The Philippians Hymn (2:5-11) as an early mimetic Christological model of Christian Leadership in Roman Philippi

Corné J. Bekker, D. Litt. et Phil.
Regent University
School of Global Leadership and Entrepreneurship

This paper proposes an early mimetic Christological model of Christian Leadership in Roman Philippi by exploring the judicial, rhetorical structure and the social function of the Philippians hymn (2:5-11) as a cursus pudorum (course of ignominies) that stands in stark contrast to a cursus honorum, the formalized sequence of public offices in first-century Roman cities. The Philippians hymn challenged the notions and principles of the prevalent shame/honor social matrix of Roman societies by offering an alternative set of behaviors and values that stood in stark contrast with those of the dominant culture. The hymn makes use of a cursus pudorum in which the voluntary abasement, humility and obedience of Christ becomes an exemplum that offers a critique of the tyrannies of the timocratic leadership style of Roman Philippi and offers an alternative vision of service oriented leadership rooted in humility and common mutuality.

The myriad scholarly discussions on the Christological hymn (compare the excellent overview of the literature on this text in Martin 1997) in the letter of Paul to the Philippians (2:5-11) have traditionally been occupied with the issues of ontological Christology (Hellerman 2003, 424), questions on authorship (Martin 1997, 42-62) and literary form and function (Black, 1995); with little or no agreement amongst scholars on these issues (Stagg 1980, 340). Recent studies have attempted to escape the inertia created

in these studies by exploring the hymn as an ethical rhetorical device and paradigm (Fowl 1990, Geoffrion 1993), as mediating tool in the midst of communal disunity and strife (Peterlin 1995, Williams 2002), as social drama (Karris, 1996, Wortham 1996), and as resistance against local timocratic[1] rule (Heen 2004, Hellerman 2003, and Oakes 2001). What these recent developments have in common is a determined effort to place the hymn within the social and cultural context of first-century Philippi and the consensus that the hymn is a religious response to the tyranny of local Roman ruler and leadership. This opens the door for scholars to explore the hymn as an alternative and exemplary model (a rhetorical *exemplum*[2]) of ethical leadership rooted in a first-century, mimetic Christological spirituality. This paper proposes an early mimetic Christological model of Christian Leadership in Philippi by exploring the judicial, rhetorical structure and the social function of the hymn as a *cursus pudorum*[3].

Philippians 2:5-11 as early Christian Hymn

Philippians 2:5-7 has traditionally been identified as a hymn because of the clear linguistic differences with the rest of the text of letter (Gloer 1984:125), the occurrence and use of rhythmic and symmetric parallelisms (Fitzmeyer 1998, 470), the use of chiasmus (Black 1995, 37), the use of antithesis (Gloer 1984:127), the participial style (Gloer 1984, 127), the use of the relative clause in Greek (Gloer 1984, 128), and the arrangement of the hymn in strophe (McLeod 2001, 308). The strophic arrangement of the text suggests that the hymn had its origin in a liturgical setting (Briggs 1989:142) and Church historians have argued that hymns like these were the primary form of theological and communal expression of the primitive church (Gloer 1984, 120). Communal hymns in the early Christian communities had a three-fold function: they were employed in mutual teaching of new converts by antiphonal singing (Bruce and Simpson 1957, 285), they were the preferred medium of theological training (Selwyn 1969, 274) and they served as mnemonic, pedagogical devices in the formation of communal members (Guthrie, 1970, 551).

Building on these structural insights mentioned above, scholars have argued that the hymn is very early in the formation of the Christian community (Stagg 1980, 337; Hamm 1997, 31; Harrington 2006, 1), probably Pre-Pauline (Fitzmeyer 1988, 471; Howard 1978, 368), Aramaic in origin (at minimum Semitic) and clearly a composition of Jewish-Christian origin (Martin 1997, 39-41, Fitzmeyer 1988, 483). Some writers have even gone as far as to propose that the hymn is the oldest Christological reflection in the Christian Scriptures and that it originated in the generation immediately following the death and resurrection of Jesus , thus around 56-60 C.E. (McClendon 1991, 439). Other scholars have illustrated

---

[1] As in a timocracy, where a love of honor ostensibly operates as a ruling governmental principle.

[2] A rhetorical term referring to the use of a citation of an example, either truthful or fictitious.

[3] A course of ignominies, in stark contrast to a *cursus honorum*, the formalized sequence of public offices that marked out the prescribed social pilgrimage for aspiring senatorial aristocrats in Rome and which was replicated in miniature in municipalities and in voluntary associations in Roman cities, such as Philippi.

that the hymn falls squarely within the example and genre of Jewish Psalms in the first-century (Collins 2002:362). This claim finds support when one compares the psalmody of Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity as mentioned in the writings of Philo of Alexandria[4] (On the Contemplative life 80), Josephus[5] (Apion 1.40 and Antiquity 2.346; 7.364, 7.305) and Tertulian[6] (Apology 39). Further analogies for the hymn can also be found in the literature of the first-century, i.e. in the Qumran Literature[7] such as 11Q Melchizedek and 4Q Ages of Creation (Sanders 1969, 290).

The Social Situation of the early Christian Community of Philippi

Several recent studies (compare Hellerman 2003, Horsley 2004, Peterlin 1995 and Wortham 1996) have focused on the social location of the early Christian community in Philippi to whom Paul addressed his letter. From these studies we can conclude, that Philippian church was fairly large in size (Peterlin 1995, 169), that it consisted of a cross-section of the various social strata of what was at that time a typical, highly stratified Roman community (Wortham 1996, 281), that there is good evidence that many of the members of the community came from the upper echelons of the social ranking order (Peterlin 1995, 170), that the community experienced substantial inner and outer communal and religious conflict (Wortham 1996. 281), and that some of this communal conflict arose from the an apparent values conflict between the Christian call for humble service and the Philippians' cultural value of pursuing public social honor (see Hellerman 2003, 328). Hellerman (2003, 328) provides convincing evidence for the social verticality in Philippi:

> *"Epigraphic testimonials to the social status of individuals abound in and around Philippi to a degree unparalleled elsewhere in the empire. Those who enjoyed positions of honor had an incessant desire to proclaim publicly their status in the form of inscriptions erected throughout the colony."*

Dio Chrystostum[8], a Greek historian of the Roman Empire during that time, explains that the motivation that drove the elite within Roman society to pursue public status was *"not for the sake of what is truly best and in the interest of their country itself, but for the sake of reputation and honors and the possession of greater power than their neighbors, in the pursuit of crowns and precedence and purple robes, fixing their gaze upon these things and staking all upon their attainment"* (Orationes 34.29).

