned by brutal deaths⁵¹ and seen executions in which criminals wore the costumes of gods and were forced to play “fatal charades.” It is not unlikely that they would hear a description of Christ being known through his *σχῆμα* as a depiction of an actor inhabiting a particular role so fully that it ends in his demise.⁵² In this context, performance is no sham; the authenticity of the role is displayed in the actor’s body.

This is also the world in which Paul lived. As he writes from prison, he contemplates the possibility of his own execution and prays that “with all boldness (*παρρησία*) Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death” (Phil 1:20). The very prayer for “boldness” and “openness” suggests that the prospect of a *public* death is not absent from his mind. Pondering the brutality and exhibition that accompanied Roman executions gives added force to Paul’s words. Surely, his contemplation of Christ’s public crucifixion strengthened him in his particular circumstances, even as he intended it to encourage the Philippians in theirs. What is notable here is that the body is the site of revelation; physical existence is the place where Christ’s true identity—and Paul’s—is displayed.

“LIKENESS”

The verb *ὁμοιόω* means “to make like” (Latin *assimilare*), or in the passive voice, “to be made like, to become like.” It denotes the process of assimilation whereby one thing becomes like another. *Ὁμοιώσις* means “a being made like, becoming like, likeness, resemblance,” while the cognate noun that appears in

50. Duncan, *Performance and Identity*, 24

51. See Barton, *Sorrows*, in particular for discussion of the gladiator’s vow (*devotio*) to fight to the death (pp. 40–46) and Roman fascination with violence and death (pp. 60–66).

52. The singular *ἄνθρωπος* suggests a singular character whom Christ “performs,” and through whom he assimilates to all humanity. For the argument that Christ takes the part of “Adam”—not Adam at creation, but Adam as a stand-in for the human race under the condemnation of death—see Eastman, “Imitating Christ Imitating Us,” 439–45.

our text, ὁμοίωμα, signifies the result of this assimilation: *likeness, image*.⁵³ The ὁμοιόω word group has a rich philosophical background that can readily tempt one into vast swaths of classical literature. Like σχῆμα it also has a long history linking it with mimesis.

I noted earlier the link between likeness, appearance and imitation in Plato's criticism of the dangers of poetic representation (*Resp.* 393.c.3). But despite his well-known rejection of poetic mimesis (*Resp.* 602D–603E; 605A–C), Plato also speaks of mimetic assimilation as a means of “participating” in God by becoming as much *like* God as possible (see, e.g., *Phaedrus* 253A–B). In both cases, at issue is the power of mimetic representation to transform its practitioners, either for ill or for good. Thus, in *Theaetetus* 176B, Socrates advises escape from earth to heaven through “becoming as like God as possible” (ὁμοίωσις θεῶ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν), and one becomes like God by becoming “just (δίκαιον) and pure, with understanding (φρονήσεως).”⁵⁴ This goal of assimilation to God through virtue did not end with Plato, but rather enjoyed a resurgence in the time of the early Empire. As John Dillon has shown, this resurgence can be traced in part through the reception history of this particular passage from *Theaetetus*; among others, both Philo (*Fug.* 63) and Plutarch (*de Sera* 550D) cite it to speak of the goal of life as assimilation to God through virtue.⁵⁵

Is this sort of process of assimilation to God in view here in Phil 2:6–11? Certainly, the goal of becoming like Christ through moral transformation and thereby participating in him has a long history of influence in the “ethical” interpretation of Phil 2:6–11.⁵⁶ It is thus tempting to read Phil 2:6–11 within this trajectory of thought. Nonetheless, there are significant problems with construing Phil 2:6–11 as teaching human assimilation to the divine likeness. First and foremost, an interpretation such as this runs exactly opposite to the movement of the plot itself. Yes, the larger context of the letter certainly concerns human actions and interactions, but at this precise point, Christ is the subject doing the assimilating. The mimetic movement is from Christ to humanity, not vice versa.

Furthermore, Christ does not become like the virtuous models upheld in Greco-Roman *paideia*. From beginning to end, from taking the part of a slave to hanging on a cross, he becomes “like” people who appear in public

53. LSJ 1225.

54. My translation. See also *Resp.* X 613A; and *Phaedrus* 253A–B for the notion of a mimetic assimilation to God through which one “participates” in God as much as possible.

55. John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 145, 193. George van Kooten provides extensive discussion and a rich collection of both pagan and Jewish primary sources on the topic of divine and human likeness in *Paul's Anthropology in Context* (WUNT 232; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 124–80.

