



journal of biblical
perspectives
in leadership

LEADERSHIP AS PARTICIPATION IN CHRIST: PAUL'S THEOLOGY OF LEADERSHIP IN THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

Karl Inge Tangen

This article argues that Paul's theology of leadership in the letter to the church in Philippi should be understood in light of the central Pauline idea that believers live in communion with Christ (*koinōnia*). Paul's theology includes an ecclesial vision of a church unified by a shared cruciform wisdom that sees Christ as both Lord of the world and as well as an example of humble self-giving leadership. It is argued that Paul's understanding of the *koinonia* of Christ moves beyond the imitation of Christ to a form of participation in the cruciform leadership of Christ through the Spirit. This kind of leadership takes place as facilitation of, and participation in Christo-practices, which includes cruciform moral reasoning and self-giving love through liturgical-charismatic worship, preaching, teaching, service, economic gifts and peace-making.

I. INTRODUCTION

The notion of “participation in”, or “union with” Christ, is by many contemporary scholars seen as the central theological idea in Paul's theology (for an overview see Campbell, 2012; see also Wright, 2015). There is also a growing interest in the topic of leadership in studies of Paul (Agosto, 2005; Barentsen & Esler, 2011; Clarke, 2013). Yet, no one has to my knowledge explicitly explored the relationship between participation in Christ and Paul's notions of ministry as leadership. This study will explore this relation more specifically, Paul's understanding of leadership as participation in Christ in the letter to the Philippians.

This letter is an important source since it is one of the few early, and largely undisputed, Pauline letters that explicitly addresses leaders in terms of overseers (*episkopoi*) and deacons (*diakonoi*) (Phil. 1:1). Unfortunately this has often been overlooked by scholars according to Clarke (2013, p 52 n.4). Yet, the letter has served as a vantage point for Bekker's (2007) important contribution to the field of Pauline leadership studies. In this study I will seek to demonstrate that Bekker's model of mimetic leadership, which is built on Philippians 2:5-11, might be elaborated by means of Paul's description of his ministry as participation in Christ, as described in Philippians 3:3-14. The research question is therefore: *In what way does Paul understand leadership as a kind of participation in Christ – in the letter to the Phillipians?* The study will be a biblical theological study based on exegetical work done by biblical scholars. The primary goal is to provide a theological interpretation of the letter that will contribute fresh insight into Paul's theology of leadership and provide a biblical basis for further practical theological reflection.

II. THE PHILIPPIAN CONTEXT AND CHRIST AS A MODEL OF COUNTERCULTURAL LEADERSHIP

Why was leadership and important issue in Philippi? Philippi was a Roman colonial city where Romans owned most of the land and dominated local institutions (Tellbe, 2001). Hellerman (2003) has shown that the *cursus honorum*, the pecking order of power and dignity, formalized in the sequences of public offices, played a very important role in Roman colonies in general, and in Philippi in particular.¹ Hellerman concludes that epigraphic testimonials to the social status of individuals in and around Philippi is unparalleled elsewhere in the empire. He also shows that evidence from Philippi seems to indicate that non-elite voluntary associations and cult groups tended to replicate the vertical structures of the Roman elites (Hellerman 2003). At the time the letter was written the church faced critical challenges as a result of social intimidation from these elites. This can be seen in chapter 1, where Paul writes that he is in chains (1:14) and that the church is struggling and suffering as a result of Roman use of force (1:28-30, see also Fee 1995; Longenecker & Thompson, 2016; Zerbe, 2016). There were simultaneously internal challenges, including ongoing conflicts and posturing (4:2), probably relating to the Roman perception of status (Phil. 2:2, Fee, 1995), and the threat of false "Judaizing" teaching (3:2-3) that possibly promised protection from Roman power by advocating official recognition as a *religio licita* (Tellbe, 1995). It is in this situation that Paul offers a countercultural vision of leadership and status. Bekker (2007) has shown that Paul's response to Roman preoccupation with honor was to narrate Christ as an example of a *cursus pudorum* (course of ignominies). He suggests that what many scholars perceive as central section of the letter, the hymn² in 2:6-11, represents a counter-cultural model of mimetic leadership where Jesus serves as an *exemplum* for Christian leaders (2007, pp.6-7).

¹ The *cursus honorum* meant that Romans generally divided society into two groups with regard to honor: the *honestiores*, or privileged strata of society, and the *humiliores*, who did not qualify for offices or honor, for reasons of birth, lack of wealth or education (see also Witherington, 1995).

² Whether is it a pre-Pauline hymn is highly debated but not relevant here. For the debate see (Fee, 1995; Witherington III, 2011)

Instead of climbing up the social ladder of the Roman society, Jesus deliberately chose the *cursus honorum*, stepping down the social ladder, taking the role of a slave, and a suffering servant. He was in the form of God (*en morphēi theou*), yet "he did not regard being equal to God as something to be taken advantage of."³ (2) He then engaged in a voluntary self-emptying of statuses and privileges, humbling or "emptying himself (*kenoso*), taking on the status and form of a slave (*morphēn doulou*). (3) He chose to suffer in obedience to God, obeying until death (*mechri thanatou*), the shameful death of the cross. (4) Yet, because of this, God has now highly exalted him (*huperupsōse*) superior to any human power. (5) In the future all humans will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord (*kúrios*) – with God the Father and kneel before him.