Hellerman (2003,421-433) proposes that the Philippians hymn functions in this context as a *cursus pudorum* (a course of ignominies), standing in stark contrast to the socially pervasive and accepted practice of a *cursus honorum*, the formalized sequence of public offices that marked out the

---

[4] 20 BCE to 40 CE

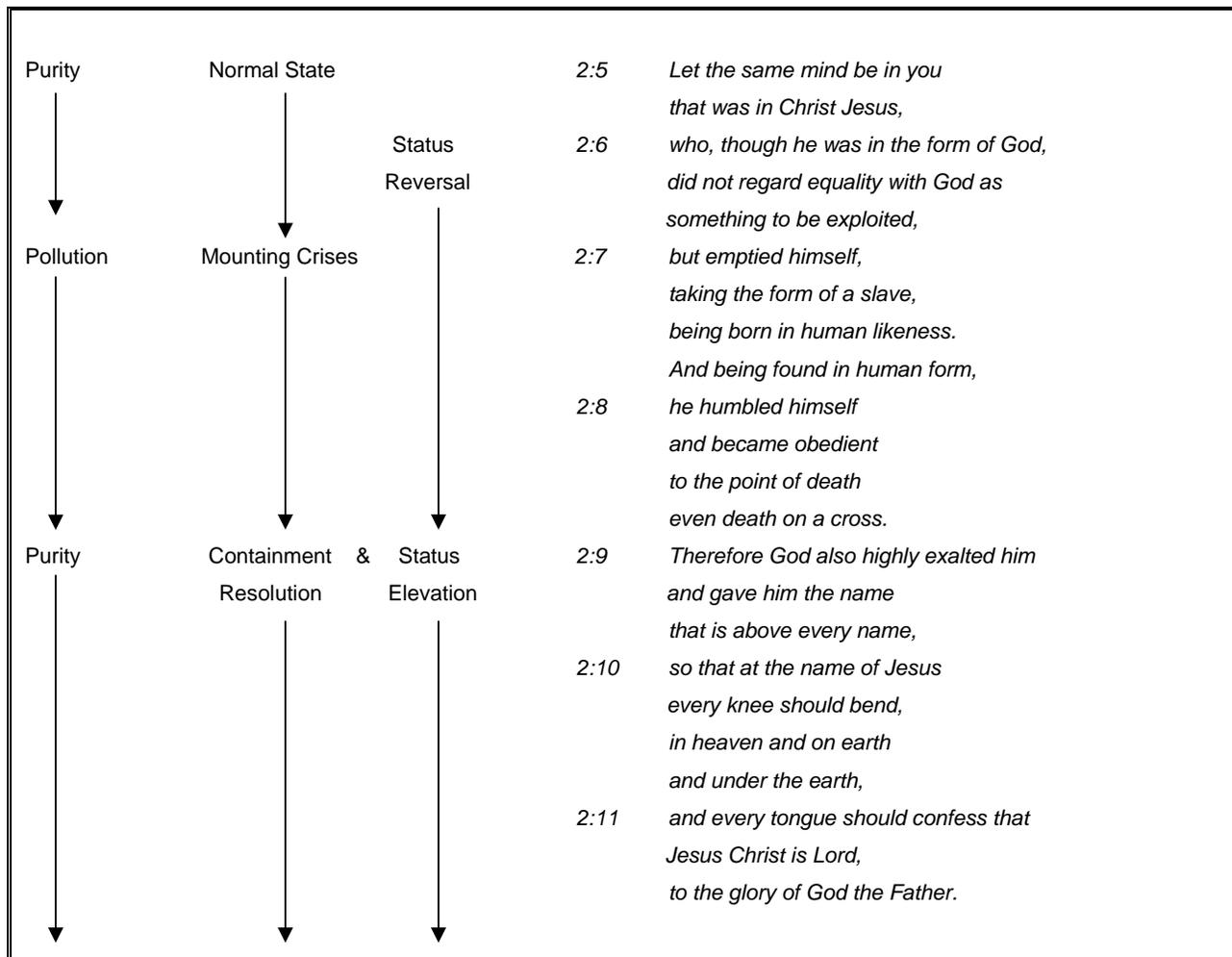[5] 37-100 CE

[6] 155-230 CE

[7] Around 150 BCE to 68 CE

[8] 40-120 CE

prescribed social pilgrimage for those aspiring to public status and acclaim in first-century Roman societies. Building on the anthropological and sociological insights of Victor Turner, Mary Douglas and Gerd Theissen, Wortham (1996, 281-282) suggests that the hymn functions as a kind of social drama that unites and calls for an inversion in the early Christian community in Philippi of the social values that they faced daily in this highly-stratified and socially competitive Roman community:

> *"…the image of Christ preserved in the Philippians Hymn (2:5-11) may function as a symbol of unity, providing social identity and legitimation for members of a new religious movement in much the same manner as the emperor, in the ruler cult, symbolized the unity of Roman Society."*

This social reading of the Philippians hymn in the work of Wortham (1996) and Hellerman (2003) focus on the hymn as social drama that aims to resolve the social and values conflict that this early Christian community experienced through a "*rites de passage*" with contrasting subplots of status reversal and elevation. This social drama can be illustrated as follows in the text of the Philippians Hymn:

Figure 1:   The Philippians Hymn as Social Drama

Purity	Normal State		2:5	*Let the same mind be in you*
				that was in Christ Jesus,
		Status	2:6	*who, though he was in the form of God,*
		Reversal		*did not regard equality with God as*
				something to be exploited,
Pollution	Mounting Crises		2:7	*but emptied himself,*
				taking the form of a slave,
				being born in human likeness.
				And being found in human form,
			2:8	*he humbled himself*
				and became obedient
				to the point of death
				even death on a cross.
Purity	Containment &	Status	2:9	*Therefore God also highly exalted him*
	Resolution	Elevation		*and gave him the name*
				that is above every name,
			2:10	*so that at the name of Jesus*
				every knee should bend,
				in heaven and on earth
				and under the earth,
			2:11	*and every tongue should confess that*
				Jesus Christ is Lord,
				to the glory of God the Father.

The plots of status reversal and elevation so evident in the social drama of the Philippians hymn served to protest the tyrannies of the local timocratic[9] leadership of the Roman emperor daily in song (Heen 2004, 150-153) through a call for radical values reversal and symbolic inversion that provided the impetus for the construction of alternative social classifications and leadership style in the early Christian community of Philippi. Collins (2002, 372) reads the hymn as a call to "*honor Jesus Christ instead of the Emperor"* and in doing so redefined the manner in which honor and power were to be utilized among the Christians at Philippi (Hellerman 2003).

