

THE *GENUS MAIESTATICUM*  
 AND PHIL 2:5-11:  
 WHO'S THE "WHO" IN PHILIPPIANS 2?

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<sup>5</sup> In your relationships with one another,  
 have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

<sup>6</sup> **Who** (ὁς), being in very nature God,  
 did not consider equality with God something to be used to his  
 own advantage;

<sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing  
 by taking the very nature of a servant,  
 being made in human likeness.

<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man,  
 he humbled himself  
 by becoming obedient to death—  
 even death on a cross!

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
 and gave him the name that is above every name,

<sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

<sup>11</sup> and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
 to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:5-11 NIV)

The Apostle Paul's words in Phil 2:5-11 present significant interpretive challenges to the serious reader of Scripture. Critical to a proper interpretation of these verses is a correct understanding both of the communication of attributes in Christ and the two states of Christ: his exinanition (or humiliation) and his exaltation. A common exposition of these verses is that the ὁς in Phil 2:6 refers to the preincarnate Christ, who humbled himself by the very assumption of a human nature, thereby making the incarnation the first stage of Christ's exinanition. His incarnation then led inexorably to his death on a cross and ultimately resulted in his exaltation. This standard approach to the section, however, results in part from a faulty presupposition regarding the communication of attributes. Specifically, this interpretation arises from a rejection of what Lutheran dogmaticians refer to as the *genus maiestaticum*, which notes how the Scriptures teach that the divine nature in Christ communicates its attributes to the human nature, so that the human nature in Christ has full possession of the divine attributes. My contention is that those who humbly acknowledge the *genus maiestaticum*, even as it defies

fallen human reason, have a decided advantage in understanding and explaining the Apostle's words in Phil 2. In this essay, I will lay out the case for seeing the  $\delta\varsigma$  in Phil 2 as the incarnate Christ, who enjoyed full possession of the divine attributes in his human nature not only in the state of exaltation, but also during the exinanition.

### Defining the *Genus Maiestaticum*

The Logos, complete in himself as the Son of God and needing nothing, freely assumed a human nature. The One who was begotten of the Father from eternity received a human nature when he was conceived in time in the womb of the Virgin Mary. The Apostle Paul, in speaking about the uniqueness of Christ, in whom the divine nature and the human nature are united in one person, writes, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Col 2:9). The Son of God lived in bodily form, not as a specter or phantom, but as a genuine human being. As a result of the personal union, the divine nature ("the fullness of the Deity") bestowed its attributes on the human nature as a gift, as is demonstrated in those passages of Scripture in which divine characteristics are ascribed to the man Jesus. That is the *genus maiestaticum*. For example, because of the personal union and the communication of attributes, the man Jesus could speak of his being in more than one place, even before his triumphant resurrection and ascension: "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matt 18:20). Jesus didn't limit his presence only to the divine nature, but said, "there am *I* with them," which includes the human nature. The human nature received the divine attribute of omnipresence and was thus enriched and augmented.<sup>1</sup> Martin Chemnitz describes the *majesty* granted to the human nature (the *genus maiestaticum*) in this way: "His human nature has received and possesses innumerable supernatural ( $\delta\pi\epsilon\rho\phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\kappa\acute{\alpha}$ ) gifts and qualities which are contrary to its nature ( $\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\kappa\acute{\alpha}$ ) and which are above every name and also above, beyond, and exceeding its own essential properties, which still, however, remain unimpaired."<sup>2</sup>

In explaining Jesus's startling action of taking on the work of a slave in washing his disciples' feet, the Apostle John wrote, "Jesus knew that the Father *had put all things under his power*" (John 13:3a).<sup>3</sup> St. John was not referring to new power being granted to the divine nature, because the divine nature is complete and cannot be

<sup>1</sup>Leo wrote, "He assumed our nature, not that the divine might be reduced by the human, but that the human might be augmented by the divine," in Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia, 1971), 376.

<sup>2</sup>Chemnitz, 244.

<sup>3</sup>Emphasis added. The NA28 text:  $\epsilon\iota\delta\omega\varsigma\ \delta\tau\iota\ \pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha\ \epsilon\delta\omega\kappa\epsilon\nu\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omega\ \acute{\omicron}\ \pi\alpha\tau\eta\rho\ \epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \tau\acute{\alpha}\varsigma\ \chi\epsilon\iota\rho\alpha\varsigma$ . "Knowing that the Father had given all things to him, into his hands."

increased in any way. The Son of God had always had everything in his hands; this could only be speaking of a gift to the human nature in Christ. Even in the state of exinanition, then, just hours before it would appear to all that he was utterly powerless as he hung dying on a cross, Jesus possessed almighty power as a human being. That such communicated power had not become an essential attribute of the human nature is apparent from the way the apostle describes Jesus in chapter 4 as "tired . . . from the journey" (John 4:6). Had omnipotence become an essential attribute of Christ's human nature, there could have been no tiredness. When the Son of God became flesh, the assuming nature (the divine nature) shared its attributes with the assumed nature (the human nature), so that what is said of the divine nature can be said of the human nature in Christ. The writers of the *Formula of Concord* expressed it this way:

For the ability to give life, to execute all judgment, and to possess all power in heaven and on earth, to have all things in his hand, to have everything subjected to him under his feet, or to cleanse people from their sins, etc., are not created gifts, but divine, infinite characteristics. According to the statements of Scripture these are given to and imparted to the human Christ (FC SD VIII 55).<sup>4</sup>

In communicating these attributes to the human nature, the divine nature was not in any way diminished, as if it had poured itself out completely; nor did this sharing of attributes transform the human nature into a new composite nature, a fusion of elements both human and divine. The human nature remained human, experiencing an increase<sup>5</sup> when it received the divine attributes as a gift from the divine nature, bestowed upon it already at the very moment of conception. In the words of the *Formula*, "Christ did not receive this majesty to which he was exalted according to his humanity only after he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, but he received it already when he was conceived in his mother's womb and became a human being and the divine and human natures were united personally with each other" (FC SD VIII 13). The *Formula* cites Dr. Luther's explanation of Jesus's words, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt 28:18). Luther has Jesus explain what he meant by "me": "To me, Jesus of Nazareth, Mary's incarnate Son. I had this from my Father from eternity, before I became human, but when I

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<sup>4</sup>Quotations from the Lutheran Confessions are from *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000).