III. THE CHURCH AS A CONTEXT FOR LEADERSHIP AND PAUL'S COMMUNAL VISION

It is essential to observe that this countercultural model of leadership serves a larger purpose in the letter. Ben Witherington laments that the enormous attention the Christ-hymn in 2:6-11 has drawn in scholarly discussion has resulted in a tendency to gloss over 2:1-4. Witherington sees this as an immense mistake, because vv.1-4 set up the hymns that follow (Witherington 2011, loc 1855). Paul's primary concern is the church as an alternative community (Phil. 3:21), and leaders in the Philippian church should therefore not only follow Christ's example but seek to grasp the communal vision created by the risen Lord. Paul introduces this vision using the term *koinōnia* in 2.1. This term has a variety of meanings, including association, fellowship, and participation. Variations of the same root may take on the meaning of common, communal (*koinōs*); share, participate in (*koinōneō*); and companion, partner, or sharer (*koinōnos*) (Verbrugge, 2003). In Philippians the word first appears in the description of Paul and the church as partners in the gospel (1:5). The partnership is oriented towards Christ and includes the ethical aspect of living a life worthy of the gospel (1:27), which also leads to the sharing of struggles and sufferings (1:29-30).

The moral vision of a life worthy of the gospel is then unpacked in more depth in Philippians 2:1-4. The two first verses may be translated as follows (NIV):

Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit. If any tenderness and compassion then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

Here the term *koinōnia* is specifically linked to the Holy Spirit in 2:1 (*koinonia pneumatōs*). The genitive seems to imply that the ecclesial vision is grounded in the spirituality, of having fellowship with the Spirit.⁴ Moreover, Paul seems to emphasize the deep and motivating affections that come from being united with the Spirit in love (2:1-2). As Thompson observes, the overall goal of Paul's exhortation is the transformation of the community in terms of a transformation from self-centeredness to a corporate existence shaped by the self-denying love of Jesus (Thompson, 2006). Such corporate

³ For this translation, see Witherington III, 2011, I.2203. In the imperial temples, in the city center, Roman leaders were considered "equal to the gods" (see also Zerbe, 2016, I. 442)

⁴ See the implicit Trinitarian formula in 2. Cor. 13:13 (see also Witherington 2011, i.1901, and Fee 1995, 180-182).

existence expresses itself in tenderness and compassion (see also Hawthorne & Martin, 2018, I. 5698-5699). Moreover, in Philippians 1:9 Paul is praying that this love may abound in *epignosis* and in *aesthesis*, which might be translated as moral knowledge and discernment (see Verbrugge, 2003). The third dimension of the ecclesial vision is therefore a unifying moral reasoning. Paul seems in particular to focus on the development of an alternative, and cruciform form of moral phronesis, that could unite the community so that the church may “think the same thing” (*to auto phronein*), and be “of one mind” (*to hen phronountes*) (Longenecker & Thompson, 2016). Thompson and Longenecker observes the exhortation to have “one mind” would have resonated with a Greco-Roman audience’s perception of friendship. Likewise, in Philippians 4:8-9, Paul encourages the church to embrace what is commonly perceived as virtuous (*arête*) in the social context.

Yet as Witherington argues, Paul does not merely borrow terms from Greco-Roman discourse. Rather he incorporates such terms into the matrix of the paradigmatic story of Christ and his own example (Witherington III, 2011, I. 3841-42). This can be seen in Philippians 2:3-4: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” The virtue that gives the moral reasoning of the ecclesial vision its particular shape is the virtue of humility (*tapeinophrosynē*). It was not regarded as virtue in the Greco-Roman world. It had rather negative connotations in terms of weakness, obsequious groveling, or mean-spiritedness, and was considered a synonym for being ignoble, cowardly, or of low birth (Longenecker & Thompson, 2016). Thus, it is exactly at this point that Paul confronts Roman perception of leadership. Instead of empty self-glorification and rivalry (Witherington 2011, I. 1920-1921), Paul promotes the kind of humility that is seeing and reckoning others above oneself. (Hawthorne & Martin, 2018 I. 5801-5805). The fourth and final dimension of this ecclesial vision may be seen as the practical outcome of this mindset. This is described in 2:4 in terms of serving one another, or mutual service. Paul sketches a contrast between looking out for one’s own interest on one side, and caring for others, or the common good of the church, on the other (2:20-21).⁵ In sum, Paul’s communal vision of the church may be described as follows: a community that worships in the Spirit, is driven by love, has a shared moral reasoning characterized by humility, and engages in mutual service so that they will live a life worthy of the gospel (Phil. 1:27).

