Philippians and the Politics of God

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The "same mind" that Paul urges upon the Philippian community does not imply their uniformity on matters of doctrine or ethics. Rather, it is an injunction to have within themselves the mind that Christ Jesus had, one that will lead them to think of the interests of others. Adopting that "same mind" today will lead the church to discover new practices that build community.

Paul's letter to the Philippians does not occur in either a political or a theological vacuum. Both parties to the correspondence are culturally situated, embedded in a specific social location, in which the words Paul writes and the Philippians hear make sense to them both. One way to describe the particularity of their theo-social location is to identify them in terms of the narrative that defines them both: the story they hold in common of the powerful salvation accomplished for them by their gracious God through the death and resurrection of God's Son and their Lord, Jesus Christ, in whose Spirit they worship. Another way to describe their peculiar theo-social location is to say that they participate in the politics of God.

Kathryn Tanner describes the politics of God as the intersection between Christian beliefs about God including God's relationship to the world and those attitudes and actions that Christians display in their relations with others in God's world.[1] That Paul and the Philippians hold a set of beliefs about God and the world in common is to be presumed from the fact of his writing a letter to them and their preservation of it. On the other hand, that there may also be differences between them about the attitudes and actions that ought to result from those beliefs is also suggested by the the letter. The politics of God, then, becomes a useful framework for examing the social implications of the theological convictions that are already shared by Paul and the Philippians.

From the beginning of the letter, such Christian beliefs, together with implied attitudes and suggested actions, are prominent. Paul identifies himself and his co-sender, Timothy, as

[1] Kathryn Tanner, *The Politics of God: Christian Theologies and Social Justice* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 1.

slaves of Christ Jesus.[2] From this theo-political location, he addresses "all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons"[3] and wishes them grace and peace "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:2). Paul greets the Philippians as those whom God is sanctifying, those holy ones in Christ Jesus who are located in Philippi. The power and unifying presence of the Spirit is implied twice: in Paul's ability to greet them from wherever he is being held in prison and in his ability to wish them grace and peace from God, their common Father, and from Jesus Christ, their Lord. An entire Christian belief system and a series of implied recommendations as to attitudes and actions, that is, a politics of God, can be tentatively reconstructed from the first two verses of the letter alone. The remainder of Paul's letter is similarly replete with references to the politics of God as Paul understands them.

The purpose of this essay is to engage that letter, especially ch. 2, with the aid of some suggestive remarks by Tanner about cultures and the possibility of a self-critical transformative Christian culture. After considering both *polis* and prison as social locations for doing constructive political theology, I will explore the politics of God in Philippians by asking about the social consequences of a theology of the cross in that community as we are able to reconstruct it from Paul's letter. I will focus particularly on an exegetical question suggested by Tanner's analysis: what does Paul's request that the Philippians be of the "same mind" (2:2) mean for their ability to be a self-critical transformative Christian community? How is their Christian belief about God and God's relationship to the world, as summarized in the creedal fragment of Phil 2:6–11, to be embodied within the community? Then, since the political is inevitably both personal and particular, I will describe a contemporary Christian issue in the denomination with which I am most familiar and ask how the challenge of the ethics implied by a theology of the cross might be met in that specific social context.

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN CHRISTIAN BELIEF AND PARTICULAR FORMS OF PRACTICE

Tanner's analysis suggests that the meaning of Christian beliefs about God and about God's relationship to the world changes over time, as these beliefs are embodied in specific social attitudes and practices. "For example, beliefs about the nature of womanhood obviously make a big difference in undercutting or supporting certain forms of social relation between men and women."[4] For that reason, social processes that define the meaning of Christian beliefs—such as discussions about the meaning of "femininity" where there is a socially circulating belief that women should be "feminine," or discussions about the meaning of

[2] Timothy is also named as co-sender in 1 Thessalonians, 2 Corinthians, and Philemon.
[3] The word translated "bishops" (*episcopoi*) implies oversight or supervision while the word *diakonoi* suggests service or ministry, but the precise meaning of the terms and whether or not they imply specific offices is not clear.
[4] Tanner, *Politics of God*, 20.