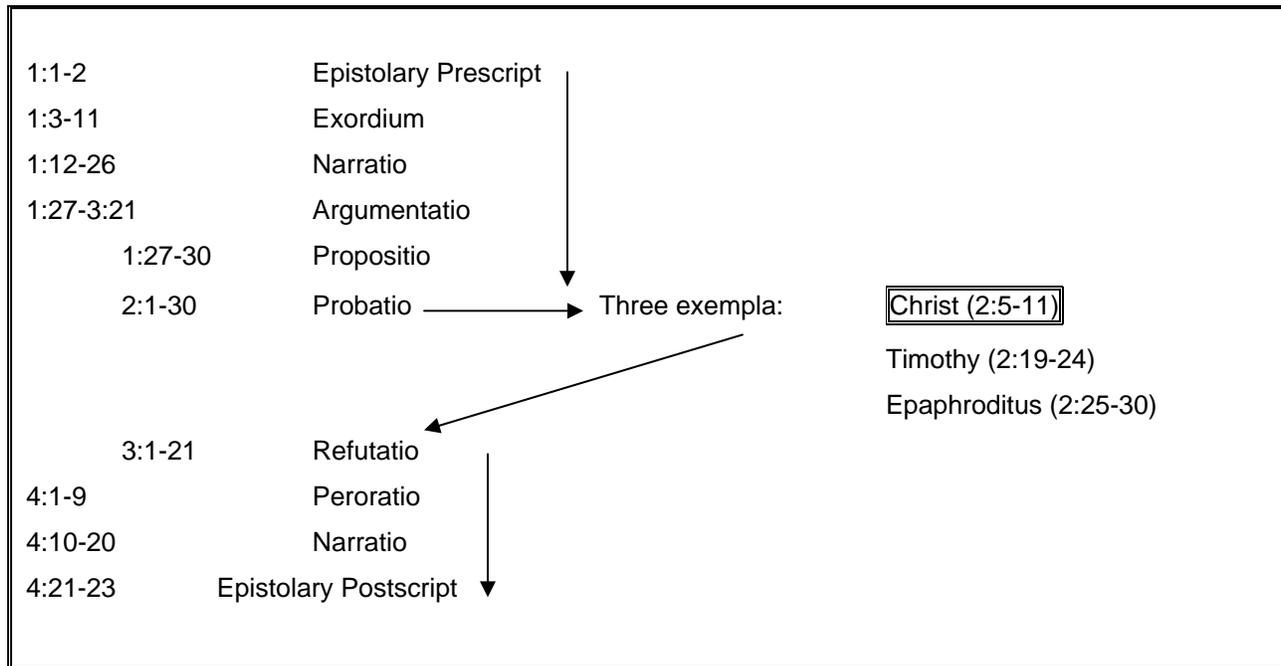**The Rhetorical Structure and Function the Philippians Hymn**

The rhetorical category of the Philippians hymn, that has traditionally been identified as a pure Christological and ethical expression (Wortham 1996, 269), is clearly part of a larger judicial document (Black 1995, 46). Kennedy (1984, 23-24) explains the rhetorical structure and function of a judicial speech as follows:

> "*A **<u>judicial speech</u>** usually begins with a **proem** or **exordium** which seeks to obtain the attention of the audience and goodwill or sympathy toward the speaker. It then proceeds to a **narration** of the facts, or background information, and states the **proposition** which the speaker wishes to prove, often with a **partition** of it into separate headings. The speaker then presents his arguments in the **proof**, followed by a **refutation** of opposing views; here he may incorporate what was called a **digression**, often a relevant examination of motivations or attendant circumstances. Finally comes an **epilogue** or **peroration**, which summarizes the argument and seeks to arouse the emotions of the audience to take action or make judgment."[10]*
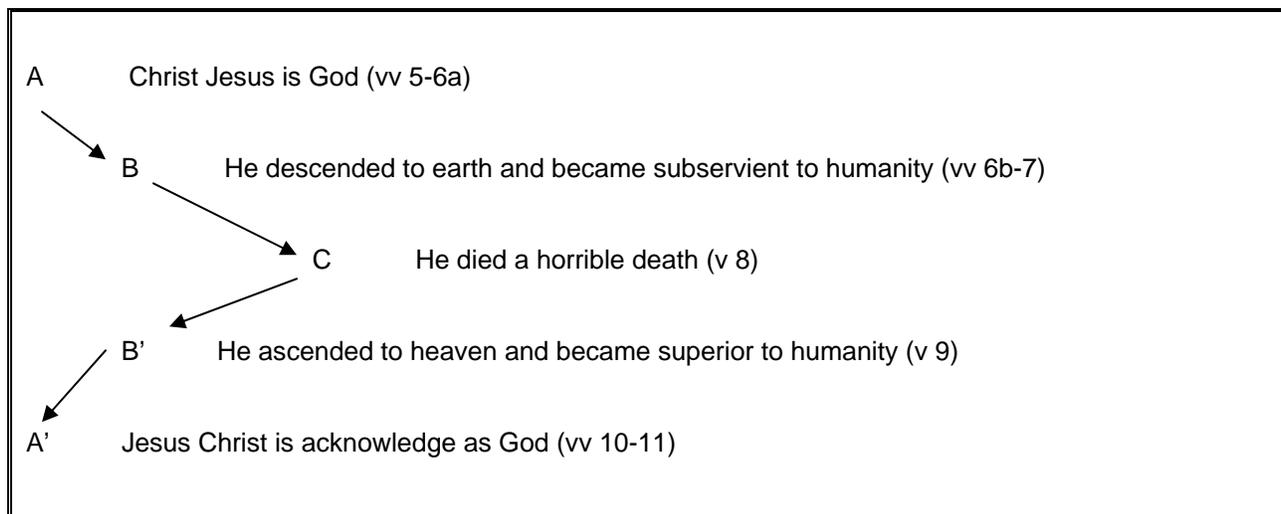
Building on the insights of Black (1995, 48) and Kennedy (1984, 23-24) the rhetorical structure of the letter to the Philippians can be illustrated as follows:

---

[9] As in a timocracy, where a love of honor ostensibly operates as a ruling governmental principle.
[10] Emphasis mine.