IV. LEADERSHIP AS PARTICIPATION IN CHRIST’S POWER AND SUFFERING

Having sketched the horizon of an alternative communal vision, Paul turns to a presentation of the leader as participating in Christ’s death and resurrection. Philippians 3:9-10 reads:

⁵ Thus, the ecclesial vision of Philippians is fairly similar to the one which is worked out in more detail in other letters through the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ. The main idea is that the different members need one another and serve one another in light of the common good, which is Christ (Rom. 12; 4-6, 1. Cor 12:12-27).

and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

These verses need to be understood within its immediate context. The text appears within Paul’s self-presentation in Philippians 3:3-14, which both builds on and resembles the hymn in chapter 2. This can also be seen in the thematic similarities between the sections,⁶ displayed in the table below, where I have taken themes from Bekker’s analysis of Philippians 2:6-11 and compared it to chapter 3:3-12:

Table 1

Thematic similarities between Philippians 2:5-11 and Philippians 3:3-12

Common theme ⁷	Philippians 2:5-11	Philippians 3:3-12
Being in a privileged state	Jesus being in the form of God (<i>en morphēi theou</i>), having divine status.	Paul being a part of God’s people, seen as faultless and righteous Pharisee by virtue of obedience to the law.
Voluntary self-emptying of status, privileges and glory	Humbling or “emptying” (<i>kenoo</i>) himself, “becoming nothing,” taking on the status and form of a slave (<i>morphēn doulou</i>).	Gains considered as loss (<i>zemia</i>), “debt” or “cast away”, now serving in the Spirit as a slave (<i>doulos</i>) of Christ (1:1)
Suffering in obedience to God	Suffering obedience to death (<i>mechri thanatou</i>), even the shameful death of the cross.	Participating in his sufferings, becoming conformed to him in his death (<i>summorphizomenos tōi thanatōi autou</i>).
Divine exaltation: a second and restoring status reversal	Being highly exalted (<i>huperupsōse</i>) by God, becoming Lord (κύριος) with God the Father.	Knowing the power of the resurrection of Christ Jesus my Lord, (Christou Iēsou tou kyriou mou). Gaining a new status of righteousness.
Eternal glory	This will be acknowledged by all humans in the future.	This will be fully accomplished in the future when Paul “accomplishes” resurrection.

⁶ It might be added, as Longenecker and Thompson observes, that there are many other terminological parallels between chapter 2 and 3 (see Longenecker & Thompson 2016, 92).

⁷ It’s worth noticing that there are also important distinctions between the chapters. First, there is an obvious ontological and theological difference between the privilege of being in the form of God and the human status of being a faultless Pharisee. Secondly, it is crucial to acknowledge that Paul’s new status, and suffering obedience, is not based on his own effort, but is rather God’s work in him, as I am suggesting below (Phil. 3:10, 2:13).

It is also critical to acknowledge that the order in which Paul presents his Jewish status in Philippians 3 corresponds to the typical structure of Roman honor inscriptions found in Philippi (Longenecker & Thompson, 2016). Thus, Philippians 3:3-14 might be read as a parallel to Philippians 2, implying that Paul deliberately designed his self-narrative as a contrast to the *cursus honorum*. It follows then that the main point of the self-narrative in 3:3-9 is that Paul denounces whatever status and privileges that humans may put their trust in (3:3, see also Longenecker & Thompson, 2016). Paul goes as far as considering these assumed privileges as (*skybala*), which might be translated as “rubbish” (Fee 1995, 219), compared to knowing Christ. To know Christ is the superior good in this narrative. The term for knowing (*ginosko*), denotes, as Hawthorne and Martin observe certainly more than an intellectual apprehension of truth. Rather, it is a personal appropriation of, and communion with, Christ himself, involving both the mind and the heart (Hawthorne & Martin, 2018, I. 9011-9015). So what does it mean to know Christ? In Philippians 3:9-10 there seems to be an intimate connection between this kind of knowledge and receiving one’s righteousness from God by faith. The meaning of righteousness and justification has been heavily debated in recent years since the arrival of the so-called “New perspective on Paul”.

Within this article I cannot present my own perspective on this debate in any depth, but a couple of comments will suffice. It is beyond doubt that some of the “new perspectives” have brought refreshing insights on Second Temple Judaism, and on how Paul’s account of justification by faith in Galatians and Romans includes the sociological question of how Gentiles are included in the people of God⁸ (e.g. Barclay, 2015). Yet, as Witherington (2011, I.3074-76), following Kim notes, “if Paul was not conscious of his personally achieved righteousness but only of the ‘national righteousness’ of Israel in Philippians 3.2-20 should he not have referred to it as ‘our own righteousness’?” – but he rather uses the noun in the singular. Thus, Philippians 3:9-10 indicates that Paul’s encounter with Jesus also transformed his understanding of individual justification in terms of a clearer distinction between the status acquired by human achievement, and the righteousness received from God as a gift. Hence, Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus and his post Damascus reflections seems to include not only a new and humbling understanding of Jesus as the Messiah, and a new insight on the nature of God’s covenant people, it also includes an experience of being surprised by personal and undeserved grace (*charis*) and being overwhelmed by divine love (*agape*) that fills the heart (Rom 5:5). This seems to be an essential aspect of what Paul described as his *koinōnia* with Christ, evident in the verse that N. T. Wright (2015, I.9401-9411) sees as a possible center of Pauline theology:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:20).