"freedom" where the issue discussed is the freedom of working men and women—"are liable therefore to be sites of political struggle."[5] Moreover, as Tanner shows,

> Tactical maneuvers among those fighting to maintain or rearrange social relations are prone to be part of the social processes by which the meaning of beliefs is established and reestablished, and to be part of what divides competing traditions or schools of thought on such matters. The ups and downs of such tactical struggles tend to produce changes in a belief's meaning.[6]

Recognition of the ongoing political processes by which Christian beliefs evolve over time and vary from situation to situation does not yet bridge the gap between a particular belief and its embodiment in communal attitudes or social practices. Tanner notes that the various life situations of those involved in such social interactions, their political interests, and life experiences also influence beliefs about God and God's involvement with the world. "For example, even if the meaning of freedom is undisputed, a belief in freedom will clearly have a different meaning *for* one—it will be associated with different attitudes and actions—depending on whether one is a corporate executive officer or a migrant farm worker."[7]

The relation of a particular Christian belief to a set of attitudes or actions arguably implied by the belief is a complex one. It is affected by changes over time and place in the politically negotiated meaning of the belief; broadened or constricted by its relationship to other beliefs with which it is combined or juxtaposed; modified by the life situations and political interests of those to whom it applies; and it is limited or expanded as its scope (the range of people to whom it applies) is understood to be narrower or wider in application.[8] All these factors work to complicate the political process by which a Christian belief is expressed culturally in the specific attitudes and practices of a given ecclesial community.

Since Christians, as holders of Christian beliefs, participate in socio-cultural practices, "they are inevitably involved in institutionalized forms of social interactions and the circulation of beliefs within them."[9] Tanner asks, "Is it possible for the beliefs of any culture to encourage critical reflection on that culture itself and the social relations of which those beliefs are a part?"[10] She observes that cultures differ widely "in the resources they present for positively encouraging critical reflection." Tanner identifies two understandings of culture that work to exclude the possibility of self-critical reflection:

> According to one, cultures form homogenous, monolithic, and organically interconnected wholes. They do not allow therefore for any diversity of opinion or contest over the fundamental terms according to which social interactions proceed. Nor do they allow any breathing room for radically innovative ideas. According to the second, commonly held beliefs, values,

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[5] Ibid., 20.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid., 21. Italics hers.
[8] Ibid., 22.
[9] Ibid., 35.
[10] Ibid.

> and attitudes support established social practices in some fixed and static way. When beliefs support established social practices, they perform only that function, never a critical one. The support offered is never a focus for contest. Finally, practices that gain such support must be monotonously reproduced thereby.[11]

Tanner's own project leads her to argue for the possibility of self-critical cultures and an understanding of divine transcendence that leads to cultural transformation within such self-critical cultures as a value within Christian political theology. For the purposes of this study, I wish merely to assume her general framework of cultural analysis in order to help frame an exegetical question about the politics of God in Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Towards the beginning of the second chapter of the letter, Paul writes to the Philippians, "make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (Phil 2:2). What does Paul's request that the Philippians be "of the same mind" mean for their ability to be a self-critical, transformative Christian community? How is their Christian belief about God and God's relationship to the world, as summarized in the creedal fragment of Phil 2:6–11, to be lived out within the community? What does the politics of God as Paul conceives it look like in Philippi?

An initial caveat is appropriate. We need not assume that either Paul or the Philippians thought of themselves as a culture, let alone a self-critical culture engaged in the process of constructive political theology. Such an assumption would be anachronistic to the point of being nonsensical. This essay assumes only that Tanner's categories helpfully focus our own inquiry in a way that frames a question of interest to present-day readers of Paul's letter. We can ask whether the politics of God as Paul conceives them necessarily result in a monolithic culture that resists difference of opinion and the sort of self-critical reflection that leads to transformation. Exegetes who engage in such an examination do not necessarily imply that they can somehow "channel" Paul to discover his motives, intentions, and theological convictions. A more modest claim is advanced here—that by uncovering the narrative logic of Paul's argument, it is possible to work backwards from what Paul actually wrote to what he might have thought and assumed about God and God's relationship to the world as it played itself out in the attitudes and actions he recommended to the Christians at Philippi.

THE POLIS AS SOCIAL LOCATION FOR DOING CONSTRUCTIVE POLITICAL THEOLOGY

We have already noted that Paul writes to "the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi"

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[11] Ibid., 36.