Figure 2:   The Rhetorical Structure of Philippians

1:1-2		Epistolary Prescript
1:3-11		Exordium
1:12-26		Narratio
1:27-3:21		Argumentatio
	1:27-30	Propositio
	2:1-30	Probatio → Three exempla: Christ (2:5-11)
		Timothy (2:19-24)
		Epaphroditus (2:25-30)
	3:1-21	Refutatio
4:1-9		Peroratio
4:10-20		Narratio
4:21-23		Epistolary Postscript

The entire hymn may be regarded as a chiasm that further serves to sharper the rhetorical function of the hymn as an exemplum:

Figure 3:   The Chiastic Structure of the Philippians Hymn

A   Christ Jesus is God (vv 5-6a)

      B   He descended to earth and became subservient to humanity (vv 6b-7)

            C   He died a horrible death (v 8)

      B'   He ascended to heaven and became superior to humanity (v 9)

A'   Jesus Christ is acknowledge as God (vv 10-11)

It is clear from the structures above that the Philippians hymn has a larger rhetorical function in the epistle and that the function of the hymn, at least as it has been preserved and used by Paul, is

clearly and deliberately linked to the social situation of Philippi. Black (1995, 46) echoes this sentiment as he attempts to place the letter squarely in the context of communal and leadership conflict in Philippi:

> *"The various parts of the letter are not a random accumulation of general precepts but are relevant to a situation in which differences between key leaders in the Philippian church have provoked animosities and contempt."*

The hymn therefore functions as an exemplum within the epistle, with a strong paradigmatic appeal (Stagg 1980, 340), and thus serves together with the rest of the epistle as an ethical call (Cousar 1998:46) to the community members to emulate the values and leadership behaviors of Christ (Peterlin 1995, 66). Black (1995, 37) echoes this sentiment when he writes that *"the emphasis here is not paranetic[11] but ethical, with the conduct of Christ as the ultimate $\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\delta\epsilon\iota\gamma\mu\alpha$[12] of Christian behavior"* and thus the hymn becomes the paradigm "*for the life and ethics of the believing community*" (Cousar 1998, 46) addressed to *"Christians who were tempted to be unloving, divisive, selfish, arrogant, and overly concerned about their own rights"* (MacLeod 2001, 310).

The Philippians Hymn as Mimetic Christological Model of Christian Leadership in the early Christian Community of Roman Philippi.

The hymn starts with a call to mimetic focus and behavior (Hamm 1997:31) modeled on the values and behavior of Christ. The opening words of the hymn as a call to imitate ($\tau o \hat{v} \tau o$ $\phi \rho o \nu \epsilon \hat{\iota} \tau \epsilon$) should be read as referring to social relations and, therefore, to ethical behavior (Black 1995, 37). We concur with the Moule's rendering of this verse as (1970, 265): *"adopt toward one another in your mutual relations, the same attitude which was found in Christ Jesus."* At it most basic mimesis is the ability to imitate or represent someone or something in our actions, speech and general behavior (Parris 2002, 39). Several thinkers have convincingly argued that the cognitive function of mimesis allows us to recognize the "*reality*" of that which is being mimicked (Parris 2002, 44) and thus gaining further knowledge, knowing "*more than is already familiar*" (Gadamer 1989, 245-246). Gadamer (1986, 64) argues:

> *"All true imitation is a transformation that does not simply present again something that is already there. It is a kind of transformed reality in which the transformation points back to what has been transformed in and through it. It is a transformed reality because it brings before us intensified possibilities never seen before."*

This call to "*imitate*" Jesus, who is then shown as Divine in the hymn (2:6), is thus a call in a sense to "*imitate God*". The idea of the "*mimesis/imitation of God*" is not a concept that is "*uniquely or originally Christian*" (Heintz 2004, 107) and although it is found nowhere in the Septuagint[13] or the Christian

---

[11] Paranetic material is practical teaching that flows from doctrinal material or theology.

[12] Paradigm.

[13] Greek Translation of the Old Testament.

pseudopigrapha[14]; it has been shown to be part of the "*philosophical koine[15]*" (Heintz 2004, 117) of the Hellenistic and Roman world (compare similar language in the Epistle to Diogenetus[16] 10:4, Platonic texts of Phaedrus[17] 176b and Theaetetus[18] 252-253, and Philo of Alexandria's De Migratione Abrahami 127-130) . What is new and surprising is the call to imitate the lowly and humble crucified Savior by using a *cursus pudorum* instead of the usual call to imitate the glories of the Roman Emperor with the use of a *cursus honorum*.

The *cursus pudorum* in the hymn lists five ignominies of Christ that within the contexts of the hymn as a rhetorical exemplum becomes aspired communal values: kenosis[19], servant posturing, embracing humanity, humility and obedience. These values are found as descriptions of deliberate actions of status and role reversal in keep with the social and rhetorical function of the hymn. The following table illustrates:

Table 1:   Deliberate Actions of Status and Role Reversal in the Philippians Hymn

Kenosis	Servant Posturing	Embracing Humanity	Humility	Obedience
"but <u>emptied</u> himself" (2:7)	"<u>taking the form</u> of a slave" (2:7)	"<u>being born</u> in human likeness. And <u>being found</u> in human form" (2:7)	"he <u>humbled</u> himself" (2:8)	"and <u>became</u> <u>obedient</u> to the point of death even death on a cross" (2:8)
"ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν"	"μορφὴν δούλου λαβών"	"ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος"	"ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν"	"γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου"

Since the hymn functions as an exemplar to an alternative vision for ethical leadership in the early Christian community in Philippi (Black 1995, 46) it would be logical to use these steps in ignominies or active values to construct a model of an early mimetic Christological approach of Christian leadership in Philippi. The proposed model can be illustrated as follows:

---

[14] Books that were falsely attributed to a famous character from the Bible.
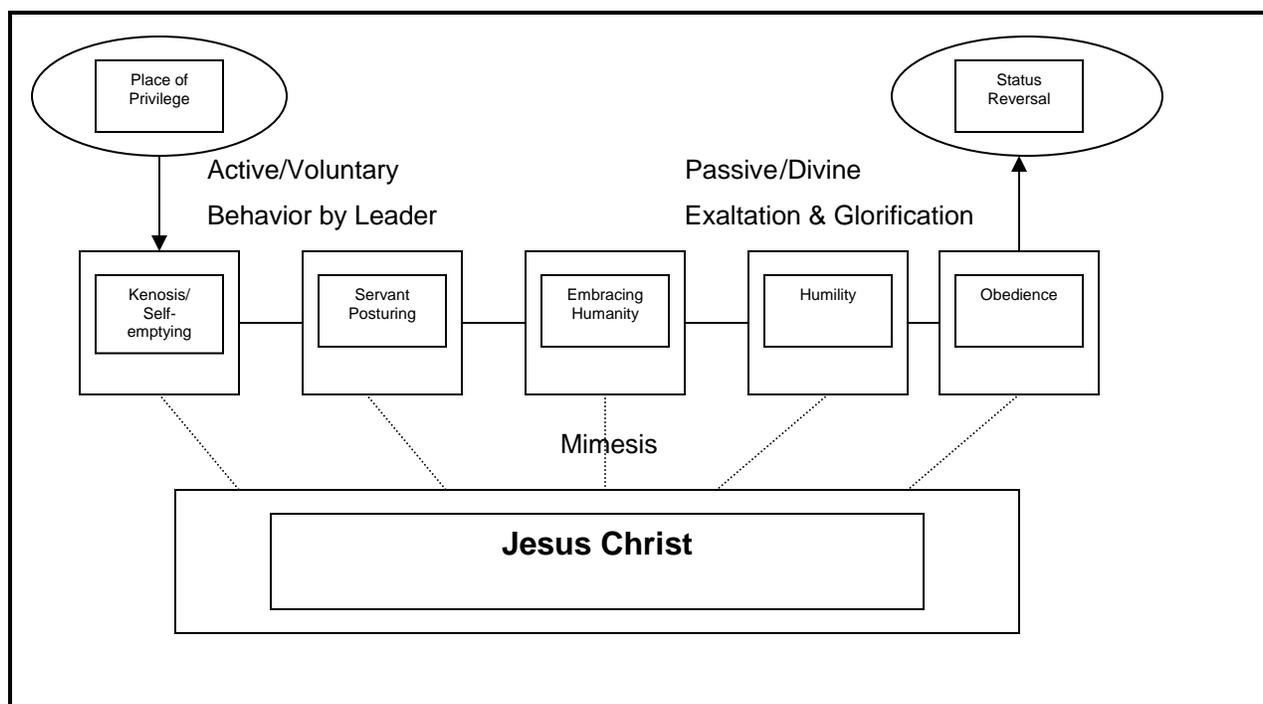
[15] Common language.

[16] Late Second Century Christian Apologetic text.

[17] 15 BCE to 50 CE

[18] 427-347 BCE

[19] From the Greek word "kenao" which means to empty out.

Figure 4: A Mimetic Christological Model of Christian Leadership in the Philippians Hymn

Kenosis *("But emptied Himself")*

Discussions on the nature of the kenotic actions of Christ in the Philippians hymn have been vast and wide (Silva 1992, 125). Martin (1997, 169-194) discusses seven distinctly different interpretations, all which could be "*plausible defended*" (Silva 1992, 125). We are off the opinion that the kenosis that the hymn speaks of refers to the relinquishment of "*privilege not essence*" (Stagg 1980, 344) and it seems that this verb (ἐκένωσεν) is used this way in the Septuagint[20] (compare Genesis 24:20 and 2 Chronicles 24:11). Thus one should not read this phrase as meaning that Christ emptied himself of His deity, but rather of the prerogatives of deity (MacLeod 2001, 318). This is echoed by a saying attributed to Thomas Aquinas[21]: *"He emptied Himself, not by laying down the divine nature, but by taking human nature."* But in order to explore the meaning of this phrase in the proposed mimetic model we will mostly keep to the social and rhetorical function of this statement as part of an exemplum and focus on what this would mean in an alternative vision of Christian leadership.

Linking the "*self-emptying and receptivity*" of Christ in the Philippians hymn and seeing it as the "*point of intersection where divinity and humanity meet*" (Gau 2000, 406) opens the door to explore the values of this radical giving up of status and privilege. The values of kenosis have been described as, voluntary self-limitation (Barbour 1990, 224), vulnerability (Barbour 1990, 224), present to the "*other*"

---

[20] Greek Translation of the Old Testament.
[21] 1225-1274 CE

(Baker 270, 320), voluntary powerlessness (Szabolcs 2003, 10), continual purification from self-centeredness (Szabolcs 2003, 10), humility (Papanikolaou 2003, 1), self-sacrifice (Papanikolaou 2003, 1), and openness to the "*other*" (Szabolcs 2003, 10). In this light, kenosis addresses the true challenge of dialogical leadership behavior (Szabolcs 2003,10) and as appropriated in the Christian past was often rooted in a mimetic re-enactment of the self-emptying/kenotic Christ (Karecki and Wroblewski 2000, 12-13), interpreted mostly through readings of the Philippians hymn (Kourie 1993, 127). Thus kenosis was often seen as a mystical communion with the kenotic Christ (Ledoux 1997, 40) that leads to personal transformation of both the leader and follower and enabled them to practice kenosis/self-emptying as Christ did. This "*resolute divesting*" of the prestige and power inherent in the leadership transaction (Cronin 1992, 1) enables the leader and follower enter into a new union that is marked by equality and service. The missiologist, Yves Raguin (1973, 112) building on these precepts, argues that *"kenosis, then, is the gateway to mutual understanding, and beyond this, to an intimate sharing that is the consummation of a relationship in union….By dispossession of self we are able to absorb the amazing riches of others."*

The values of kenosis allow the leader to transcend narrow selfhood (Kourie 1993, 124), to locate the "*other*" in the mutuality of love (Fiddes 2001, 175) and to truly enter into the world of the follower where the leader becomes the servant of the "*other*" (Szabolcs 2003, 10). This is a state of mutual acceptance (Fiddes 2001, 175), vulnerability (Wisniewski 2003, 11) and receptivity as Raguin (1973, 111) further explains:

> *"…kenosis, then, places us in a state of receptivity. We develop an instinctive attitude of listening, trying to understand, letting ourselves be permeated with the atmosphere of our surroundings, passing beyond what is merely heard and seen to reach the personality of the people with whom we love, or those we may meet."*

This overcoming of the separation between leader and follower finds it deepest dimension in kenotic love and self-sacrifice (Papanikolaou 2003, 12) that negates the *"dream of separateness"* (Merton 1996, 156) as Söring (2003:162) rightly observes that *"the connection between kenosis and service runs far deeper that a mere recognition of the divine spark in our broken, anguished brothers and sisters: taken to its ultimate conclusion, self-emptying must logically lead to self-sacrifice."*

Servant Posturing *("taking the form of a slave")*

In the Philippians hymn, Christ empties Himself by taking the forms of a slave (δούλου). He thus becomes a person without social advantage, with little or no rights or privileges of His own, for the determined purpose of placing Himself completely at the service of others (MacLeod 2001, 321). The

hymn makes use of several strong terms to encourage the Christian community not to succumb to the temptations of aspiring to the social values and stratification so prevalent in Roman Philippi. Most striking is the use of the terms slave (δούλου) and cross (σταυροῦ); which represents respectively, *"the most dishonorable public status and the most dishonorable public humiliation imaginable in the world of Roman antiquity[22]"* (Hellerman 2003, 424).