56. For a recent example that explicitly reads Paul in relationship to Middle Platonism, see van Kooten, 210–12, although van Kooten also rightly notes Christ's prior ὁμοίωμα with humanity (pp. 212–13).

discourse only as the butt of crude jokes and burlesque mimes and who appear in refined philosophical conversation not at all.⁵⁷ The φρονήσις thus modeled (2:5) is shaped by a mimetic movement into the place and status of the guilty and the powerless; to assimilate to this model is to be exhibited in public like criminals condemned to death (1 Cor 4:9). It is to become a θέατρον—literally, “a place for seeing”⁵⁸—in the midst of the brutality and obscenity of the Roman arena. The cosmic spectacle in which Paul is put on display re-presents the cosmic spectacle of Christ’s humiliation and death on the human stage, in Phil 2:7–8.⁵⁹ Like Plato’s denigrated poets, Christ has become like the common humanity whom he imitates through his public σχῆμα (ὁμοιοῦν ἑαυτὸν ἄλλῳ ἢ κατὰ φωνὴν ἢ κατὰ σχῆμα μιμεῖσθαι; *Resp.* 393.c.6).⁶⁰ For Plato, this kind of assumption of another’s persona, particularly the persona of a slave or a lowlife, is dangerous and destabilizing; for Paul, it is at the heart of Christ’s liberating action on humanity’s behalf.

Furthermore, philosophical interpretations of ὁμοίωμα as assimilation to God would resonate only for a very limited audience in Philippi, whereas the performative connotations of ὁμοίωμα provide a possible context of interpretation that encompasses all members of the Philippian congregation. They know how mimes and pantomimes become like their characters and how condemned criminals sometimes play lethal roles, all for the entertainment of the masses. Their hearing of these resonances for the depiction of Christ “in the likeness of human beings” is strengthened by the perceptual and performative connotations of σχῆμα in 2:7d. Taken together, the two clauses present the story of Christ as a kind of street theater, in which the Philippians imaginatively “see and hear” Christ’s assimilation to humanity’s condition—indeed, even to their own condition.

Our earlier discussion of σχῆμα highlighted the way an actor’s identity could meld with that of the onstage character, particularly in the choreographed and costumed “charades” that ended with the performer’s death. That is, the merging of offstage identity and onstage role ultimately is effected through a shared destiny. A similar pattern emerges when we trace Paul’s uses of ὁμοίωμα in Romans.⁶¹ In Rom 1:23, the term draws on a long association with idolatry, as Paul traces the history of humanity’s dereliction through a primal “exchange”

57. Welborn (*Paul, the Fool of Christ*, 124–42) provides extensive examples of the silence of the upper classes in regard to crucifixion and of the crude humor associated with it.

58. LSJ 787.

59. See Welborn, *Paul, the Fool of Christ*, 53–54.

60. Van Kooten (*Paul’s Anthropology*) notes this mimetic assimilation of Christ to humanity: “Just as man is said to become grown together with the *likeness* of Christ (Rom 6.5) and to become of *the same form* as Christ (Philipp 3.10, Rom 8.29), prior to that, Christ has become *in the likeness* of man and taken on *the form* of man” (p. 213). See especially also Tannehill, “Participation in Christ,” 228–29.

61. It is striking to note that, apart from Rev 9:7, the only occurrences of ὁμοίωμα in the New Testament are in Romans (1:23; 5:14; 6:5; 8:3) and Phil 2:7.

of “the glory of the immortal God for the likeness of the image of a mortal human being (ὁμοιώματι εἰκόνας φθαρτοῦ ἀνθρώπου) and of birds and four-footed creatures and reptiles.”⁶² In Rom 5:14, the outcome of that exchange becomes clear, as Paul traces the entrance of sin and death into the world through Adam’s fall and its effects even on those whose sin is not in the “likeness” of Adam’s sin. Here, there is not an exact correspondence between the sins of Adam and his heirs but a “likeness” that denotes a shared history and destiny under the dominion of sin and death. In Rom 6:5, the language of “likeness” denotes a different shared destiny for those baptized into Christ—the “growing together with the likeness of [Christ’s] death” that promises a similar participation in the likeness of his resurrection. And in Rom 8:3, the basis of this transformation from one “likeness” to another is found in Christ himself, the son whom God sent in the “likeness” of sinful flesh (ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας), in order to condemn “sin in the flesh” and liberate enslaved and condemned humanity from the dominion of sin and death.