<sup>5</sup>The *genus maiestaticum* is sometimes called the *genus auchematicum* because "it speaks of an actual increase of the attributes of Christ's human nature through its endowment with divine perfections." John Schaller, *Biblical Christology* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1981), 70.

became human, it was imparted to me in time according to my human nature, and I kept it concealed until my resurrection and ascent into heaven" (FC SD VIII 85).

Though the term *genus maiestaticum* was first employed in the sixteenth century to describe the communication of attributes in Christ, the concept was present long before that. The "Catalog of Testimonies," appended to *The Book of Concord* by Jakob Andreae and Martin Chemnitz, includes writings of the Fathers confessing that the human nature received the divine attributes from the divine nature in the personal union. Leo, in "Letter 83," wrote, "Whatever Christ has received in time he has *received as a human being*, upon whom are conferred those things which he did not have. For, according to the power of the Word, the Son also has all things that the Father has, without distinction."<sup>6</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, commenting on Jesus's words in John 6 regarding the life-giving nature of his flesh, expressed the truth of the *genus maiestaticum*, without using the term:

You are entirely correct in denying that the flesh is life-giving, for if it is understood by itself, it certainly cannot make anything alive, for it too needs a life-giver. But when you have with laudable care studied the mystery of the incarnation and discovered that life dwells in the flesh even though the flesh by itself could do utterly nothing, yet you may believe that this flesh has been made life-giving. Inasmuch as the flesh has been united with the life-giving Logos, the whole is made totally life-giving. For by the union the flesh did not draw the divine Logos down to its own corruptible nature but rather is itself raised to the power of the better element.<sup>7</sup>

In *The Two Natures in Christ*, Chemnitz explains the apostle's words in Col 2:9, noting that the assuming nature's attributes permeate the assumed nature, so that the majesty of the divine nature shows forth in the human nature: "The whole fullness of the deity of the Logos dwells bodily and personally with all His power, activity, majesty, and glory in the assumed nature and shines forth in, with, and through it, exercising and accomplishing the works of His omnipotence, as a soul in an animate body and as fire in heated iron communicates itself and its properties without any commingling."<sup>8</sup> Throughout *The Two Natures in Christ*, the second Martin repeatedly points to the Fathers' illustrations of the glowing iron and the union

<sup>6</sup>"Catalog of Testimonies," in *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord*, trans. Thomas Manteufel, ed. Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 229, emphasis original.

<sup>7</sup>Cyril of Alexandria, *In Johannem*, in Chemnitz, *Two Natures*, 371.

<sup>8</sup>Chemnitz, 72.

of the soul and body to describe the impact of the personal union,<sup>9</sup> as the divine nature works through the human nature. The *Formula* does the same.<sup>10</sup>

### Denying the *Genus Maiestaticum*

Many within Christendom reject the teaching that the divine attributes were given to the human nature in Christ at the time of conception. One of the charges commonly leveled against the *genus maiestaticum* is that it was an invention of Luther for the sake of defending his teaching of the Real Presence in Holy Communion. Charles Hodge, a nineteenth-century Presbyterian, summarizes his findings regarding the Lutheran teaching of the communication of attributes by saying, "The Lutheran doctrine of the Person of Christ has never been disconnected from the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Both are peculiar to that Church and form no part of Catholic Christianity."<sup>11</sup> In his popular *Systematic Theology*, twenty-first-century theologian Wayne Grudem marginalizes the teaching of the divine nature sharing its attributes with the human nature in Christ by saying that "this position has not been adopted by any other segment of the Christian church, and it seems to have been a position that Luther himself took mainly in an attempt to justify his view that Christ's body was actually present in the Lord's Supper."<sup>12</sup> Louis Berkhof, a Reformed theologian, repudiated the teaching, suggesting that the *genus maiestaticum* "implies a fusion of the divine and human natures in Christ," because "by a communication of divine attributes to the human nature that nature *as such* ceases to exist. Omnipresence and omniscience are not compatible with humanity."<sup>13</sup>

Reformed theologian Michael Horton deals charitably with the *genus maiestaticum* in his systematics text, acknowledging that the teaching does "affirm the closest possible union of God and humanity in Christ."<sup>14</sup> He grants that the Reformed rejection of the omnipresence of Christ according to his humanity would seem Nestorian to Lutheran ears, as if there were two persons rather than two natures in Christ, but then suggests that divine attributes

<sup>9</sup> See Chemnitz, *Two Natures*, 259, 262-263, and especially 289-291.

<sup>10</sup> See FC SD VIII 18, 64, and especially 66.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), 418.

<sup>12</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 558, footnote 38.

<sup>13</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 326.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 478.

being communicated to the human nature strikes Reformed ears as a mixture of natures.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, Horton contends, predicating divine attributes of the human nature in Christ “threatens his genuine humanity.”<sup>16</sup> If the human nature of Christ possesses divine attributes, Hodge argues, “He becomes not God and man, but simply God, and we have lost our Saviour, the Jesus of the Bible, who was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, who was one with us in his humanity, and therefore can sympathize with us and save us.”<sup>17</sup> Methodist theologian John Miley describes the Lutheran teaching of the communication of attributes as “the monophysitic or Eutychian theory,” which had been rejected at Chalcedon in 451, and must also be opposed because “the deification of the human nature of Christ cannot be reconciled with the human facts so thoroughly manifest in his life.”<sup>18</sup>

At the heart of the rejection of the *genus maiestaticum* is the Reformed contention that “the finite is not capable of the infinite (*finitum non capax infiniti*).” Reformed theologian Richard Muller explains the formula this way in its connection to the two natures in Christ: “Christologically, it signifies the finitude of all humanity, including Christ’s, and therefore its incapacity for receiving divine attributes, such as omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience.”<sup>19</sup> Guided by that principle, Horton rejects the teaching that the divine attributes have been communicated to the human nature: “The incarnate God cannot be enclosed, circumscribed, and fully contained by the finite. According to his humanity, Jesus Christ was not omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent, as he was according to his deity.”<sup>20</sup> John Calvin may not have used the expression, but it does accord with his view of the relationship between the divine and the human nature in Christ:

Another absurdity . . . namely, that if the Word of God became incarnate, [he] must have been confined within the narrow prison of an earthly body, is sheer impudence! For even if the Word in his immeasurable essence united with the nature of man into one person, we do not imagine that he was confined therein. Here is something marvelous: the Son of God descended miraculously from heaven in such a way that, without leaving heaven, he willed to be born in the virgin’s womb, to go about the earth, to hang upon

<sup>15</sup> Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 476-477.