(1:1). It is useful to consider the implications of the *polis*, in this case, Philippi, a colony of the Roman Empire in the province of Macedonia, as an appropriate social location for doing constructive political theology. The city was colonized by people banished from Athens under Callistratus in 360 B.C.E. In 356 B.C.E, the inhabitants of what was then called Krenides invited Philip of Macedon to assist them in repelling local Thracian tribes. Philip subsequently annexed the area, renamed the city after himself, and fortified the strategically located city. It was transferred to the Roman Empire in 167 B.C.E. and the construction of the Via Egnatia, a major road, about 130 B.C.E. increased its military importance. The emperor Octavian settled more than five hundred war veterans there in the first century B.C.E.[12]

Bonnie Thurston and Judith Ryan suggest that because the Philippian Christians were proud of their citizenship, Paul had to remind them that their true citizenship was in heaven (Phil 1:27; 3:20).[13] In any case, the prominence of Philippi as a Roman colony might well have led Paul to frame his theology in political metaphors, as he does in the letter. The verses just mentioned are key to the question of the politics of God in Philippians because both use words related to the term *polis*. In 3:20, the NRSV translates the noun *politeuma* as "citizenship" or "commonwealth," clearly a "political" term; in 1:27, the related verb, *politeuesthe*, does not receive the same care. The communal aspect of Paul's imperative is concealed in the translation, "Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ . . ." Stephen Fowl helpfully translates the beginning of 1:27 as "Do this one thing: order your common life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ"[14] to highlight the socio-political context in which Paul's imperative occurs. Paul's injunction is important to this essay, because it is the first time in the letter that Paul uses the language of group unity: "I will know that you are standing firm in *one spirit*, striving side by side with *one mind* for the faith of the gospel" (1:27).

A second key word in the letter is *koinōnia*, the meaning of which is much debated. Paul Sampley has argued that the word is a technical legal term for a business contract, a "partnership" in the sense of shared assets, economic profits, and losses.[15] And *koinōnia* is also the language of friendship, as Michael White and Ben Witherington have noted.[16] Whatever else it means, the basic idea of the word is sharing something, having something in common, or participating (having a part) in something, hence partnership. Paul's first use of the term occurs almost immediately in 1:5, which the NRSV translates as "because of your *sharing* in the gospel." Paul begins the letter by giving thanks for what he and the Philippians have in common: the meaning of the word "gospel" will not be fully clarified until Phil 2:5-11.

Finally, Paul uses a number of words formed by the compound *syn-* (with) in Philippians.

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[12] Bonnie B. Thurston and Judith M. Ryan, *Philippians and Philemon* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2005), 7–8.
[13] Ibid., 8.
[14] Stephen E. Fowl, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 59.
[15] J. Paul Sampley, *Pauline Partnership in Christ: Christian Community and Commitment in Light of Roman Law* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).
[16] L. Michael White, "Morality Between Two Worlds: A Paradigm of 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, 1991), 201–15, and Ben Witherington, III, *Friendship and Finances in Philippi: The Letter of Paul to the Philippians* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994).

While it is difficult to show this in English translation, a few examples can be noted. In 1:7, Paul describes the Philippians as "partakers with me of grace." The word *synkoinōnous* combines the preposition (something like our co-) with the partnership word to show strong bonding. In 1:27, he uses *synathlountes* "striving side by side" to create a vivid word picture of the Philippians working in close cooperation with one another. In both cases, Paul shows that the community of the Philippians is the focus of his writing: their political life is the subject of his letter. For Paul and for us, the *polis* is a (theo)logical starting point for the construction of a political theology.

THE PRISON AS SOCIAL LOCATION FOR DOING CONSTRUCTIVE POLITICAL THEOLOGY

Although Paul writes to the Philippians from prison (1:7, 13-14, 17), he does not mention where he is.[17] He does, however, describe his political situation and how he feels about it at some length. It is therefore also helpful to consider the implications of prison as an appropriate social location for doing constructive political theology.