It is important that the exemplum here does not speak of mere service, but the radical quest to take the form of a slave. Framing Jesus as a slave was *"to assign to Him a position of greatest opprobrium[23] in the social world"* of the Philippians, living the in the *"most status-conscious city in the Roman East"* (Hellerman 2003, 427). These words must have challenged the *"dominant view of reality"* for the citizens of Philippi who *"valued their imperial connections, their privileges, and their advantages as subjects"* (Peterson 2004, 179-180) of the Emperor. In a community so highly socially stratified as Philippi (Wortham 1996, 281) this "*temporary role reversal*" (Wortham 1996, 283) as slave becomes an exemplary symbol of the mutuality and common humanity of all the members of the early Christian community. The incarnational motif of the first value of kenosis finds it social scope and dimension in a resolute identification with the lowest members in the social ladder within the community. The values of servant posturing are communicated in the *"denial of self-interest"*, in the *"divestment of status and privilege"* (Saunders 1998, 18).

A recent development in Pastoral Counseling (see Gau 2000, 403-409), building on the kenotic theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar[24] , aims to make use of this leadership value of servant posturing to effect a therapeutic process where both therapist and client experience healing and enhancement that "*diminishes ego and heightens self-awareness*" (Gau 2000, 408). Gau (2000, 407) describes the process as follows:

> *"The challenge for the pastoral psychotherapist is manifesting the Christ gestalt[25] to the client. The therapist does this by self-emptying and becoming a servant to the client, speaking the client's language, and the focusing on the client's needs. Despite the client's defensiveness, the therapist trusts the client's ability to merge, individuate, and learn emptiness and receptivity. As the client comes to trust and internalize the therapist, the therapist is able to act form within the client. Out of compassion, the therapist becomes poor so that the client might become rich and absorbs the client's sin so that the client might know the goodness of God."*

Despite the rather heavy counseling language used in this section, the multiple applications of this approach in leadership are quite evident. When leaders, having practiced kenosis, are able to enter the

---

[22] Our emphasis.

[23] Disgrace; infamy; reproach mingled with contempt.

[24] 1905-1988 CE

[25] A physical, biological, psychological, or symbolic configuration or pattern of elements so unified as a whole that its properties cannot be derived from a simple summation of its parts.

world of their followers and take the posture of their servants, relationships of mutual trust and healing are formed that in time removes the social and power distance between them in mutual liberation and transformation. This radical approach of mutuality and service in leadership is one of risk-taking as Gregerson (2003) so eloquently demonstrates in his premise of a theology of kenosis and risk taking.

Embracing Humanity ("*being born in human likeness")*

Discussions on the interpretation of Christ "*being found in appearance as a man*" (σχήματι εὑρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος) in the Philippians hymn has been traditionally riddled with controversy and rigorous debate (Howard 1978, 368). Re-reading the hymn as an ethical exemplum has opened a new and promising avenue for a discussion on the social values that the hymn proposes in a society riddled with social inequalities. Albert Nolan (1977, 135), in his response to apartheid in South Africa, used the Philippians hymn to construct a new perspective in ontological Christology that demands a new appreciation of the humanity of Christ and thus of others:

> *"Whatever humanity and divinity may mean in terms of a static philosophy of metaphysical natures, in religious terms for the man who recognizes Jesus as his God, the human and the divine has been brought together in such a way that they now represent one and the same religious value. In this sense Jesus' divinity is not something totally different from His humanity. Jesus' divinity is the transcendent depth of His humanity. Jesus was immeasurably more human than other men…"*

Regardless of some of the obvious theological difficulties of some of Nolan's arguments, his Christology does open exciting possibilities in ethical discussions in leadership and service.

In embracing the His own humanity and thus the humanity of others, Jesus "*redefined neighbor in terms of praxis, not propinquity*[26]" (Sorenson 2004, 461). This "*praxis*" is one of charity, identification with the one being served and of authentic love. Vanstone (1978) has developed a phenomenology of love in which he characterizes three characteristics of authentic love (Gregerson 2003, 371-372). Authentic love is limitless, precarious and vulnerable (Vanstone 1978, 44-51). Authentic love therefore does not impose boundaries on others (limitless) but *"accepts without limit the discipline of the circumstances"* (Vanstone 1978, 44), is precarious in that it avoids the "*the distortion of possessive control*" (Gregerson 2003, 372) and finally true love revels in being vulnerable in that it gives the one loved a "*power that could not otherwise be there*" (Vanstone 1978, 51). Whiteman (2003) in his work using the theology of the incarnation to link the disciplines of Anthropology and Missiology makes the point that the incarnation is *"about God becoming human, but God did not become a generic human being. God became Jesus, the Jew, shaped and molded by first-century, Roman-dominated, Palestinian Jewish culture"* (2003, 407).

---

[26] Propinquity can mean physical proximity, a kinship between people, or a similarity in nature between things.

Whiteman (2003, 409) proposes seven leadership practices and values statements informed by a Missiological and Anthropological reading of the values imbedded in the Christian doctrine of the incarnation of Christ as found in the Philippians hymn (also compare the thoughts of Bjork 1997:279-291 on this):

1. *We start with people where they are, embedded in their culture, and this frequently requires downward mobility on our part.*
2. *We take their culture seriously, for this is the context in which life has meaning for them.*
3. *We approach them as learners, as children, anxious to see the world from their perspective.*
4. *We are forced to be humble, for in their world of culture we have not yet learned the acquired knowledge to interpret experience and to generate social behavior.*
5. *We must lay aside our own cultural ethnocentrism[27], our positions of prestige and power.*
6. *To be incarnational means we will be very vulnerable; our defenses will have to go.*
7. *We make every effort to identify with people where they are, by living among them, loving them, and learning from them.*

The application of these values to values-based approaches to leadership, such as Servant leadership is obvious and should be explored further.

Humility (*"He humbled Himself"*)

Theologians have traditionally linked the birth of Christ with His humility (MacLeod 2001, 319). Humility (ἐταπείνωσεν) as used in the Philippians hymn could be defined as being empty of ego (Sorenson 2004, 458) and as Moore (2002, 13-14) elaborates on in his maxim: "*Jealousy empty of ego is passion. Inferiority empty of ego is humility. Narcissism empty of ego is love of one's soul.*" The humility of Christ is here linked with His appearance as a slave/man and His obedience unto death. When people saw Him, they saw "*ordinariness, nothing to distinguish Him physically, just ordinariness, poverty, frailty, unpopularity and human rejection*" (McLeod 2001, 325). This call to humility is the call to not only identify with humanity and servant posturing but the voluntary rejection of symbols and systems of power, prestige and privilege.