<sup>16</sup> Horton, 478.

<sup>17</sup> Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 417.

<sup>18</sup> John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, Volume II (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 24.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 119.

<sup>20</sup> Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 478-479.

the cross, yet he continuously filled the earth even as he had done from the beginning!<sup>21</sup>

Lutherans labeled this the *extra calvinisticum*, the idea that the Logos exists apart from the human nature even as he assumed flesh. Muller is comfortable with the term, believing that it reflects the Reformed teaching that "the Word is fully united to but never totally contained within the human nature and, therefore, even in incarnation is to be conceived of as beyond or outside of (*extra*) the human nature."<sup>22</sup> Muller maintains that this is not a Calvinistic innovation, but rather a teaching aimed at "safeguarding both the transcendence of Christ's divinity and the integrity of Christ's humanity."<sup>23</sup>

### **Denials of the *Genus Maiestaticum* and the Conventional Approach to Philippians 2**

The commonly-held presupposition that the divine nature cannot bestow its attributes on the human nature, because such communication would destroy the finite human nature, leads to what might be termed "the conventional approach" to Phil 2:5-11. In this approach, the  $\delta\varsigma$  in verse 6 must be the pre-incarnate Christ, with verses 6-8 describing "the downward spiral of the preexistent Christ"<sup>24</sup>: *the pre-incarnate Christ*, "being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (Phil 2:6-7). Gerald Hawthorne suggests that "the burden of the remainder of v 6 describes Christ's preexistence and tells what took place in that earlier period."<sup>25</sup> Gordon Fee points to the words  $\delta\varsigma \ \acute{\epsilon}\nu \ \mu\omicron\rho\rho\eta \ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon \ \acute{\upsilon}\pi\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\omega\nu$  and contends that "this language expresses *as presupposition* what the rest of the sentence assumes, namely that it was the Pre-existent One who 'emptied himself' at one point in our human history 'by taking the "form" of a slave, being made in the likeness of human beings.'<sup>26</sup> G. Walter Hansen concurs, arguing for the "who" of verse 6 as a reference to the preincarnate Christ, not based on the meaning of the participle  $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\omega\nu$ , which he doesn't believe points to preexistence by

<sup>21</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.xiii.4, quoted in Robert Raymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 171.

<sup>22</sup> Muller, *Dictionary*, 111.

<sup>23</sup> Muller, 111.

<sup>24</sup> James W. Thompson and Bruce W. Longenecker, *Philippians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 71.

<sup>25</sup> Gerald Hawthorne, *Philippians*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 81.

<sup>26</sup> Gordon Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 203, emphasis original.

itself, but rather on the basis of the temporal relationship between the present tense of the participle in relation to the aorist finite verb (ἐκένωσεν, *he emptied himself*) and the aorist participles (λαβών, *taking the form of a slave*, and γενόμενος, *becoming in the likeness of human beings*) which follow.<sup>27</sup> William Hendriksen, as he considers the question regarding the ὅς in verse 6, notes that the preincarnate Christ must not be separated from the incarnate Christ, because “the One who in his pre-incarnate state exists in a manner equal to God is the same divine Person who in his incarnate state becomes obedient even to the extent of death, yes, death by a cross.”<sup>28</sup> In the end, however, even after suggesting that no separation ought to be made, he concludes, “Naturally, in order to show the greatness of our Lord’s sacrifice, the apostle’s *starting-point* is the Christ in his pre-incarnate state.”<sup>29</sup> Many commentators make the case for the preincarnate Christ as the ὅς of verse 6 so as to preserve the humanity of Christ from the deification or destruction they believe necessarily results from the *genus maiestaticum*.

Commentators who have decided to view the ὅς of verse 6 as the *logos asarkos* then typically view the self-emptying of verse 7 (ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν) and the humiliation of verse 8 (ἐταπείνωσεν ἐαυτὸν) as references to the incarnation. Fred Craddock speaks quite matter-of-factly about it: “The humiliation here spoken of was the entrance into existence and submission to the conditions of existence by the pre-existent Christ.”<sup>30</sup> The preincarnate Christ humbled himself by the very act of taking on flesh to live in this world. Hawthorne, too, identifies humiliation with incarnation: “In the *self-humbling act of the incarnation* God became man and thus set himself wholly to seek the advantage and promote the welfare of his fellows.”<sup>31</sup> Moises Silva translates ἀλλ’ ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφήν δούλου λαβὼν ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος in verse 7 this way: “Instead, he made himself nothing by assuming the form of a servant, that is, by becoming incarnate.”<sup>32</sup> While he equates incarnation with exinanition, Silva argues for degrees of exinanition, considering the incarnation to be the initial humiliation which will inevitably lead to further humiliation: “the divine and pre-existent Christ . . . was willing to regard himself as nothing by taking

<sup>27</sup> G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 134.

<sup>28</sup> William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962), 105.

<sup>29</sup> Hendriksen, 105, emphasis original.

<sup>30</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *The Pre-existence of Christ in the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 109.

<sup>31</sup> Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 95, emphasis added.

<sup>32</sup> Moises Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd ed., BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 94.



on human form. Then he further lowered himself in servanthood by obeying God to the point of ignominious death."<sup>33</sup> Though expressing their thoughts in slightly different ways, they finally arrive at the same conclusion: the  $\delta\varsigma$  in verse 6 is the preincarnate Christ, whose incarnation is equated with humiliation.

The conventional approach to Phil 2:5-11 sees the preincarnate Christ as the subject of verses 6 and 7, who decides, in what some call his "preexistence," to take on flesh and become a human being/slave. In verse 8, the subject then changes to the incarnate Christ, who deals with the consequences of that decision, experiencing even greater humiliation as he becomes obedient to death. Verses 9-11 then deal with a third stage of Christ's existence: his existence in exaltation.