In our own time, the prison letters of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day, Philip and Daniel Berrigan, Nelson Mandela, and others have attracted attention in part because, as important as their contents were, the fact of their being written from prison lent them a weight and an urgency they might not otherwise have had. Very probably, Paul's prison letters had the same powerful effect in part because of their origin. Paul himself seems to be clearly aware of the rhetorical potential of his chains in the letter to Philemon. In Philippians, too, Paul calls attention to the danger he is in and the possibility of his death. He does so, not for his own sake, but to underline the importance of the cause for which he and the Philippians are in partnership, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As Lou Martyn has shown us, when Paul uses the term "gospel" in Galatians, he is not thinking about a message, but an event—specifically, the world-altering event of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's saving power expressed in Christ's loving obedient action.[18] Here, too, Paul seems to think of the gospel as a powerful saving event that continues to explode through the life of his churches. The saving power of the gospel is paradoxically hidden, however, in the apparent weakness and humility of the crucified One. For this reason, Paul's prison letter is doubly effective because the medium matches the message. Consequently, "it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ"(1:13). Paul rejoices that whether he lives or dies,

[17] In 2 Cor 11:23, Paul boasts that he has been imprisoned many more times than those who question his apostleship. Some scholars try to fill in the picture using Acts, which mentions three imprisonments: at Philippi (16:23–40), Caesarea (23:23–26:32), and Rome (28:16–31). Paul's references to the "imperial guard" (1:13) and to the "emperor's household" (4:22) have made Rome a traditional favorite, but these terms are imprecise and Ephesus, Caesarea, or Corinth would do as well.

[18] J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 127ff.

Christ is proclaimed. Because the gospel is inherently political,[19] this prisoner for Christ and his prison epistle proclaiming Christ give singularly powerful testimony to the politics of God in prison, an appropriate locus for constructing political theology.

FRAMING THE QUESTION ABOUT PHILIPPIANS 2:2: HOW MUCH AND WHAT SORT OF "SAMENESS"?

Assuming with Tanner that the politics of God deals with the intersection of Christian beliefs and attitudes and actions towards others, should one read Phil 2:2 ("make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind") and similar verses in Paul's letters as built-in limits to the project of empowering self-critical transformative Christian communities? Tanner claims that some understandings of cultures work to exclude the possibility of critical self-reflection, those that see cultures as "homogenous, monolithic, and organically connected wholes" that do not allow "for any diversity of opinion or contest over the fundamental terms according to which social interactions proceed," or those that see beliefs as functioning only to validate established social practices, never to criticize them, and see such support as being "monotonously reproduced" by social practices.[20]

An exegetical question suggested by Tanner's analysis is this: what does Paul's request that the Philippians be of the "same mind" mean for their ability to be a self-critical transformative Christian community? *How much "sameness" is required?*

Framing the question this way already reveals its limitations. Just as the word "gospel" in Paul is routinely understood to be the contents of the message about God's apocalyptic action in Jesus Christ rather than the saving action itself, so "sameness" can be understood with respect to doctrinal statements or ethical propositions, a certain number of which need to be agreed upon in order for "sameness" or "orthodoxy" to occur. Sometimes a stipulated list functions as a plumbline to determine the acceptable amount of deviation from the given norm. Some Christians define creeds that way, and admittedly they have been so used.

But elsewhere in Paul's writings, notably in 1 Cor 8–10 and Rom 14–15, Paul argues that Christians who differ about important issues of doctrine and ethics can and should refrain from judging and despising one another and should avoid giving offense needlessly to one another. Such passages, read together with Phil 2:2, suggest that Paul may be using the words "be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" in some

[19] The word *euangelion* was associated both with the good news of military victory and the succession of the emperor before Paul apparently appropriated it for God's victory over sin and death and the reign of the exalted Christ.

[20] Tanner, *Politics of God*, 36.

other way. The exegetical question then might be reframed: *What kind of "sameness" is envisioned?*

At this point, it becomes possible to think of another understanding of the way a creed functions. Instead of functioning as a litmus test for "sameness" in the sense of orthodoxy *versus* heresy, it can function as a narrative that describes a pattern of life to be imitated. Such a narrative requires belief, to be sure, hence the word "creed" (*credo*), but its focus lies elsewhere—on the reality of God's saving act and its implications for Christian community. Our suspicion that Paul might be thinking about "sameness" in this second sense of conformity to the pattern enacted in the obedient death and subsequent resurrection of Jesus Christ is confirmed by the verses following 2:2, to which we now turn.