Hence, in Romans as in Philipians, the language of “likeness” frequently signifies a movement from difference to similarity and from division to solidarity, via a shared condition and τέλος. It seems evident that ὁμοίωμα occurs in the center of Paul’s participatory language, both to designate humanity’s involvement in the condition of Adam, delivered over to the power of sin and enslaved to sin and death, and humanity’s union with Christ, enacted through Christ’s prior union with humanity “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom 8:3). As in 2 Cor 5:21, there is here an “exchange of attributes” or “interchange of experience,” in which Christ assumes the condition and destiny of humanity; at the same time, the language of “likeness” rather than “equivalence” maintains the uniqueness of Christ.⁶³ When Phil 2:7 describes Christ as “born in the likeness of human beings,” there is an echo and reversal of humanity’s mimetic likeness to God in Gen 1:26 (καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν); now the one “in the form of God and equal with God” assimilates to the likeness of human beings.⁶⁴

62. In the LXX, ὁμοίωμα frequently refers to idols made in the likeness of created models (Exod 20:4; Deut 5:8). The fundamental sin is the foolish exchange of the image of God for images in the likeness of created things (Ps 105:20). The God of Sinai is beyond any likeness at all (Deut 4:12, 15; cf. Isa 40:18: “To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?” τίνοι ὁμοιώσατε κύριον καὶ τίνοι ὁμοιώματι ὁμοιώσατε αὐτόν).

63. The phrase “interchange of experience” is from Morna Hooker, “Interchange in Christ” in *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 13–25. “Exchange of attributes,” which expresses a similar idea, is from Tannehill, “Participation in Christ,” who elucidates further: “The phrase ‘likeness’ or ‘form of flesh of sin’ may seem to express a reservation about the Son’s complete identification with the human situation, particularly when we recall Paul’s claim in 2 Cor 5:12 that Christ ‘did not know sin,’ although God made him ‘sin for us.’ These observations should not mislead us. The logic of God’s action against sin in Rom 8:3 depends on the Son’s identification with humanity in its sinful state” (p. 227). So also Brannick, “Sinful Flesh,” *passim*.

64. See my “Imitating Christ Imitating Us,” 441–48.

Thus, taken together, ὁμοίωμα and σχῆμα emphasize both the perceptible and the participatory aspects of Christ's downward movement into the condition of human enslavement, humiliation, and death. Σχῆμα denotes the outward trappings by which a character's identity is known, or disguised, as the case may be. But insofar as lethal Roman "entertainments" blurred the line between performers and their roles, the performers played their parts to the death. Similarly, ὁμοίωμα resonates in the context of mimetic representation, denoting the visible manifestation of an assimilative process through which one subject becomes "like" another. As we have seen, in Paul's other uses of the term, it signifies not absolute equivalence but rather a relationship between distinct entities that come to share a common destiny. In Rom 6:5 and 8:3, as in Phil 2:7, that shared destiny occurs between Christ and humanity.

From Theater to Theophany

Behind this language of likeness may well lie the motif of likeness between God and humanity that is adumbrated in Israel's Scripture. In Ulrich Mauser's eloquent exposition of this motif, "God's pathos is God's full participation in the history of his creature."⁶⁵ Bockmuehl rightly argues that Phil 2 draws on the "rich tradition of Jewish interpretation according to which God personally identifies with the suffering and affliction of his people."⁶⁶ This suggests that Christ's arrival on the human scene in the form of a slave, in the likeness of human beings, even hanging on a cross, is already a theophany.

Indeed, Christ's birth in the likeness of human beings is reminiscent of visions of God in human likeness. In Ezekiel, for example, a cascading series of images bearing the likeness of their originals (1:5, 16, 22, 26) culminates in a vision of the likeness of the image of a human being (ὁμοίωμα ὡς εἶδος ἀνθρώπου), enthroned above the heavens. The splendor surrounding this vision (1:28) is "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" (ἡ ὄρασις ὁμοιώματος δόξης κυρίου).⁶⁷ The theophany conveys both God's presence with Israel even in exile and God's superiority to and distinction from God's creatures. As Robert Jensen comments, "The division of God's place from ours is overcome: the heavenly throne, God's place, becomes an item *within our* place."⁶⁸ Similarly, in Dan 3:92 (LXX), after Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego are thrown into the fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar peers in and exclaims that he sees a fourth man with the appearance of "the likeness of an angel of God (ἡ ὄρασις τοῦ τέταρτου ὁμοίωμα ἀγγέλου θεοῦ)."⁶⁹ Through the appearance, the "likeness" of an angelic

65. "Image of God and Incarnation," *Interpretation* 20 (1970): 336–56 (quotation from p. 342). See also Terence Fretheim, *The Suffering of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), passim.