### The Context and Setting of Phil 2:5-11

Joseph Hellerman provides some helpful background to the letter to the Philippians in general, and these verses particularly, as he highlights the status-consciousness of the people living in Philippi. He quotes from an essay by Meyer Reinhold addressing the history of purple as a status symbol in which the author "categorically identified Roman society as 'the most status-symbol-conscious culture of the ancient world.'"<sup>34</sup> What was true of Rome, Hellerman says, held true in the Roman colony of Philippi, too, because "no region east of Rome was more quintessentially Roman in this regard than the colony of Philippi."<sup>35</sup> While the population of Philippi was primarily Greek, there were also a significant number of Roman colonists, about 25% of the population by one estimate.<sup>36</sup> Roman military commanders had rewarded some of their soldiers for their successful service by providing land allotments in Philippi. Because these retired soldiers owned land, they held the political power and enjoyed "disproportionate social influence in the colony."<sup>37</sup> The Roman colonists who owned land were part of the elite class and had a defined *cursus honorum*. The elite would work their way up in the honors race and their status would be visible to others by the clothes they wore, the seats they were assigned at banquets and social events, and the legal rights they were granted.<sup>38</sup> In fact, the elite class focused more on acquiring greater honor than amassing increased wealth.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Silva, 99.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor in Roman Philippi: Carmen Christi as Cursus Pudorum* (Cambridge: University Press, 2005), 63.

<sup>35</sup> Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor*, 63.

<sup>36</sup> Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor*, 70.

<sup>37</sup> Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor*, 72.

<sup>38</sup> Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor*, 24, 32.

<sup>39</sup> Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor*, 35.

Those who were in the non-elite class couldn't cross over into the elite class; advancement didn't occur across social strata, but only vertically within each stratum. While only the elite class had a specified honors course to follow, there is evidence to suggest that the non-elite class copied the concept in Philippi,<sup>40</sup> as they "mimicked their social betters by adopting a race of honors in their various trade associations and religious groups."<sup>41</sup> Hellerman concludes, "What is indisputable is that persons in first-century Philippi felt strongly compelled to proclaim publicly the honors they had received and their social location in the pecking order of this highly stratified Roman colony."<sup>42</sup> One could reasonably assume that the "Christians in the community at Philippi would have been under great pressure to conform, in their own social relations, to the marked verticality of the surrounding environment."<sup>43</sup>

In his letter to the Philippians, the apostle addresses the temptations facing Christians living in social-status-conscious Philippi. Accommodating themselves to the prevailing view would not only have been more socially expected and accepted, it also would have been more agreeable to the inveterately proud and self-seeking sinful nature. For that reason, Paul exhorted the Christians in Philippi to think differently than those around them, and he does so by pointing them to Christ, primarily, but also to himself and his example as the one who brought them the gospel. Of the four so-called "captivity letters," only in this one does the apostle refer to himself as a δοῦλος in the opening verses. Rather than emphasizing his authority and office as the Lord's apostle, as he does in other letters, he speaks of himself holding a position that would have given him no status whatsoever in Philippi. Hellerman explains that, "The Roman elite . . . generally relegated all slaves—rich or poor, powerful or powerless—to a single class which they situated decidedly below free persons of any stripe on the social pyramid."<sup>44</sup> By calling himself a δοῦλος, Paul showed himself unconcerned about rising through the ranks and receiving honor from others; he focused rather on his status in Christ and his responsibility to serve the Lord by serving others. More powerfully, in chapter 3 of the letter, the apostle recites the items that most would have thought made him worthy of being served ("a Hebrew of Hebrews," etc.) and then dismisses it all as excrement (σκύβαλα, in 3:8), that he might find his life in Christ and not in his personal accomplishments.

<sup>40</sup>Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor*, 100.

<sup>41</sup>Joseph Hellerman, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Philippians* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2015), 106.

<sup>42</sup>Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor*, 109.

<sup>43</sup>Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor*, 127.

<sup>44</sup>Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor*, 138.

### A Closer Look at Phil 2:5-8 in Connection with the *Genus Maiestaticum*

In Phil 2:5-11, Paul points to the attitude Christ demonstrated toward social status in his actions and encourages the Christians to Philippi to adopt the same kind of thinking. In verse 5 he writes, Τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “keep thinking this among you what was also in Christ Jesus.” Typically, Paul uses τοῦτο to point back to what he has just written. In this instance, it would be his urging them to “do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather in humility value others above yourselves” (Phil 2:3). Whether τοῦτο points back to verses 1-4 or points ahead to the recitation of Christ’s acts in verses 6-11 makes little difference, because the thought remains the same in either case: “Think the way Jesus thought, considering others better than himself and freely serving them.” In its entry on φρονέω, BDAG suggests translating this way: “Let the same kind of thinking dominate you as dominated Christ Jesus.”<sup>45</sup> Among the many items sparking debate in this section of Philippians 2 is whether verses 6-11 are to be considered an ethical exhortation in which Christ is held out as an example to be imitated in thought and action. Craddock argues against seeing it as directly ethical, positing that “the life and ministry of the historical Jesus are not an ethical example in Paul.”<sup>46</sup> One of his driving concerns is that people who view these verses as an ethical exhortation end up with “a highly questionable ethic” in that they are encouraging humility as the way to attain exaltation.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, because Craddock sees the ὄς in verse 6 as the preincarnate Christ, he believes that Paul would be speaking about an action that human beings cannot imitate. Francis Beare acknowledges that Paul is making an ethical appeal in Philippians 2, yet submits that he’s doing so not by pointing to Jesus as example, but by reminding Christians of the salvation Christ has won. “It is manifestly wrong,” he writes, “to think of it in terms of the presentation of Christ as the ethical ideal for our imitation. The hymn belongs in the realm of soteriology, not of Christology or ethics.”<sup>48</sup> Given the tendency of liberal theology to focus on Christ as example to the near-exclusion of Christ as Savior, one can understand and appreciate the concern.

While sensitive to that concern, Larry Hurtado doesn’t believe that Philippians 2 presents an either-or proposition: “To suggest that

<sup>45</sup>Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1066.

<sup>46</sup>Craddock, *Pre-Existence*, 109.

<sup>47</sup>Craddock, 109.