THE POLITICS OF GOD IN PHILIPPIANS: AN APPLIED THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

Paul urges the Philippians in the two verses following 2:2, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others" (2:3–4). As Paul expands his argument on the theme of "looking to the interests of others" in the rest of the chapter, his understanding of the politics of God becomes clearer. To return to Tanner's language, we can see how Christian beliefs in God and God's relationship to the world become embodied, for Paul, in specific social attitudes and political actions. In other words, we are shown the socio-political consequences implied by a theology of the cross.

An important part of Paul's argument is the so-called Christ hymn (Phil 2:5–11), which may have already been familiar to the Christians at Philippi. It appears to be an early Christian creed in the second sense of that term (a confessional formula in the shape of a narrative about the gracious saving work God has wrought in Christ). The creed summarily describes the pattern of Messiah Jesus' generous self-donation for the sake of others: "though he was in the form of God," Christ Jesus "did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (2:6–8).

While the highly condensed narrative continues to describe God's exaltation of Messiah Jesus[21] in language reminiscent of Isa 45:23, read as God's promise and therefore also a

[21] "Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (2:9–11).

prophecy now fulfilled in the career of the Messiah,[22] Paul seems to be much more interested in the first part of the story, where Jesus in radical obedience looks not to his own interests, but to the interests of others.

Paul takes pains to show that this particular pattern of self-giving that is concerned with the interests of others, initiated by God in Jesus Christ, is to be imitated by followers of Jesus, including the Philippians. According to the teaching conventions of his age, Paul gives them three examples. In the first place, he has already described his own imprisonment for the sake of the gospel, his possible impending death, and his concern for the Philippians in that circumstance (1:12–14, 19–26). Now, secondly, he describes his co-worker Timothy. Unlike others who are "seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" (2:21), Timothy is genuinely concerned for the Philippians' welfare. Finally, he describes Epaphroditus, who nearly died in the course of his ministry to Paul and to the Philippians: "he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for those services that you could not give me" (2:30).

These narratives support Paul's appeal to the Philippians that they, too, should participate in the pattern of imitating Christ by loving one another and living together in joy and peace, especially Euodia and Syntyche, who seem to be quarreling (4:2–3). As he does elsewhere,[23] Paul speaks of the tremendous privilege of sharing in the generosity of God's saving righteousness: "And this is God's doing. For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I will have" (1:28–30).

The assumed partnership (*koinōnia*) between the Philippians and Paul is (theo)logically paralleled by their implied partnership with God: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (2:12–13). As Charles Cousar comments,

> While salvation is effected by the world-encompassing act of God, it also remains a task for the church. The community at Philippi, having read of Christ's obedience unto death, is immediately enjoined to work out its own salvation "with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12).[24]

A CONTEMPORARY CASE STUDY: BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, AND ACTIONS IN A TIME OF CONFLICT

Since Paul thanks the Philippians for their "partnership in the gospel," and since themes of friendship and finances are intertwined throughout the letter from the first mention of the

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[22] God speaks these words through the prophet: "By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear'" (45:23). Paul's quotation implies a strong identity between the Lord God who promises that "to me every knee shall bow" and Jesus Christ, whom God has exalted, "so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend." Significantly, the Christ Jesus now exalted is also to be confessed as "Lord," while in the same passage from Isaiah, God says, "only in the Lord, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength" (45:24).

[23] E.g., 2 Cor 8:9.

[24] Charles Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 188.

word "partnership" (*koinōnia*) in 1:5 on,[25] it seems appropriate, by way of conclusion, to use a contemporary example of the way Christian beliefs intersect with attitudes and actions and where there is an opportunity to embody a theology of the cross in a particular socio-political situation. What are the challenges to "having the same mind" when pointedly different opinions threaten to divide a denomination? How might the politics of God understood specifically as "looking to the interests of the other" play out in contemporary church politics?

The Anglican Communion worldwide is having a family argument at present, and, like many arguments, even the description of what the argument is really about already reflects a particular point of view. Although the presenting issue concerns whether someone engaged in a committed same-sex relationship can or should hold the episcopal office and whether the church should bless same-sex relationships among its members, many would argue that the larger issues of how biblical interpretation ought to be done and the definition of what constitutes "holiness of life" are primarily at stake. That is to say, the family argument is less about whether Holy Scripture is authoritative, which is assumed on all sides, than about how its authoritative witness should be interpreted. That Christians are to live lives of holiness is also assumed on all sides, but there is disagreement about what Christian holiness looks like and how we can recognize it in the lives of those with whom we deeply disagree, especially when we disagree about the interpretation of Scripture.