If Wright is correct, this verse may serve as a hermeneutical key to Philippians 3:10 and explain what it means to know Christ. How then can such knowledge be

⁸ Anyhow, as James Dunn seems to suggest, in his exposition of Romans 4:4-5, the reformation principle may even be maintained, although with an altered horizon (see Dunn, 2006, pp.366-367).

attained? With the old perspective on Paul, one may maintain that faith comes from hearing and believing the gospel, and an experience of the love of Christ through the Spirit (Gal. 3:2-5; Rom. 5:5; 10:17). In Philippians 3:10, however, it seems that the basic way of knowing Christ also comes through a life of imitating him or participating in what might be called Christo–practices, in the sense that these are both imitation of and participation in Christ. I will identify and unpack several Christo-practices in Philippians below. However, I will first discuss how participation may transcend imitation in terms of being part of Paul’s *koinōnia* with Christ in the Spirit. To explore what I will call pneumatological or pneumatic participation, it might be useful to begin with Fee’s (1995) structural analyses of 3:10, which he considers as the “perfect chiasm”:

So that I may know, him

A – Both the power of his resurrection

B – And participating (*koinōnia*), in his sufferings

B’ – being conformed (*summorphoo*) to his death

A’ – If somehow, I might attain the resurrection from the dead

According to Fee (1995) the forcefulness of this structure lies in the A-A lines as they surround the B lines. Most important for my purpose is that they point to Christ’s resurrection (A 1) as the source or means whereby Paul is enabled to endure suffering (B lines). To know Christ is therefore to know the power of the resurrection (A 1), which in turn needs to be understood in an eschatological already, but not yet perspective (A 2.) Thus, it is the power of the resurrection that enables the church to endure pain, and to will and to act in order to fulfill God’s good purposes (Phil. 2:13).

I suggest that this kind of participation or *koinōnia* should be understood in terms of fellowship with, or participation in, the Spirit. We have already seen that Paul uses *koinōnia* in this way in Philippians 2:1 (see above), also in the sense that the Spirit is seen as the source of love and unity. Moreover, in Philippians 3:3, Paul introduces the passage by a reference to “we who serve God by his Spirit” in contrast to those who serve in the flesh.⁹ Here Paul uses the liturgical term *latreio*, which also can be translated as worship (Verbrugge, 2003, I. 28754, see also RSV). This might indicate that Philippians 3:10 can be read in light of 2. Cor. 3:17-18, which describes worship in the Spirit in contrast to worship under the law. The case for such a reading is strengthened by the fact that there is a resemblance between how *summorphoo* is being used in Philippians 3:10 for describing conformity to the death of Jesus, and the way *metamorphoo* is used to describe how the church is transformed into the image of Christ by the agency of the Spirit in 2. Corinthians 3:17-18. Thus, seeing these texts together, I suggest that it is the knowledge of the grace of God and the power of the resurrection given by the Spirit that alters imitation into a transforming response to the one “who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2.20). Thus, in Philippians 3:3-12, Paul moves beyond imitation to pneumatic participation in Christ,¹⁰ in the sense that

⁹ Serving in the Spirit (verse. 3) is a parallel to the later theme of knowing Christ (verse 7-10), in contrast to leadership based on Jewish privileges or Roman status.

¹⁰ In the words of Gordon Fee: “so that what most characterizes the Holy Spirit is *koinōnia*, a word that primarily means “participation in” or “fellowship with”. This is how the living God not only brings us into an intimate and abiding relationship with himself, as the God of all grace, but also causes us to participate in the benefits of that grace and salvation,” (Fee, 2000, pp. 27–28)

Christo-practices are enabled by, and dependent on, God's transforming grace and the transforming presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Yet, at the same time, Philippians 3:10 informs us that this fellowship with the Spirit, includes participation in the sufferings of Christ. Fee makes an important observation when he says that the term resurrection only applies to those who have first experienced death (Fee, 1995). Thus, there is an intimate connection between the experiences of the power of the resurrection and the suffering and pain that is experienced in countercultural imitation of Christ, which Paul describes in 2. Corinthians 4:11 in terms of being "given over to death." Hence, what we see at work in Paul's leadership is what Michael Gorman would call an experience of cruciform power (2009). Gorman stresses that there is certain continuity between Jesus' humiliated and his exalted status in Philippians 2:6-11. He therefore suggests that the cross is the signature of the Risen One and it follows that Jesus' lordship, paradoxically, has the form of servanthood:

That is, Jesus' lordship, paradoxically, has the form of servanthood even in the present (which is why it is no surprise that Paul tells the Romans that Christ is praying for us [Rom 8:34]). That is why a community that lives "in Christ" (Phil. 2:1-5) will be shaped like the story of Christ narrated in 2:6-8 (Gorman 2009, I. 320-21).

Gorman does not neglect God's majesty and power. He defines God's holiness as "majesty in relation" (Gorman 2009, I.328). At the same time, I think it is imperative to see that Paul's understanding of God's power includes the whole economy of salvation, including the eschatological notion of Jesus as the one who annihilates the evil incarnation of lawlessness with the breath of his mouth (2. Thess. 2:8). How these images should be combined cannot be discussed here. Nevertheless, one may maintain that the death and resurrection of Jesus have transformed the character of human power in the church to a form of serving power for others (Phil. 2:6-11, see also Marshall, 2003).