<sup>48</sup>Francis Beare, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1973), 75.

the description of Jesus in Phil 2:5-11 includes a description of him as an example for Christian response does not mean that Jesus's actions of self-humbling and obedience are seen as nothing but illustrations or examples of Christian ethical ideals.<sup>49</sup> The apostle clearly calls for the imitation of the attitude of Christ in verse 5 and points to what Christ did in humble service as a pattern for their thinking and acting. As the apostle recites Christ's saving acts, reminding the Christians in Philippi of the Savior's ministry to them, he builds the foundation for their life of service to the glory of God and the benefit of others. That's the approach Hansen advocates: "By placing the proclamation of Christ in the hymn after his moral exhortation, Paul is pointing to the power for moral transformation. Christian behavior is motivated and empowered by salvation in Christ, not by the example of Christ."<sup>50</sup>

Those who view the  $\delta\varsigma$  in verse 6 as the preincarnate Christ, because they believe the divine attributes cannot be communicated to the human nature, face some difficulties in interpreting the ethical exhortation in this section. How can a Christian follow the example set by Jesus of being God and taking on human flesh? How can a Christian imitate the miracle of the divine becoming human? Though it's true that the apostle specifically calls for an imitation of the *attitude* of Christ, the expectation is that imitating the attitude will show itself in actions that reflect the way Jesus humbly served others. When the Scriptures call for following Christ's example, they normally do so with his attitudes and actions as the incarnate Christ. In 1 Pet 2, for example, the apostle exhorts Christians to "follow in his [*Christ's*] steps" (1 Pet 2:21) in the way he dealt with unjust suffering as the innocent Lamb of God, as he "entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Pet 2:23). On the night he was betrayed, after washing his disciples' feet, Jesus said, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13:15). Again, the example commended for imitation is an action performed by the incarnate Logos. By taking on the task of the lowliest servant, Jesus revealed the attitude of his heart. He encouraged his disciples to follow that example, to give up any claim on service from others because of their "prestigious positions" and choose instead to serve.

The Apostle Paul, in Eph 5, presents Christ as an example for Christian husbands, who are to love their wives "just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy" (Eph

<sup>49</sup>Larry Hurtado, "Jesus as Lordly Example in Philippians 2:5-11," in *From Jesus to Paul: Studies in Honor of Francis Wright Beare*, ed. Peter Richardson and John C. Hurd (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1984), 118.

<sup>50</sup>Hansen, *Letter to the Philippians*, 120.

5:25-26a). A Christian husband is to imitate the incarnate Christ by putting the needs of his wife before his own and seeking the wife's good, regardless of the cost to self. One might see Paul's exhortation to "Follow God's example" in Eph 5:1 as directing Christians to follow an example of the divine, but even in that instance Paul points to the life of God in the flesh: "Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph 5:1-2). Seeing the ὁς in verse 6 as the incarnate Christ serves to strengthen the exhortation being offered, in that it directs Christians' attention to an example set by their brother in flesh, an example they can imitate as human beings, though only imperfectly because of the sinful nature clinging to them.

The present-tense imperative φρονεῖτε encourages an ongoing pattern of thinking. The apostle sees the temptation facing the Christians living in Philippi to think consistently of themselves and their *cursus honorum* rather than focusing on serving others. For that reason, he holds before their eyes the selfless Son of Man, who thought continually of others as he discharged the duties assigned to him. If the incarnation is equated with humiliation, then the model being held up for emulation would appeal to a one-time decision. To be sure, that momentous choice to take on flesh had serious ramifications, leading to death on a cross, but it was a decision that was made once, couldn't be repealed, and didn't need to be repeated. Additionally, according to Charles Talbert, "only here in early Christianity would there be a reference to a pre-existent reflection and decision of Christ."<sup>51</sup> However, if the ὁς in Phil 2 is instead the incarnate Christ, then the decision to think of the needs of others rather than the glory of self clearly becomes one that is repeated. Day after day, as Jesus carried out the mission entrusted to him, he repeatedly decided to think about the glory of God and the rescue of sinners rather than his rights or his honor. That kind of day-to-day, moment-to-moment decision to think selflessly is what the apostle is encouraging in this section. To be fair, those who view the incarnation as humiliation may still see Paul exhorting the Philippians to imitate Christ's decision to humble himself day after day, since the aorist ἐταπείνωσεν need not indicate a humbling that took place only once.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Charles H. Talbert, "The Problem of Pre-Existence in Philippians 2:6-11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86.2 (June 1967): 141, footnote 2.

<sup>52</sup> In John 4:20, when the woman at the well told Jesus, "Our fathers worshiped (προσεκύνησαν, an aorist) at this mountain," she was not indicating a one-time activity, but many acts of worship over many years viewed together as a whole. In a similar way, the aorist ἐταπείνωσεν encompasses Christ's practice day after day as he carried out his redeeming work.

There has been significant debate about both the form and the source of verses 6-11. Many view the  $\delta\varsigma$  in verse 6 as the indicator of a hymn (like 1 Tim 3:16) and refer to this section as the *carmen Christi* (the Christ-hymn).<sup>53</sup> Others think that it doesn't fit the classic definition of a hymn, even as they grant that it has some poetic qualities to it.<sup>54</sup> Hellerman wonders if it might be viewed along the lines of a "Greco-Roman encomium, or 'speech of praise.'"<sup>55</sup> Commentators are divided on the source of these verses, with some pointing to the unique vocabulary and style and contending that these verses do not reflect Pauline writing,<sup>56</sup> while others offer compelling arguments that the precision in the terminology employed is eminently Pauline and should be considered "exalted prose."<sup>57</sup> In the end, it doesn't matter whether Paul was quoting an existing "hymn" or penned the words himself. As Silva notes, "Whether or not Paul composed these words originally, he certainly used them to support the argument of verses 1-4, and it is primarily in that light that the words must be exegeted."<sup>58</sup>

Everyone agrees that the  $\delta\varsigma$  in verse 6 has  $\text{Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ}$  in verse 5 as its antecedent. Lutheran commentator Frederick Wenzel considers that fact helpful in answering the question of whether the  $\delta\varsigma$  refers to the *logos asarkos* or the *logos ensarkos*, since Christ Jesus is "the regular name for the *incarnate* Son of God."<sup>59</sup> The Philippians, he contends, upon hearing the name Christ Jesus, would have thought first of the God-Man, who had lived, suffered, died, rose, and ascended—all in human flesh. Wenzel argues that, since the passage makes no explicit reference to the incarnation, but rather speaks of the selfless attitude of Christ, which is held up as an example for the saints at Philippi, and since humility is not an attribute of the divine nature, the  $\delta\varsigma$  in Phil 2 can only be the incarnate Christ.<sup>60</sup> George Stoeckhardt, in his lectures on Philippians, expressed support for Friedrich Philippi's argument that the "who" of Phil 2 is the incarnate Christ: "When the historical Christ has just been referred to as He lived and

<sup>53</sup>See R. P. Martin's *Carmen Christi: Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

<sup>54</sup>See Stephen E. Fowl, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 108-110.