This call to active humility finds its clearest dimension in association and service of others. Billings (2004, 197), building on the incarnational theologies of Carl Barth, Orlando Costas and Jurgen Moltmann, proposes the following ethical and missiological actions rooted in the kind of humility advocated by the Philippians hymn:

> *"In this way, the ethics of lowliness in the New Testament can combine with a theology of the cross, which presents a stark challenge to the comfort ethos and individualism that permeates much of middle-class Western culture. True freedom in Christ means the freedom to enter into relationship with persons who bring one outside of one's socioeconomic or religious comfort zone*

---

[27] Ethnocentricity is the human tendency to see world primarily through the lens of one's own ethnic social history and culture.

– freedom to break bread with the outcasts, the poor, and all of the other 'neighbors' that Christians are commanded to love. Yet this [is][28] Christologically grounded humble courage…".

This Christological "grounded humble courage", to use the words of Billings (2004, 197) is the foundation and ground that roots the alternative vision of humble leadership that the Philippians hymn calls for.

Obedience ("*and became obedient")*

The obedience (ὑπήκοος) of Christ in the Philippians hymn has been interpreted as His voluntary decision not only to be obedient to God, but also "*His choosing to a life of submission (for others) and not one of dominance (over others)"* (Heen 2004:150). Kress (1990, 69) in his quest to formulate an ecumenical, perichoresic[29], kenotic, trinitarian ontology for mission describes the value of commitment or obedience as within the Philippians hymn as "*the willingness and ability not to insist on one's own being (identity, dignity, worth) at the expense of or to the detriment of others*" (Kress 1990, 69).

It is important to note that the obedience of Christ in the hymn is unto death, in particular the death on the cross (σταυροῦ), the "*nadir of rejection, shame and humiliation*" (Peterson 2004, 180). By linking the obedience of Christ to His death on a cross, the Philippians hymn provides an alternative, ethical vision of the apparent shame and dishonor that came with public crucifixion (Hellerman 2003, 427). The connection between public and social shame and crucifixion in the Roman world has been well documented (Hellerman 2003, 427-428). The ethical application is clear; obedience and commitment to this alternative view of social order and reality might bring dishonor in Roman Philippi, but great honor in Christ and therefore in ultimate reality. This call to obedience for the "*sake of others, not insisting on one's own position or promotion*" (Peterson 2004, 180) carries within it an ethical demand to the early Christians in Philippi to abandon the social games of honor and shame and to follow new way of humane mutuality and humility set forth by the example of Christ.

Concluding Statements

Early Christianity established itself in a *"remarkably antagonistic society in which the quest for public honor dominated the behavioral priorities of males of nearly every social rank"* (Hellerman 2003, 432). The Philippians hymn challenged the notions and principles of shame and honor of Roman society by offering an alternative set of behaviors and values that stood on stark contrast with those of the dominant culture. The hymn makes use of a *cursus pudorum* in which the voluntary abasement, humility and obedience of Christ becomes an *exemplum* that offers a critique of the tyrannies of the timocratic leadership style of Roman Philippi and offers an alternative vision of service oriented leadership rooted in

---

[28] My emphasis.

[29] Perichoresic refers to the intensely intimate presence of the Trinity, without their dissolution into a monistic mass.

humility and common mutuality. It is clear that the Philippians hymn had a difficult reception in the power-driven and honor-seeking Christian community of Philippi. Peterson (2004, 180) sees a parallel between the values of our world and the early Christian community in Philippi:

> *"The world in which we live is no more welcoming of this story, no more open to this 'mind', than was Roman Philippi. We are inundated with narratives what promise life found in superior force, in acquiring the best looks, the best bank accounts, the best weapons, the best 'stuff'. We are told that life is secured by our winning – socially, economically, politically, religiously – and everyone else losing. There is little room for the claim that the obedient death and resurrection of Jesus is the story of God's ultimate loving victory, the defining reality for all the world."*

The story of Christ's voluntary humiliation, service and obedience unto death was a dangerous story to tell in Roman Phillip (Peterson 2004, 180) and it comes as little surprise that both Paul and Philippians church suffered persecution there (Philippians 1:30). It remains a difficult and dangerous story to tell, especially within the leadership domain, but one that offers the hope of the returning to a humane, empowering approach to leadership communicated in humility and love.

> *Go to the people,*
> *live among them,*
> *learn from them,*
> *love them.*
> *Start with what they know,*
> *Build on what they have.*
> - Whiteman (2003, 410)

Bibliography

Baker, J. A. 1970. *The Foolishness of God.* London: Darton, Longman and Todd.

Barbour, I. 1990. *Religion in an age of science.* San Francisco: HarperCollins.

Billings, J. T. 2004. Incarnational Ministry and Chriostology: A Re-appropriation of the Way of
Lowliness. *Missiology.* Vol. XXXII, No.2, 187-201.

Black, D. A. 1995. The Discourse Structure of Philippians: A Study in Text-linguistics. *Novum
Testamentum* XXXVII, 1: 16-49.

Bjork, D. 1997. A Model for Analysis of Incarnational Ministry in Post-Christendom Lands.
Missiology 25.3: 279-291.

Briggs, S. 1989. Can an Enslaved God Liberate? Hermeneutical Reflections on Philippians 2:6-   11.
Semeia 47.1: 137-153.

Bruce, F. F. and Simpson, E.K. 1957. *Commentary on Ephesians and Colossians.* Grand Rapids:
W. B. Eerdmans.

Collins, A. Y. 2002. Psalms, Philippians 2:6-11 and the Origins of Christology. *Biblical   Interpretation*
11,3/4: 361-372.

Cousar, C. B. 1998. Paul and the Death of Jesus. *Interpretation* 52.1: 38-52.

Cronin, K M 1992. *Kenosis.* Rockport: Element.

Fiddes, P S 2001. Creation out of Love. In Polkinghorne, J (Ed.), *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*
(pp. 167-191). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Fitzmeyer, J. A. 1988. The Aramaic Background of Philippians 2:6-11. *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
50.3:470-483.

Fowl, S. E. 1990. *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An analysis of the Function of the   Hymnic
Material in the Pauline Corpus.* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Gadamer, H. 1986. *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays.* Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press.

Gadamer, H. 1989. *Truth and Method.* New York: Crossroad.

Gau, J. V. 2000. The Gestalt of Emptiness/Receptivity" Christian Spirituality and Psychotherapy. *Journal
of Pastoral Care* 54.4, 403-409.