However, as the notion of kneeling before Jesus in Philippians 2:9-11 demonstrates, power may still be power over. Likewise, cruciform leadership is still manifested within a hierarchical structure in Paul's writings. Andrew Clarke has shown that there is evidence for hierarchal structures in Paul's churches (Clarke 2013, Ch. 4). In Philippians we see this hierarchy in the reference to overseers and deacons (Phil. 1:1). How this kind of organizational structure intersected and interacted with what James Dunn (2006) calls charismatic structures is not apparent in this letter.¹¹ What we see in Philippians is that Paul serves as a paternal figure within the "family" of believers. Elsewhere it is also evident that this kind of "fatherhood" meant that Paul could confront alternative power toughly when the common good of the church was threatened (e.g. Gal. 1:6-9; 1.Cor. 11;17-34). Thus, cruciform leadership does not exclude the use of (rhetorical) power within a hierarchical structure.¹²

¹¹ In my view Clarke's (2013) emphasis on hierarchy versus Dunn's (2006) emphasis on charismatic structure should be discussed and possibly combined in light of a critical realist account of structure and agency. Yet, this must be discussed elsewhere, since charisms are not discussed in the letter to the Philippians.

¹² One should not overlook that the dominant tools of leadership in Paul, rhetoric and modeling for imitation also are forms of power. See for instance Elisabeth Castelli's interesting, but problematic work (Castelli, 1991). For a critique, see Clarke 2013.

Does this imply that organizational power is included in the sharing of the power of the resurrection? I suggest that this is the case, yet primarily in the sense that leaders in Pauline churches seem to have been publicly committed to the Lord by prayer, fasting and the laying on of hands, expecting the Spirit to empower their ministry to the church (Acts 14:23; 2. Tim. 1:6-7). Thus, leadership might have existed in a kind of dialectic between organizational structure and charismatic ministry. Yet, it is crucial to acknowledge that both forms of power were grounded in Christ's teaching and example (Phil. 2:6-11), and that Paul in Philippians 3 does not replace Roman status or Jewish privileges with an equivalent ecclesiastical status (see also Fee, 2000, Ch. 10). He rather makes it clear that authentic service depends on the presence and guidance of the Spirit (Phil. 3:3). Elsewhere he uses the metaphor of stewardship, implying that leaders share in a delegated form of power, that they are accountable to Christ (1 Cor. 4:1-4), and that the church should evaluate or test their ministry including their charismatic authority (1. Cor. 12:3; 14:29). Charisma and cruciform power are therefore not something the leader possesses, but rather something they are grasped by and lead by (Phil. 3:12-14).

Finally, cruciform power is also almighty power in the sense that Paul expects from God that which is impossible for humans. The good news that Paul announces to the somewhat shaken church in Philippi is that Christ has conquered all alternative human and spiritual powers, including the ultimate threat posed by Roman authorities, death (Phil. 1:21; 2:11). In Philippians 4:13 he states that he can handle any situation, both good and extremely difficult, through the power of Christ who works in him. Hence, it is the power of the resurrection that enables Paul and the church do God's will (Phil. 2:13). It follows that cruciform power is far more than the power of love suffering for others. It is also sharing in the resurrection power to do what is only possible for God – give life and turn death to life.

V. LEADERSHIP AS PARTICIPATION IN AND FACILITATION OF CHRISTO-PRACTICES IN THE SPIRIT

Thus, when I in the following will present different leadership practices, these should not only be perceived as participation in Christ death through self-giving and suffering service, but these should also be seen as participation in God's resurrecting power, present as the power of the Spirit, which is the "already" in the "already, but not yet" pattern in Paul's eschatological theology (Fee 1995). The full experience of resurrection power lies in the future when death and suffering will be destroyed at Christ's return (1 Cor. 15:23-26).

The leadership practices that will be presented also need to be seen within the ecclesial vision outlined above. Yet, this kind of social unity cannot, as morphogenetic sociology suggests (Archer, 1995), exist without continual agency in the Spirit. Here leaders carry a particular responsibility for modeling, facilitating and guiding of Christo-practices. The first Christo-practice would be that of proclaiming the gospel to the Greco-Roman world. In Philippians it is not only Paul who serves in the role of an evangelist (Eph. 4:11), but the whole church is clearly perceived as partners in this kind

of ministry (Phil. 1:5).¹³The Corinthian correspondence offers an even thicker description of this dynamic. Paul says that those who proclaim the gospel are handed over to death by torture and persecution, so that life may be at work in those who receive the good news (2 Cor. 4:8-13). The life-giving power of the gospel (1 Cor. 1:17-18) transcends both human wisdom and Paul's rhetorical skills (1 Cor. 2: 4-5) and is accompanied by the "demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1. Cor. 2:4), which probably is a reference to healings, signs and wonders (Rom. 15:19).