<sup>55</sup>Hellerman, *Exegetical Guide*, 106.

<sup>56</sup>"It is scarcely possible that Paul himself composed the hymn." Beare, *Commentary*, 77.

<sup>57</sup>See Gordon Fee, "Philippians 2:5-11: Hymn or Exalted Pauline Prose?", *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 2 (1992): 39-43, for a clear and compelling argument for Pauline authorship.

<sup>58</sup>Silva, *Philippians*, 93.

<sup>59</sup>Frederick Wenzel, *The Wenzel Commentary, Book II: An Exegetical Study, Based on Galatians (part), Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* (Bemidji, MN: Arrow Printing, 1988), 64, emphasis added.

<sup>60</sup>Wenzel, 64-65.

died on earth, every sense of exegetical propriety would be offended, if one then all of a sudden would want to make of this person the preexistent Christ."<sup>61</sup> We cannot put too sharp a point on this, however, insisting that the name Christ Jesus always refers exclusively to the *logos ensarkos*, or that the Philippian Christians would almost certainly have thought of the incarnate Christ at the mention of the name Christ Jesus.

Verses 6-8 present interpretive challenges for every reader of Scripture. Those who reject the *genus maiestaticum* have difficulty seeing how verse 6, with its reference to Christ as ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων, could apply to the incarnate Christ. How could it be said of the incarnate Christ that he was "existing in the form of God"? Some want to read too much into the present participle ὑπάρχων, suggesting that it speaks of the Second Person of the Trinity's existence before he became a man. While the Son was indeed eternally begotten of the Father, that is not what the apostle is addressing here. In Hellenistic Greek, according to BDAG, ὑπάρχω serves as a substitute for εἶναι, having in this verse the idea of "being really so."<sup>62</sup> Even as he was a genuine human being, which Paul emphasizes with "being made in human likeness" and "being found in appearance as a man" in verses 7 and 8, Jesus was "really in the form of God." The present participle, in connection with the aorist verbs that follow, indicates that he remains in the form of God throughout, offering another reason to see the ὅς in verse 6 as the incarnate Christ. A similar construction in Luke 7:25 (with both ὑπάρχω and ἐν) may provide some added insight. Jesus says, οἱ ἐν ἱματισμῷ ἐν δόξῳ καὶ τρυφῇ ὑπάρχοντες ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις εἰσὶν ("Those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces"). Hansen observes, "In the terms of this idiomatic expression, the first stanza of the hymn asserts that Christ was clothed *in the form of God*."<sup>63</sup> Hellerman employs the picture of clothing, too, saying that Christ was "publicly marked out by clothing appropriate to his divine rank."<sup>64</sup> As the Christians in Philippi could identify the social status/power of the people around them by what they saw those people wearing and doing, so Christ could be identified as "in the form of God" by what people saw.

The NIV translates ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ as "being in very nature God," a translation that is neither accurate nor helpful.<sup>65</sup> Neither BDAG nor

<sup>61</sup> George Stoeckhardt, *Lectures on the Epistle to the Philippians*, trans. H. W. Deger (Lake Mills, IA: Graphic Publishing, 1967), 31.

<sup>62</sup> Danker, 1029.

<sup>63</sup> Hansen, *Letter to the Philippians*, 135, emphasis original.

<sup>64</sup> Hellerman, *Philippians*, 110.

<sup>65</sup> Translating with "nature" is problematic, because the exaltation consists in part of the setting aside of the "nature" of the servant (v 7), but Christ has not set aside the human nature.

TDNT, for instance, suggest “nature” as a meaning for μορφή. The word is used in the New Testament only here in Phil 2 (twice) and in Mark 16:12, where we hear that the Lord appeared to the disciples on the way to Emmaus ἐν ἑτέρῃ μορφῇ, in another form. Jesus had taken on a different outward appearance (not a different nature) so that the disciples were kept from recognizing him until after he had opened the Word to them. Μορφή refers to “form, outward appearance, shape,”<sup>66</sup> representing “that which may be perceived by the senses.”<sup>67</sup> The Apostle Paul says that Jesus was ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ, in a form that could be perceived by the senses, the outward manifestation of an inner reality. But how could that be true of the incarnate Christ? In the time from his birth to his burial, with the significant exception of the Transfiguration, Jesus’s physical appearance was like that of an ordinary man. In his state of exinanition, in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy regarding the Suffering Servant, Jesus “had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him” (Isa 53:2). The leaders of the Jews didn’t recognize him as the Lord’s Anointed, the very Son of God, from his outward appearance: “if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor 2:8).

At the same time, people could see Jesus clothed “in the form of God” by what he occasionally did. When he spoke to a dead man, raising the widow’s son in Nain, the people of the place were “all filled with awe and praised God. ‘A great prophet has appeared among us,’ they said. ‘God has come to help his people’” (Luke 7:16). The people concluded that Jesus was, at a bare minimum, a great prophet to whom they ought to listen, and maybe even the Prophet promised through Moses (Deut 18:18). Some may have seen even more in Jesus, because no mere man could give life to a dead man by his own authority. The miracles Jesus regularly performed by his own power demonstrated that in him all the fullness of the deity lived in bodily form—that the divine attributes, like omnipotence, had been bestowed on the human nature by the divine nature. When Nicodemus visited Jesus, he indicated that he and other members of the Sanhedrin had reflected on Jesus’s miracles and had arrived at the inescapable conclusion that he had come from God, “For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him” (John 3:2).

Jesus experienced great popularity early in his ministry, with crowds following him wherever he went. That the crowds may not have been able to give as clear and complete a confession as Peter

<sup>66</sup> Danker, 659.