To say that our goal is to have a "good argument" instead of a bad one makes sense once the etymology of "argument" is explained. The word "argue" means to bring forth reasoned proofs designed to persuade another; it is associated with seeking clarity, narrowing the dispute to material issues, and discarding inflammatory or distorting aspects of the debate. Christian arguments in particular ought to frame issues with charity as well as clarity, "refusing to practice cunning" or underhanded misstatements of the opponent's position. To submit our debates to this discipline is a form of loving our enemies and speaking the truth, as we see it, of course, in love.

However one characterizes our family argument, and certainly it has been subject to many interpretations, one of the dynamics that is most powerful and least discussed publicly is the giving and receiving of financial gifts, and the way that patterns of exchange concerning money are tied to our ability to have a good argument. As in Paul's letter to the Philippians, financial arrangements are often in the background of the argument.[26]

A recent conversation among friends trying to facilitate such a good argument concerned financial gifts from dioceses and parishes in the United States and the difficulties they posed

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[25] Witherington, *Friendship and Finances in Philippi*, 37 Although the primary meaning of *koinonia* concerns having something in common with another, the word also has connotations of financial sharing, as Sampley has noted

[26] I choose as a case study the present conflict in the Anglican Communion and issues of financial giving there only because I know something more about that situation than about the particular concerns of other denominations, but the imaginative reader will have no difficulty finding parallels elsewhere

for recipients in the Global South.[27] A man from a province in western Africa lamented that partnerships with United States donors had become reduced to "a mail order shopping mall" where "we state our needs, our shopping list, and they come up with what we need, but we never see them." Another African commented that it was the opposite with a large gift to his diocese, where half the grant was used up to pay consultants from the United States to oversee the expenditure of the funds.

At that point, an east African bishop stated that he refused to take money from sinners, no matter how rich they were. A woman from a nearby diocese noted that her bishop had made a similar decision for the whole province without consultation; there was no procedure for challenging a bishop nor any provision for expressing another point of view. She added that many who disagreed with him were among the most vulnerable financially and had suffered greatly for his principled stand, which they themselves opposed. The bishop in that exchange expressed concern about this unwanted result, but explained that he had no choice. He had to show the seriousness of his disapproval of the Episcopal Church's actions by rejecting both their money and their missionaries. How could he accept funds from those with whom he disagreed on such an important issue? Whenever a United States donor says, "but of course you still take our money!" the implied charge of hypocrisy virtually forces a proud and conscientious bishop to refuse the next check, sometimes at great hardship to his province.

One bishop who had worked in the Pacific Islands told the story of visitors to his diocese from an American cathedral with whom he had been in disagreement about women's ordination at the time. (He has subsequently changed his mind.) He said, "They came and told us what they thought and gave us a check for our mission; we told them what we thought and we took their check and built our mission!"

We all laughed at his story and the conversation turned to other matters, but I wondered later what Paul would have made of our situation. Paul spent much of his ministry raising money for the church at Jerusalem, a part of the church that disagreed with him profoundly and whose leaders sent representatives to his Gentile churches to question his credentials and to undermine his work. After a long and arduous fundraising campaign, Paul worried about whether the Jerusalem Church would even accept his gift, for some of the same reasons just expressed. Nevertheless, in order to fulfil a promise he had made long before, and because he knew that the Jerusalem church desperately needed the money, he risked his life to carry it to them, hoping that the difficult journey would not be in vain.

Here is the politics of God lived out in practice, in the peculiar sense of "looking after

[27] Descriptions of the speakers have been modified to respect the confidential nature of the conversation.

the interests of others" before one's own interests. Here is the intersection of Christian belief with attitude and action that embodies a theology of the cross. What impresses me about Paul is his insight that the giving and receiving of money for the building up of the body of Christ and his ongoing argument with the church at Jerusalem about the terms of Gentile inclusion must not be allowed to interfere with each other. He insists that that the wealthier Gentile congregations need to give as much as the poorer Jerusalem congregation needed to receive: neither group ought to deny the other the opportunity to minister to them and to be ministered to by them. The argument about the best way to include the Gentiles would go on as long as necessary, but, in the meantime, the financial support of the church for the purpose of God's mission to the world would be carried on.