The second practice of leadership as teaching is demonstrated in the letter itself. What Clarke sees as a general pattern in Paul's letters is clearly identifiable in Philippians, and in particular in chapter 3. He is mainly using "two principal tools" to persuade his followers, namely rhetoric and personal example (Clarke 2013, p.156-159).¹⁴ Paul's teaching includes a variety of rhetorical and didactic genres. He engages in kerygmatic proclamation and exhortation in the indicative (Phil. 2:6-11) and instructs in the imperative (2:1-4; 4:2). He combines showing the way to a life modeled on Christ with warnings against false teaching and alternative practices (Phil. 3:2-14).

Paul's teaching in Philippians should be understood within the framework of a "family letter" as Whiterington argues (2011, l.474-530).¹⁵ Paul avoids setting up a patron-client friendship of instrumental reciprocity (Whiterington 2011, l. 495). Rather, he creates a shared responsibility for living a life worthy of the gospel. In terms of leadership, this means that the deacons and overseers would be responsible, not only for handing over the teaching of Paul, they would also be expected to become role models themselves. This would in particular apply to the third, and perhaps most emphasized practice in the letter to the Philippians, that of mutual service. This communal practice is already described in some depth above, as Paul's ecclesial vision. Here I want stress that leaders would be expected to be role models. Paul describes Timothy and Epaphroditus as such examples. Timothy is described as one who shows genuine concern for the church's welfare (2:20) in contrast to those who "look out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" (2:21). Epaphroditus is portrayed as one risking his own life in order to help Paul and take care of his needs (2:25-30). Moreover, if Paul's advice in Philippians 2:3-4 were taken seriously by upper-class Christians in Philippi, they would have to stop acting on the basis of the normal social protocols towards slaves and others who were seen as *humilores*, and start considering them better than themselves. They would have to take care of their interests and lead by example, rather than lording it over them (2 Cor. 1:24). This would, as Witherington observes, be a significant change in mindset concerning the social order, at least within the context of the Christian community (2011, l.2051). Service would also include financial support and self-giving. Since the church portrayed in 2 Corinthians 8:1

¹³ The hymn in Phil 2:6-11 may therefore be read as a radically missional text that presents a cruciform testimony to the a world (Gorman, 2015).

¹⁴ As Witherington shows in his socio-rhetorical commentary. In Philippians, Paul is teaching in a rhetorically structured way, demonstrating not only oratory skills, but the dominant rhetorical character of Greco-Roman culture (Witherington III, 2011). Whiterington (2011, l.428) suggest that we are dealing with in Paul's letters are rhetorical discourses courses with some epistolary features.

¹⁵ Philippians is often referred to as a letter of friendship but this is probably incorrect. Since the language of friendship is absent in the letter, it should not be read within the framework of a patron-client friendships. It is better to see it as family letter (see, Witherington 2011 l.474 -530).

probably is the church in Philippi, it is possible that the church might have supported Paul financially for a long period of time, probably years (Phil. 2:25; 4:15, 2. Cor. 11:8-9, see Zerbe 2016, l. 6225-6234). In 2. Corinthians the church in Macedonia is portrayed as a role model of voluntary self-giving and provision (“beyond their ability”), based on loving care for Paul, and their devotion to Christ (2 Cor. 8:3-5). As I suggested above, this should not be understood within a reciprocity cycle of patron-client relationships (Witherington 2011, l. 495), but rather be seen within the framework of mutual service and love (Phil. 2:1 -4.)

Thus, from the letter to Philippians, I think it is legitimate to claim that Paul is promoting a radical form of cruciform servant leadership, which included both sociological and economical self-giving. Yet, it is important to note, as Witherington does, that the “servant language” (*doulos*) in Philippians 2 and 3, does not refer to slavery, but reflects the OT language of Isaiah 52-53. The basic connotation is therefore of Jewish leaders and prophets as servants of God (Witherington, 2011, l.2056-2058). This implies that the deacons and overseers in Philippi (Phil. 1:1), who were stripped of their “Roman status” or “Jewish glory,” could still see themselves as leaders who had the authority to lead within an organized hierarchy.

However, Andrew Clarke acknowledges that Paul is mixing metaphors, including mixing hierarchy with images of leaders as servants or slaves: The leader has a higher status within the hierarchy, but is not to abuse that status, and there will be occasions when the actions and vulnerabilities, suffering and incessant toil of the leader reflects more the status of a slave (2013, p.103). Do this imply that a Pauline theology of leadership would include an occasional paradox? The evidence in the letter to the Philippians seems to imply that this was a relatively continual paradox. Although a defined and organized power-structure existed, leaders were called upon to use these roles in a way that benefited the interest of others and the common good over their own interest (2:4).

The communal vision of Paul also leads to a fourth practice, that of peace-making or reconciliation. In Philippians 4:2-3 Paul urges two female leaders,¹⁶ Euodia and Syntyche to reconcile in terms of coming to the “same mind”. Paul does not present an exact method for how this should take place, but he provides at least two important clues. Firstly, the expression “coming to the same mind” (4:2) was already introduced in 2:2 and 2:6, and this shows that the earlier exhortations and the exemplary paradigm of Jesus is relevant for how he would like these leaders to think about the conflict. If the leaders valued the other higher than themselves (2:3), the dialogue could start on new premises. Secondly, it is clear that the church, and in particular one unnamed co-worker, should serve as mediators (4:2) and assist the two leaders in the process (Zerbe, 2016, l. 4824, see also Silva 2005, p.194-195).