<sup>67</sup> Gerhard Kittel, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume IV (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 745.



did—"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:16)—doesn't change the fact that people could, and did, see him clothed in the form of God. In that sense, he had the outward appearance of God even as he looked like only a man. In fact, Jesus wanted people to recognize, from the miracles he performed, that he was clothed in the form of God. He rebuked the Jews for their unbelief, for not drawing the obvious conclusion from his miraculous works, saying, "Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (John 10:37-38). Jesus also revealed himself as God in the flesh by his teaching. He did so not only when he claimed to be God, but especially by the authority with which he spoke (Matt 7:28-29).

Johann Gerhard contends that the apostle is speaking about the incarnate Christ with the phrase ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ, because "to be *in* the form of God absolutely and simply is not to be God by nature but to behave as God, to declare himself as God, to exercise His divine majesty by doing divine works."<sup>68</sup> By the actions he performed, he showed himself clothed in the form of God. Gerhard finds support for his position in words he attributes to Ambrose, but which were likely written in a commentary on Paul's epistles by another, a man to whom has been given the name Ambrosiaster, to distinguish him from Ambrose, the bishop of Milan: "He was in the form of God because, though he appeared to be a man, He was doing the works of God so that, in the things He accomplished, it would be apparent that He is God, who was only being considered as a man. . . . After all, what is 'the form of God' except the example by which God appears: when he raises the dead, makes the deaf hear, and cleanses the lepers?"<sup>69</sup> Every miracle that Jesus performed, with his human voice and human hands, demonstrated that the human nature had been increased with gifts from the divine nature, even though those divine attributes never became part of the essence of his human nature. Gerhard points specifically to the preposition ἐν as proof that Paul is speaking about the incarnate Christ, because "the non-incarnate Word was not so much *in* the form of God as He was that very form of God (Heb 1:3)."<sup>70</sup>

The words τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ are synonymous with "being in the form of God." It's part of a double accusative construction, with "his

<sup>68</sup> Johann Gerhard, *On the Person and Office of Christ*, trans. Richard J. Dinda, *Theological Commonplaces: Exegesis IV* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009), 300, emphasis added.

<sup>69</sup> Gerhard, 301.

<sup>70</sup> Gerhard, 299, emphasis added. Schaller concurs: "Jesus Christ as man was in the form of God (as Logos, he did not exist in the form of God, but was God by nature." Schaller, *Biblical Christology*, 86, emphasis original.

being equal with God” the object of the verb ἰγήσατο and the *hapax* ἀρπαγμὸν serving as the complement. Jesus demonstrated that he was equal with God, possessing the same attributes as God, in the miracles he performed and in the authority with which he taught. Though many refused to draw the reasonable inference from his frequent miracles, some nevertheless recognized that he was God because of what they saw and heard. Yet the incarnate Christ decided not to consider his being equal with God a ἀρπαγμὸν. Scholarly debate on that word has been extensive, with no clear consensus. Some look at ἀρπαγμὸν in an active way, others passive. C. F. D. Moule, for example, sees it in an active way (the act of snatching), maintaining that the point of the passage is that “instead of imagining that equality with God meant getting, Jesus, on the contrary, gave—gave until he was ‘empty.’ . . . He thought of equality with God . . . as open-handed spending—even to death.”<sup>71</sup> He concludes that the most probable meaning is that “the self-emptying was evidence of how Christ understood that equality with God which he possessed inalienably—indeed, that the self-emptying was an exhibition of that equality.”<sup>72</sup> Hawthorne, who supports Moule’s understanding, suggests that rather than translating ὑπάρχων concessively, as many English versions do, it would be better to render it causally.<sup>73</sup> Understood that way, Paul is saying, “Because Jesus was in the form of God, he didn’t consider his equality with God to mean that he should get, but rather that he could give, because that’s the way God operates—he gives.” There is much to commend that view, particularly the emphasis on God’s “giving-ness” as opposed to sinful man’s “getting-ness.” However, it seems a bit of a stretch to say that Jesus’s existing on an equal plane with God is an act of snatching, since he is the Son of God. One also wonders if it fits the context of exhortation as well as it might. Jesus’s example of “acting like God because he is God and thus giving” doesn’t have an exact parallel in the lives of Christians, who have two natures at war within them, both seeking to assert their authority. Sinner-saints acting like sinner-saints won’t yield the same consistent results as God acting like God. Paul’s point seems rather to be, “Even though you may be in a position to be served, and your old self is insisting on being served, say ‘no’ to the flesh, give up what might rightly be yours, and seek only to benefit others, just as Christ did.” Another issue with that approach is that it makes Christ’s humiliation a demonstration that he is God. Fee, for example, writes, “Christ’s self-emptying and death

<sup>71</sup> C. F. D. Moule, “Further Reflexions on Philippians 2:5-11” in *Apostolic History and the Gospel: Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F. F. Bruce on his 60th Birthday*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 272.

<sup>72</sup> Moule, 275.

<sup>73</sup> Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 85.

by crucifixion revealed true equality with God."<sup>74</sup> It's rather the use of his divine attributes, whether in the state of exinanition or exaltation, that demonstrates his equality with God.

Taken passively, ἀρπαγμὸν refers to something to be grasped (or exploited). Hellerman suggests that more scholars today think that ἀρπαγμὸν "is something positive that Christ possessed and chose not to exploit (unlike Roman aristocrats and emperors)."<sup>75</sup> Many English translations render ἀρπαγμὸν in this passive sense: "something to be exploited" (CSB), "a thing to be grasped" (ESV/NASB), "something to be used to his own advantage" (NIV). Living in a status-conscious society in which the rule of the day was to use position for personal benefit, the Christians in Philippi needed to have their Savior's selfless service held before their eyes, both as encouragement and example. The incarnate Christ could have used his power to provide an easy existence for himself, turning stones into bread to satisfy his hunger or taking a short-cut to glory without the cross. Instead, because he was not thinking about himself, but the salvation of sinners, including those living in Philippi, he refused to exploit the power he had as a man by virtue of the personal union. In effect, Paul is saying, "Do as your brother in the flesh did. Don't use your power for your own advantage, so that you might be served, but place yourself in service to others," just as he had encouraged them in verse 3: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves."