66. *Philippians*, 134.

67. See also Ezek 8:2 and 10:1–21.

68. Robert Jensen, *Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 39, emphasis original.

69. The terminology is ambiguous: the LXX interprets the Hebrew, which reads "like a son of a God," in terms of an angelic representative of God. In either case, the phrase indicates

messenger, the reader knows that God is with the three young men and that it is God who delivers them from the fire.

The occurrences of ὁμοίωμα in the visions of Daniel and Ezekiel accord with Ugo Vanni's definition of it as "the adequate and perceptible expression of some reality."⁷⁰ The point here is the indicative, visual connotation of the term; the ὁμοιώματα make visible what would otherwise be invisible; they make God's anthropomorphic likeness accessible to human senses, even as they maintain the distinction between the creator and the creation. In so doing, they disclose the divine presence among God's people. As Fretheim puts it: "The theophanies in human form bear witness to a God who has determined to be present in the world and to God's people in such an intensified way. This God has done in order to encounter the people and communicate with them in as personal a way as possible."⁷¹ Similarly, the birth of Christ "in the likeness of human beings" and his subsequent "gestures" culminating in self-humbling and crucifixion render visible and accessible God's character and relationship to humanity. They are already a theophany, conveying God's presence in the midst of Christ's downward mobility.⁷²

"Form"

These observations about the meaning and function of both ὁμοίωμα and σχῆμα confirm and enrich our understanding of μορφή as what "may be perceived by the senses" and, in O'Brien's further explication, "the visible form or characteristic of a person or object."⁷³ O'Brien adds, "possession of the form implied participation in its nature or character."⁷⁴ With regard to Christ's pre-existence "in the form of God," this expression also resonates with ancient traditions about God's having a visible form "like a human being."⁷⁵ Bockmuehl cites the *Ascension of Isaiah* 8:9–10 and the *Odes of Solomon* 7:4–6 as evidence that some early Christian interpretations of Phil 2:6–11 understood "form" as carrying "certain palpably visual connotations."⁷⁶ With regard to Christ's "taking the form of a slave," then, the terminology must also convey both recogniz-

the divine presence, whether directly or mediated through an angelic messenger. See discussion in John Collins, *Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 190.

70. "Homoïōma in Paolo (Rm 1,23; 5,14; 6,5; 8,3; Fil 2,7): Un' interpretazione exegetico-teologica alla luce dell' uso dei LXX," *Greg* 58 (1977): 339. Translation from Brannick, "Sinful Flesh," 249–50.

71. *The Suffering of God*, 105.

72. See particularly Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, 25–39.

73. O'Brien, *Philippians*, 207–8; Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 127.

74. O'Brien, *Philippians*, 207.

75. Bockmuehl has argued this position most thoroughly, in "The Form of God," 11–17. See also his *Philippians*, 127–29. For the theme of God in human form in Israel's Scriptures, see also Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 79–106.

76. "The Form of God," 12. Bockmuehl notes Ezek 1 and 8 but does not discuss the function of ὁμοίωμα in those passages and in Phil 2:7.

able attributes and a complete identification with the status and position of a slave. Despite different views concerning the background of μορφή, most commentators share this emphasis on both its visual aspect and its participation in the reality that it expresses.⁷⁷ The emphasis throughout is on public appearance along with personal involvement; the interchange between Christ and humanity does not happen in secret or in heavenly realms but in the open, on Adamic humanity's "turf."⁷⁸

Returning to the image of "Passion Play," this is the play within a play, the fault line along which theatrical performance moves as it explores the relationships between the actor's performance and identity, between representation and reality, between mimesis as copy and mimesis as production. The resulting picture of Christ's incarnation, in which his identity is displayed through his costume, demeanor and gestures, is of an actor who never loses his offstage identity, but plays his onstage part with complete and utter realism, such that the destiny of the character becomes his own.