The fifth practice is that of corporate worship. There is no specific section in the letter that systematically deal with liturgical–charismatic spirituality that is outlined in more depth in other Pauline letters (e.g. 1 Cor. 11-14). Yet there are references to thanksgiving (eucharistia) and different forms of prayer in 1:3-4 and 4:6 (*proseuche*,

¹⁶ From the very beginning in Philippi, church leadership seems to have consisted largely of faithful and courageous women, who had struggled beside Paul (Acts 16:12-16, see also Silva, 2005, p.192, Longenecker & Thompson, 2016, p.123).

deesis). The closest parallel in the Pauline material is probably 1. Thessalonians 5:16-20, which shows how joy in the Lord is associated with continual prayer, thanksgiving and openness to charismatic utterances such as prophecy. Based on the introduction to the letter (Phil. 1:1), it is reasonable to assume that leaders may have had a responsibility of initiating and facilitating such practices, helping the church to rejoice continually in Lord (Phil. 4:4-7). The reference to prayer and thanksgiving in the introduction to the letter (1:3-4) also shows that thanksgiving and prayer was one of the ways in which Paul and his co-workers were leading, overseeing and caring for the churches. In 2 Corinthians 11:28-29 he says:

Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

Thus, suffering and struggling with Christ is also an internal practice. In Colossians 4:12 he describes, Epaphras, one of his co-workers, as a servant of Christ Jesus, who is “wrestling” in prayer for you. Yet, in Philippians 4:6 Paul makes it clear that these practices take place in faith and not in total anxiety, because the presence of the resurrected Lord brings joy and peace in the Spirit (Phil. 4:4,7). In Philippians 4:7 he describes the peace from God as something that exceeds or surpasses (*huperecho*) human understanding. Thus Philippians 4:4-7 also shows how the power of the resurrection, manifested in prayer, becomes a cruciform practice.

The sixth practice is slightly more individual in character and may be associated with what Paul in Romans 12:2 calls the renewal or transformation of the mind (*nous*). Within the letter to the in Philippians it means taking on or having the same mind as Christ (2:5). This means accepting a new way of moral reasoning as we have seen above. Yet, it also means embodying a new understanding and self-identity as a leader. Leaders in Philippi should denounce the *cursus honorum* and instead take the posture of a servant, imitating Christ, seeing themselves as servant of others, including the *humilores*. That would certainly require a continual and conscious renewal of the mind.

From Philippians 3 we might add that the renewal of the leaders’ minds also includes seeing oneself as an empowered servant, united with Christ in his death and resurrection. Romans 12:2 may certainly be read in light of Romans 6:1-11 where Paul exhorts the church to recon themselves as being dead to sin and alive to God because they have been baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ. It is possible to see a similar sacramental dynamic in Philippians 3:10 (Hawthorne & Martin, 2018, II. 9191–9218; Silva, 2005, p.163),¹⁷ although this is not exegetically, obvious. Anyhow, the practical outcome was the same: leaders in Pauline churches were called to serve out of the identity of having become and becoming new persons in Christ. Servant leadership was therefore more than a style of leadership, it was who they were by having entered into *koninoia* with Christ in the Spirit (Phil. 1:1).

The six practices that have been presented so far may possibly be summed up in the seventh, faithful self-giving. The most dramatic form of self-giving is depicted in Philippians 2:17 where Paul interprets the possibility of his own execution in terms of

¹⁷ If this is the case, leaders in Rome could return to the place where they were baptized and ask: What kind of leader “died” as I was baptized to Christ and what kind of leader was raised to live in the Spirit?

becoming a “drink offering” to God (Phil. 2:17), demonstrating that he is interpreting his life liturgically (see Silva, 2005, p.126). However, we have seen above that Paul could see his ministry in terms of already being handed over to death in terms of the pain and suffering that followed from serving Christ. Thus, the kind of cruciform leadership that Paul envisions in Philippians is taking place as he is presenting his body - his whole self, as a living sacrifice to God, every day turning his whole life into a Christo-practice (see Rom. 12:1). As we have seen, this is a self-giving that is done in faith because Paul is expecting from God, that which is impossible for men. That includes righteousness from God and the resurrection power of Jesus Christ working through self-giving service. It is this power from God through the Spirit that gives Paul confidence to witness without fear and which makes the gospel advance in the world regardless of erroneous motivations (Phil. 1:12-14; 2:13). It provides joy and peace that surpasses all understanding (Phil. 4:4-7), and it gives strength to handle any circumstance, including hunger, abundance and desperate economic need (Phil. 4:12 - 13). Yet, this joy and power is experienced in, and not apart from, self-giving service, which frequently includes sacrifice and pain.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has shown that Paul’s theology of leadership in the letter to the church in Philippi should be understood in light of both the cultural context in Philippi, which was characterized by Roman quest for honor, and the central Pauline idea that believers live in communion with Christ. This communion includes an ecclesial vision of a church that is unified by mutual service grounded in a shared cruciform wisdom that see Christ as Lord of all, and at the same time, as a model of humble and serving leadership. Moreover, Paul’s theology of leadership moves beyond imitation to a form of participation in the cruciform leadership of Christ through the Spirit. This takes place as modeling and facilitation of Christo-practices, such as preaching, teaching, service, peace-making, liturgical-charismatic worship, and new ways of moral thinking and decision-making, all in the form of faithful self-giving in the Spirit.