Geoffrion, T. C. 1993. *The Rhetorical Purpose and the Political and Military Character of Philippians.*
Lewiston: Mellen Biblical Press.

Gibbs, J. G. 1970. The Relation between Creation and Redemption according to Phil. II 5-11.   *Novum
Testamentum* 12.3: 270-283.

Gloer, W. H. 1984. Homologies and Hymns in the New Testament: Form, Content and Criteria for
Identification. *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 11.2:115-132.

Gregerson, N. H. 2003. Risk and Religion: Toward a Theology of Risk Taking. *Zygon*, vol. 38, no.2: 355-376.

Guthrie, D. 1970. *New Testament Introduction*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press.

Hamm, D. 1997. One Hymn says it all. America, 177(5):31.

Harrington, D. J. 2006. The Dangerous Memory of Jesus. *America* 194(12): 1-2.

Heen, E. M. 2004. Phil 2:6-11 and Resistance to local Timocratic Rule: Isa Theo and the Cult of the Emperor in the East, in Horsely, R. A. *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order*. New York: Trinity Press International.

Heintz, M. Imitating God in the Epistle to Diogenetus. *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12:1, 107-119.

Hellerman, J. H. 2003. The Humiliation of Christ in the Social World of Roman Philippi, Part 1. *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160.639:321-336.

Hellerman, J. H. 2003. The Humiliation of Christ in the Social World of Roman Philippi, Part 1. *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160.640:421-433.

Horsely, R. A. 2004. *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order*. New York: Trinity Press International.

Howard, G. 1978. Phil. 2:6-11 and the Human Christ. *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40(3): 368-387.

Karecki, M and Wroblewski, S 2000. *Franciscan spirituality: Franciscan study guide series: Volume I.* Jeppestown: The Franciscan Institute of Southern Africa.

Karris, R. J. 1996. *A Symphony of New Testament Hymns*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press.

Kennedy, G. A. 1984. *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*. Raleigh: University of North Carolina Press.

Kourie, C 1993. The Kenotic Mysticism of Clare of Assisi in the light of inter-religious dialogue. *S.A. Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 3 (1), pp. 124-140.

Kress, R. 1990. Unity in Diversity and Diversity in Unity: Towards an Ecumenical Perichoresic Kenotic Trinitarian Ontology. *Dialogue and Alliance* 4.3, 66-70)

Ledoux, C M 1997. *Clare of Assisi*. Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press.

Martin, R. P. 1997. *A Hymn of Christ: Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the setting of Early Christian Worship.* Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press.

MacLeod, D. J. 2001. Imitating the Incarnation of Christ: An Exposition of Philippians 2:5-8. *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158: 308-330.

MacLeod, D. J. 2001. The Exaltation of Christ: An exposition of Philippians 2:9-11. *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158: 437-450.

McClendon, J. W. 1991. Philippians 2:5-11. *Review and Expositor* 88.4:439-444.

Merton, T 1966. *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. New York: Doubleday.

Moore, T. 2002. The Soul's Religion. San Francisco: HarperCollins.

Moule, C. F. D. 1970. Further Reflections on Phil. 2:5-11, in Gasque, W. W. and Martin, R. P. *Apostolic History and the Gospels: Biblical and Theological Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Nolan, A. 1977. *Jesus before Christianity*. Cape Town: David Phillips.

Oakes, P. 2001. *Philippians: From People to Letter*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Papanikolaou, A. 2003. Person, Kenosis and Abuse: Hans Urs von Balthasar and Feminist Theologies in Conversation. *Modern Theology* 19 (1), pp. 1-26.

Parris, D. P. 2002. Imitating the Parables: Allegory, Narrative and the Role of Mimesis. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25.1: 33-53.

Peterlin, D. 1995. *Paul's Letter to the Philippians in the Light of Disunity in the Church*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

Raguin, Y. 1973. *I am sending You (John 22:21): Spirituality of the Missioner*. Manila: East Asian Pastoral Institute.

Sanders, J. A. 1969. Dissenting Deities and Philippians 2:1-11. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88.3: 279-290.

Saunders, S. P. 1998. *Philippians and Galatians*. London: Westminster John Knox Press.

Selwyn, E. G. 1969. *The First Epistle of Peter*. New York: St. Martins.

Silva, M. 1992. *Philippians.* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Sorenson, R. L. 2004. Kenosis and Alterity in Christian Spirituality. *Psychoanalytic Psychology.* Vol. 21, No. 3, 458-462.

Söring, J. 2003. The Kenotic Convict: a Divertissement on Contemporary Contemplative Spirituality and its Social Context. *The Merton Annual* 16 (2003), pp.152-171.

Stagg, F. 1980. The Mind of Christ Jesus: Philippians 1:27-2:18. *Review and Expositor* 77.3:337.

Szabolcs, N. 2003. The Ministry of Reconciliation through Kenosis. *Mozaik* 2003 (1), pp. 8-10.

Talbert, C. H. 1967. The Problem of Pre-existence in Philippians 2:6-11. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86.2: 141-153.

Vanstone, W. H. 1978. *The Risk of Love*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Whiteman, D. L. 2003. Anthropology and Mission: The Incarnational Connection. *Missiology* 31.4, 397-415.

Williams, D. K. 2002. *Enemies of the Cross of Christ: The Terminology of the Cross and Conflict in Philippians.* London: Sheffield Academic Press.

Wisniewski, D. 2003. Salesian Images of Love in Creation: Divine Kenosis in the Spirituality of Francis de Sales. *Unpublished paper delivered at Works of Love: Scientific and Religious Perspective on Altruism Conference, May, 2003.*

Wortham, R. A. 1996. *Christology a Community Identity in the Philippians Hymn: The Philippians Hymn as Social Drama (Philippians 2:5-11).* Perspectives in Religious Studies 23:3: 269-287.

Appendix A: The Text of the Philippians Hymn (2:5-11)

I   Novum Testamentum Graece, Nestle-Aland 26th edition:

2:5   τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ,

2:6   ὃς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων οὐχ ἁρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ,

2:7   ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβών, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος: καὶ

σχήματι εὑρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος

2:8   ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου, θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ.

2:9   διὸ καὶ ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν καὶ ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα,

2:10   ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ πᾶν γόνυ κάμψῃ ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ   καταχθονίων,

2:11   καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσηται ὅτι κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρός.

II   New Revised Standard Version of the Philippians Hymn (2:5-11):

2:5   Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

2:6   who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

2:7   but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,

2:8   he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death even death on a cross.

2:9   Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,

2:10   so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

2:11   and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the F