THEOPHANY AND TRANSFORMATION

Everything depends upon the epiphany of the obedient one.⁷⁹

Taken together, μορφή, ὁμοίωμα, and σχῆμα depict the movement of Christ onto the human stage in performative, perceptible, and participatory terms. Because Christ remains in the form of God throughout his this-worldly "performance," God is *in* the play in addition to directing it; God is both producer and protagonist, such that the story of Christ functions as a theophany. From the dramatic turning point of Christ's crucifixion, that divine presence and the theophanic function of the "hymn" come increasingly to the fore: God "super-exalted" (ὑπερύψωσεν) Jesus and gave him the name above every name, thereby establishing his supremacy over all the created order.⁸⁰ Like ὁμοίωμα,

77. See Fee, *Philippians*, 204; Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 125–29; Fowl, 91–93. Gerald Hawthorne ("In the Form of God and Equal with God," in *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* [ed. R. P. Martin and B. J. Dodd; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998], 96–110 [esp. pp. 97–101]), provides a helpful overview of the scholarly literature.

78. The open proclamation of Christ's crucifixion in Gal 3:1 and Rom 3:25–26, amplified in Col 2:14–15, is noted by Brannick, "Sinful Flesh," 250 n. 15: "This sense of ὁμοίωμα as 'perceptible expression' ties into Paul's repeated description of the crucifixion and the redemption as a form of manifestation."

79. Käsemann, "Critical Analysis," 74.

80. The word ὑπερύψω is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament, but its cognate verb, ὑψώ, sometimes refers to being "lifted up" on a cross (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34). Marcus discusses the links between crucifixion and the revelation of Jesus' kingly identity in Mark and John and argues that crucifixion was a form of ironic exaltation in which the condemned was raised high for all to see. Possibly Paul's use of this rare word in Phil 2:9 plays on this use of ὑψώ: Christ was "exalted" on the cross; therefore, God "highly exalted" him ("Crucifixion as Parodic Exaltation," 74–75 n. 9).

ὑπερῦψώ occurs in visionary language that depicts God's enthronement and exaltation (Ps 96:9 LXX; Dan 3:52–88; 4:37 LXX). The confession of Jesus Christ as Lord by “every tongue” further confirms the public acclamation—and political implications—of his reign.⁸¹ What looked like nothing more than a lowly, humiliated human life—the life of a slave and a criminal!—is shown to be the apocalypse of God. That this is the case is confirmed by the response that Paul anticipates from the Philippians: “in fear and trembling work out your salvation, for God is the one working among you to will and to work for his good pleasure” (2:12b–13). As Wagner notes, “This is the language of theophany.”⁸² “Fear and trembling” is the human reaction to God's awesome presence, whether immediately or through a representative figure.⁸³ In Phil 2:12–13, the phrase has an ethical dimension as well; God's presence revealed to and among the Philippians brings to pass their own obedient willing and working for God's good pleasure.⁸⁴

Käsemann was right—this is the drama of salvation, the apocalyptic event through which God acts decisively on behalf of enslaved humanity.⁸⁵ Käsemann's critics are also right when they insist that the “hymn” must be read in relationship to Philippians as a whole, from the paraenesis that brackets it (2:1–5; 2:12–18) to the many verbal links between this passage and the rest of the letter.⁸⁶ The question is *how* the drama of Christ's mimetic assimilation to the human race and the disclosure of that drama as a theophany function

81. With the majority of commentators, I take “name above every name” in v. 9 to be κύριος. In the context of the Emperor cult, naming Christ as both Lord and Savior (3:21) “presented the alternative between Christ and paganism in a way that was both accessible and posed in the starkest possible terms” (Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 144). See also Käsemann's interpretation of ἐξομολογεῖσθαι as the “public and irrevocable recognition” of Christ's enthronement over the cosmos (“Critical Analysis,” 80).

82. Wagner, “Working Out Salvation,” 263.

83. Exod 15:16; Deut 2:25; 11:25; Ps 2:11; Isa 19:16; 66:2, 5; Dan 4:37a; 10:11; 4 *Macc* 4:10; *Jos. Asen.* 14:10. See Klaus Berger, *Identity and Experience in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 138–43.