In the same way, contemporary denominations like my own, that are experiencing conflict and division over the way Christian beliefs are implemented in attitudes and practices, ought to set up structures that will facilitate the giving and receiving of financial gifts, so necessary to the spiritual health of the whole body, in a way that does not compromise either giver or receiver, while the doctrinal argument runs its course. We need more Christians willing to live with what I'm now calling the "Pacific Islands" model of mutual ministry, in which givers and receivers are free to speak their minds to one another in love and, most importantly, the work of the church goes on.

CULTIVATING THE MIND OF CHRIST IN THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

In Philippians, the "sameness" Paul urges upon the community is having the same mind within themselves that Christ Jesus had, the mind that will lead them to think of the interests of others rather than of themselves and their own interests. Arguably, any theory of human relations implies attention to the Other: to do justice means to recognize the Other as precisely the one who is other than I am, the Other who has a claim to recognition and respect from me simply by existing. I am required to behave differently than I might otherwise simply by the fact of the presence of another person. To be just in this sense is to engage in an act of recognition, which is, at the same time, also an acknowledgment of difference. By virtue of being another, the Other is not me and therefore requires of me attention to the similarities and differences between us.[28]

Paul's suggestion that the church should be acquiring and cultivating the mind of Christ, who gave himself for the well-being of others and humbled himself that others might be

[28] Attention to the ethical implications of the Other has been a feature of the work of Emmanuel Levinas. Among other writings, see his *Time and the Other* (trans. Richard Cohen; Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987).

exalted, necessarily implies a further act of the moral imagination that is both counter-intuitive and counter-cultural: seeing the other as the brother or sister "for whom Christ died" (Rom 14:15). The other, whether ally or opponent, friend or enemy, is shown to have infinite value in the sight of God and to be worth, in the judgment of Christ Jesus, the pain and humiliation of death on the cross. The political and theological differences between my interlocutor and myself, however important they seem to us in our situation, are thus drastically relativized by the crucial (*crux*) event that has united us, the death of Christ on the cross for our salvation.

Cultivating the mind of Christ, therefore, turns out to be a habit of the heart comparable to the discipline of active and attentive prayer. It is a way of thinking that results in a changed way of being. I must act differently towards the other whom I describe as my brother or sister in Christ, the one who shares with me the saving narrative of the cross, the one, like me, for whom Christ died.

The brothers and sisters who are infinitely precious in the sight of God may be easier to love if they are located on the other side of the world than if they are sitting next to me in the pew of my local congregation. It may require extraordinary measures of spiritual discipline to remain in communion with people I see every day. Once more, Paul's letter to the Philippians proves a useful guide.

Paul's letter is framed by statements of joy and thanksgiving to God for the Philippians. At the start of the letter he testifies, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy, thankful for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now" (1:3–4). Toward the letter's end, he addresses the Philippians as his "joy and crown," as his "beloved" (4:1), even as he urges them:

> Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to every one. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (4:4–7)

The rector of a large inner-city parish in Alabama follows a practice that embodies Paul's exhortation to the Philippians in the daily life of his community. He rises early every day for Bible study, prayer, and quiet time. At the end of that time, he writes a letter to someone in the congregation, giving thanks to God for something that person said or did that served to build up the body of Christ. Since he tries to write to a different person each day, the dis-

cipline helps him to be on the lookout for people and events that provoke thanksgiving and joy and to be prompt about acknowledging those gifts in the other. I can only imagine how the congregation's life together has been affected over the years by this practice, especially when the letter goes to someone who disagrees with the rector about some policy or practice of the church. Both the rector and members of the congregation he serves would be subtly shaped to notice the gifts and deeds of the people around them. As Paul says,

> Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (4:8)

The politics of God are instantiated in a congregation, or in any Christian body, not by unanimity of opinion, even about material issues, but by communal imitation of the Christ-like pattern of looking to the interests of others. Where that pattern is palpably present, God's resurrecting power is also abundantly apparent and lives are visibly changed. Conflict does not disappear, but it is transformed into self-critical reflection that enables the community as a whole and everyone in it to grow more joyful and thankful over time.