This kind of leadership exhibits at least two intertwined paradoxes. First, it operates through an organized hierarchy and yet takes the form of service where leaders consider others higher than themselves. Secondly, leaders simultaneously participate in the suffering of Jesus and the power of his resurrection. Suffering comes from the force of external resistance as well as the pain that follows from internal care and tensions in the church. Resurrection power is characterized by having power to lead for the benefit of others, although it manifests itself within an organized hierarchy. This represents a sense of having power over yet remains accountable to Christ and the church as a whole. Hence, the image of cruciform power is a real paradox of individual empowerment and corporate responsibility that integrates both the divine and the human and hold together real experiences of cruciform vulnerability with the reality of God’s strength and dynamic power.

Finally, from this study it can be concluded that the image of cruciform leadership should not be dissolved by either humanistic reductionism that reduces it to nothing more than the effect of suffering love for others, or by theological triumphalism that teaches the false notion of continual experiences of God’s power without the sacrifice

and pain that follow from imitating Christ in self-giving love. These findings are to some degree limited to the letter to the Philippians although parallels in other Pauline material have been demonstrated. This calls for more research not only in the field of Pauline leadership studies but also in practical and constructive theology.

About the Author

Karl Inge Tangen (Ph.D.) is Dean of Research at HLT; The Norwegian School of Leadership and Theology. He is an inter-disciplinary scholar, who has written and co-edited books and articles within the fields of Organizational leadership, Pentecostal studies, Sociology of Religion and Practical Theology. More recently he has published a study on Luke's theology of Leadership (*Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, 2018). He is also an associate pastor of the Filadelfia Church in Oslo, Norway.

VII. REFERENCES

- Agosto, D. E. (2005). *Servant leadership: Jesus and Paul*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press.
- Archer, M. S. (1995). *Realist social theory: The morphogenetic approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Barentsen, J., & Esler, P. F. (2011). *Emerging leadership in the Pauline mission*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications.
- Black, D. A. (1995). The discourse structure of Philippians: A study in text-linguistics. *Novum Testamentum*. Vol. 37, pp.16-49.
- Campbell, C. R. (2012). *Paul and union with Christ: An exegetical and theological study*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Cassius, D. (1917). *Roman history, volume V. Books 46-50*. E. Cary & H. B. Foster, Trans. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Castelli, E. A. (1991). *Imitating Paul: A discourse of power*. (1st ed.) Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Clarke, A. D. (2013). *A Pauline theology of church leadership*. (1st ed.) Bloomsbury T&T Clark.
- Dunn, J. D. G. (2006). *The theology of Paul the apostle*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Fee, Gordon. D. (1995). *Paul's letter to the Philippians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Fee, Gordon. D. (2000). *Listening to the Spirit in the text*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Gorman, M. J. (2009). *Inhabiting the cruciform God: Kenosis, justification, and theosis in Paul's narrative soteriology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Gorman, M. J. (2015). *Becoming the gospel: Paul, participation, and mission*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Gorman, M. J. (2016). *Apostle of the crucified Lord: A theological introduction to Paul and his letters*. (2nd ed.) Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Hawthorne, G. F. & Martin, R. P. (2018). *Philippians. Volume 43. Rev. Ed.* (B. M. Metzger, D. A. Hubbard, & G. W. Barker, Eds.) Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

- Hellerman, J. H. (2003). The humiliation of Christ in the social world, part 1. *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 160, 321–336.
- Kennedy, G. A. (1984). *New Testament interpretation through rhetorical criticism*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Longenecker, B. W., & Thompson, J. W. (2016a). *Philippians and Philemon*. (M. Parsons, C. Talbert, & B. Longenecker, Eds.). Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Marshall, T., & Coates, G. (2003). *Understanding Leadership*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Silva, M. (2005). *Philippians* (2nd Ed.). Grand Rapids: MI, Baker Academic.
- Tellbe, M. (1995). The sociological factors behind Philippians 3.1-11 and the conflict at Philippi. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 17(55), 97–121.
- Tellbe, M. (2001). Paul between synagogue and state: Christians, Jews, and civic authorities in 1 Thessalonians, Romans, and Philippians. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell Intl.
- Thompson, J. W. (2006). *Pastoral ministry according to Paul: A biblical vision*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Verbrugge, V. (Ed.). (2003). *New international dictionary of New Testament theology*. (Abridged ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Witherington, B. (1995). Conflict and community in Corinth: A socio-rhetorical commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Witherington III, B. (2011). Paul's letter to the Philippians: A socio-rhetorical Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Wright, N. T. (2015). *Paul and his recent interpreters*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Zerbe, G. (2016). *Philippians*. Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press.