84. Fretheim summarizes the effects of theophanies in terms of “a new level of knowing” and “a new level of being,” resulting in redemption, reconciled relationships between individuals and between God and humanity, and a call to a task within that relationship (*The Suffering of God*, 83–84). Berger discusses the gradual “ethicizing” of the phrase “fear and trembling” in Pauline use: “‘fear and trembling’ is transformed into a mode of interpersonal behavior, or becomes the basis for such. The intervening factor in this transformation is the way that God is perceived to be present—not directly but through a herald or a messenger” (*Identity and Experience*, 140). Hence, “fear and trembling” frequently describes a mode of obedience (Phil 2:12–13; 2 Cor 7:15) in response to the presence of God through God's representatives (1 Cor 2:3).

85. “Critical Analysis,” 65: “Our text does not describe a relationship, but an event, a ‘drama,’ in which various phases follow one another.”

86. See, e.g., Meeks, “The Man from Heaven,” 333; Fowl, “Christology and Ethics in Philippians 2:5–11,” 140–53. For appreciative and critical discussion of Käsemann's argument, see Robert Morgan, “Incarnation, Myth, and Theology,” in *Where Christology Began: Essays*

in Paul's exhortation. The preceding exploration of the images of performance and participation in Phil 2:6–11 suggests a direct link between the text as the "drama of salvation" and its paraenetic outworking within the letter. This link functions on two levels: the power of mimetic performance to evoke a corresponding mimesis by the audience and the action of God within the drama, so that it becomes a theophany that conveys God's effective presence in and among its auditors.

"Audience Participation"

Clearly, Paul expects the presentation of Christ's downward mobility and divine exaltation to have an effect on the Philippians, just as that same divine action has affected his own life (3:4–17). An expectation such as this is, on one level, precisely in line with Plato's definition of mimesis as including not only the process and product of mimetic representation but also its replication in the lives of those who see and hear the poets personify the characters in the ancient epics (*Resp.* 3.392.a).⁸⁷ This power of representation to evoke mimetic participation, not only by the performers but also by their audience, is vividly exhibited in Roman society during the Empire. The melding of actors with their roles was accompanied by an increasing erasure of the distinction between the spectacle and the audience. Spectators could find themselves the victims of poisoned arrows shot by actors in a mime (Macrobius, *Sat.* 2.7.15–17) or dragged from the stands and thrown to the beasts for Caligula's entertainment (Dio 59.10.3, 4; Seutonium, *Calig.* 34, 35).⁸⁸ Barton argues that episodes such as these were part of the appeal of the arena: "The audience came to be seen and heard, to act and interact. Their performance was not simply a reaction, but rather a counterpoint to the one on the stage or on the sand."⁸⁹

This "audience participation" is not precisely one in which an example is put forth, eliciting a decision to follow it or not. Rather, the spectators are caught up into the action, sometimes in spite of themselves. When the action is brutally violent, as in theatrically staged gladiatorial contests and executions, the dangers of such a mimetic impulse are obvious. But what if the action is redemptive? What if the "actor" faces death with courage and trust in God?⁹⁰

on *Philippians* 2 (ed. R. P. Martin and B. J. Dodd; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 43–73; and Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference*, 211–14.

87. Havelock's analysis of Plato's anxiety regarding the subjectivizing power of mimesis is particularly acute: "[Mimesis] focuses initially not on the artist's creative act but on his power to make his audience identify almost pathologically and certainly sympathetically with the content of what he is saying. . . . This kind of drama, this way of reliving experience in memory instead of analyzing and understanding it, is for him 'the enemy.'" *Preface to Plato*, 45. See also Gebauer and Wulf, *Mimesis*, 3–44.

88. See Duncan, *Performance and Identity*, 194–95; Barton, *Sorrows*, 60–65.

89. *Ibid.*, 63. See also Beacham, *The Roman Theatre and its Audience*, 42–43, 151.

90. Marcus, "Crucifixion as Parodic Exaltation," 86–87.

Surely, the plot of Phil 2:6–11 functions on this level, as it powerfully involves its hearers in the action of Christ’s humiliation and death.⁹¹ As that action is revealed as a theophany, the hearers are then caught up into the homage rendered by all the created order. In Käsemann’s words, “With this hymn, the Christian community on earth takes up responsively, as it were, what is effected by the homage of the powers before the divine throne. It is thus drawn into the eschatological event and witnesses the enthronement of the obedient one on earth.”⁹²

Divine Participation

On another level, Phil 2:6–11 conveys not a *merely* human “performance” directed by God but God’s own sharing in the predicament of God’s creatures. Within this theophany, Christ “im-personates” Adamic humanity in its enslaved and condemned condition.⁹³ Through this “im-personation,” Christ has gotten under humanity’s skin, so to speak. “Therefore” (2:12), because Christ decisively and continually participates in their history, the Philippians may and do obey and themselves become cosmic signs of Christ’s reign (2:15).⁹⁴ From start to finish (1:6), the “willing” and “working” of that obedience is created among them by God, who, in Christ, effects the formation of their communal character. For this reason, the φρονήσις that is “in Christ” is always a divinely given apocalyptic gift (3:15).⁹⁵

Public Witness

The visible, perceptible connotations of the terms that describe Christ’s incarnation, crucifixion, and subsequent exaltation support Käsemann’s claim that “[T]he text is concerned precisely with cosmic-eschatological openness.”⁹⁶ This openness accords with an emphasis elsewhere in the letter on public manifestation. Paul’s imprisonment “in Christ” is known (φανερῶς) throughout the whole praetorian guard (1:13); he eagerly hopes that Christ will be honored in his body “in all boldness” (ἐν πάσῃ παρρησίᾳ). The Philippians’ own unity and courage are an exhibit (ἔνδειξις) of either destruction or salvation, and that

91. As Paul Minear perceptively comments, “[T]he hymn encouraged participation at a level beyond the reach of analysis, where the *phronēma* of Philippians saints was being shaped.” “Singing and Suffering in Philippi,” in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John* (ed. R. Fortna and B. R. Gaventa; Nashville: Abingdon, 1990) 202–19 (quotation from p. 205).

92. “Critical Analysis,” 87.

93. For discussion of the notion of “im-personation” as both personification and putting oneself “into” another person, see my “Imitating Christ Imitating Us,” 450.

94. Wagner, “Working Out Salvation,” 259–63; Bockmuehl, “‘The Form of God,’” 5 n. 11: “The ‘mindset’ which Paul encourages in the Philippians ‘is present’ in Christ Jesus both historically and eternally.”

95. O’Brien, *Philippians*, 439.

96. “Critical Analysis,” 77.

from God (1:28); indeed, the Philippians themselves are to shine as lights in the world (2:15).⁹⁷ The φρονήσις that Paul enjoins among them comes through an apocalypse given by God (3:15). Paul's own life mediates that revelation, as he directs the Philippians to model their actions on what they "have learned and received and heard and seen" in him (4:9). At the heart of this public display is Christ's own perceptible, embodied performance of a φρονήσις enacted through participating in the dereliction of enslaved and condemned humanity.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the vocabulary of mimetic representation that describes Christ's incarnation suggests a strong link between "imitation" and "participation" in Paul's proclamation of the gospel. It is crucial to recognize that both begin with and are sustained by Christ's mimetic participation in the human predicament. The Philippians "mimic" Christ because Christ has "mimicked" them. Their hope that Christ will transform (μετασχηματίζει) their body of humiliation, to be conformed (συμμορφιζόμενοι) to his body of glory, is a mirror image of Christ's appearance in the σχῆμα and μορφή of a human being. Only within the ambit of this reciprocal, divine-human "performance" may we talk properly about the imitation of Christ and participation in Christ. It may well be that this participatory language echoes prophetic depictions of God's involvement in the suffering of Israel, which in turn evoke ancient notions of a "likeness" between God and humanity.

Christ's divine-human performance is not hidden, but is staged in the arena of human history. Its visible, embodied character, with the power to evoke a public, embodied response, overcomes any distinctions between an "essential" private identity and its outward representation. Here, there is no privileging of some inner essence in contrast with "outward appearance." Rather, physical existence is where the action is. That this action moves from suffering to hope and from humiliation to exaltation is a sign of Christ's reign as κύριος and the source of paraenetic power. This is the ethical outworking of Christ's participation in the realm of human affairs. Conscripted into the drama of salvation, Paul and the Philippians enact Christ on the earthly stage, in full view of the cosmos. Indeed, even though their "citizenship" is *in* heaven, they await a savior *from* heaven, implying that their complete transformation will also be this-worldly (3:20–21). Because they re-present the Christ who is lord of the cosmos, who has power to subject all things to himself and who works in them (2:10–11; 3:21), how could it be otherwise?

97. Whether everyone will recognize this public display is quite another matter. Fowl (*Philippians*, 66–69) interprets Phil 1:28 as "displaying two competing evaluations of the Philippians' adhering to their faith"—that of the opponents, who see it as a demonstration of the Philippians' destruction, and that of Paul and the Philippians themselves, who see a sign of their own salvation.

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