In verses 6 and 7, with the words οὐχ and ἀλλ', the apostle uses a strong contrast to make his point. Jesus didn't consider his equality with God something to be exploited for his own advantage, but rather ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφῆν δούλου λαβὼν (he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant). BDAG suggests that in this verse ἐκένωσεν means "he emptied himself, divested himself of his prestige or privileges."<sup>76</sup> In other passages<sup>77</sup> Paul uses the same verb with the meaning of "to render void or of no effect."<sup>78</sup> Following that approach leads to a translation like that of the KJV, "he made himself of no reputation" or the NIV, "he made himself nothing," by taking the form of a servant. ἐαυτὸν, the object of the verb, has been pulled forward for emphasis, to note that this emptying (and the humbling mentioned in verse 8) did not happen to him as an unsuspecting victim, but as the result of his choice. Those who were concerned about status feared the possibility that they might lose the position of honor they had achieved; they

<sup>74</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 219.

<sup>75</sup> Hellerman, *Exegetical Guide*, 112.

<sup>76</sup> Danker, 539.

<sup>77</sup> See 1 Cor 1:17, Rom 4:14, and 2 Cor 9:3.

<sup>78</sup> Danker, 539.

would never have put aside that position by their own free choice. But the incarnate Christ, who had received, in his human nature, the attributes of the divine nature and always possessed them, freely decided never to use those attributes for his own benefit. Rather than using the communicated omnipotence to secure an easier life or avoid the cross, he used the power he had received only for the benefit of others.

Jesus made himself nothing and took on the form of a servant (μορφὴν δούλου λαβών). He took the outward appearance of a servant; that is, he could be seen as a servant in the way he lived. Though he had the right to command, he chose to be one who served and obeyed, repeatedly testifying that he had come to do the will of his Father.<sup>79</sup> As the omnipotent God-Man, Jesus had the power to provide for himself the very best accommodations, but instead he could honestly say, and people could see, that “the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (Matt 8:20). On Holy Thursday evening, as Jesus took off his outer garment (which slaves would not have worn) and washed his disciples’ feet, he was taking on the duty of the lowest slave, in full view of his disciples. Later that very evening, as the disciples began to engage in a dispute about which of them was the greatest, he explained what they should have observed, that he had chosen not to lord his power over others or demand to be served, but to be a servant: “I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27). As he suffered and died on the cross, experiencing a form of execution that would never have been employed on a Roman citizen, he endured what the Romans referred to as “a slave’s punishment (*servile supplicium*).”<sup>80</sup> Those who witnessed him hanging on a tree, deemed worthy of such an ignominious death, saw him in the form of a δούλος.

The apostle then describes the one who emptied himself by taking the form of a servant with the words ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος. Those who believe the ὅς in verse 6 has to be the preincarnate Christ view this phrase as describing the manner in which he took on the form of a servant, “by becoming in the likeness of human beings,” and therefore consider it a reference to the incarnation. The circumstantial participle may rather be revealing the attendant circumstances, that the incarnate Christ took the form of a servant and became like any other human being. Martin Luther’s translation, *ward gleich wie ein anderer Mensch*, captures that thought, emphasizing that Jesus experienced the normal infirmities and weaknesses common to human beings. John Schaller notes that Jesus became man “not in the magnificent manhood of Adam when newly created, but in the ‘fashion’

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, John 4:34, John 6:38, and Heb 10:5-10.

<sup>80</sup> Joseph Hellerman, “μορφὴ θεοῦ as a Signifier of Social Status in Philippians 2:6,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52.4 (December 2009): 784.

of the human nature as weakened and made infirm through the fall. Hence his κένωσις did not consist in the incarnation itself, but in the fact that his human nature came into existence and developed in precisely the same fashion as that of sinful men."<sup>81</sup> In the state of humiliation, Christ "hid himself, as it were, under a covering of infirmities," Chemnitz writes, so that "only the natural qualities and infirmities seemed to be present and to predominate in His assumed nature."<sup>82</sup>

Verses 7 and 8 can be considered parallel, both in form and meaning.<sup>83</sup> In verse 7, Christ "emptied himself" or "made himself nothing," existing in the likeness of human beings. In verse 8, Christ "humbled himself," having been found in appearance as a human being (καὶ σχήματι εὑρεθείς ὡς ἄνθρωπος). He emptied himself in verse 7 and took the form of a servant/slave, while in verse 8 he humbled himself and became obedient to death on a cross—the slave's punishment. Silva argues for viewing these verses in parallel, with ἐκένωσεν and ἐταπείνωσεν illuminating each other, contending that it is "specious to drive a sharp wedge between these verbs; only a wooden approach to this poetic passage would insist that the verbs refer to two different and separate stages."<sup>84</sup> Those who argue for the preincarnate Christ as the subject of verses 6 and 7 see ἐκένωσεν as a reference to the incarnation and typically contend that the incarnate Christ is the subject of ἐταπείνωσεν in verse 8. The simpler approach is to see the incarnate Christ as the subject of both verbs, with the verses in parallel construction.

The incarnation and the humiliation are not one and the same, though they begin at the same time. Schaller argues that the incarnation hardly fits any standard definition of humiliation in that it was eminently "a demonstration of divine power,"<sup>85</sup> as the Son of God interrupted the natural order of things by taking on flesh through the Virgin Mary. At the moment of conception, the divine nature endowed the human nature with its attributes, and at that very same time, Christ chose to set aside the full use of those attributes even as he retained possession of them, also in his human nature. David Scaer acknowledges that "this distinction between Christ's humiliation and His conception is difficult to make because it is one of logic, cause, and effect, and does not involve a time sequence."<sup>86</sup> Those who reject the *genus maiestaticum* end up with a definition of humiliation that

<sup>81</sup> John Schaller, *Biblical Christology, Two Natures*, 86-87.

<sup>82</sup> Chemnitz, *Two Natures*, 490.

<sup>83</sup> Talbert, "Problem of Pre-Existence," 149.

<sup>84</sup> Silva, *Philippians*, 104.

<sup>85</sup> Schaller, *Biblical Christology*, 84.

<sup>86</sup> David Scaer, *Christology, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics* (Lake Mills, IA: Graphic Publishing, 1989), 40.

focuses almost exclusively on the inglorious manner in which Christ lived or the suffering he endured, rather than seeing it primarily as a decision Christ made, moment after moment, not to make full use of the majesty he possessed even as a man, for the glory of God the Father and the benefit of sinners. For example, in the state of exinanition Christ chose to endure, according to Chemnitz, “these infirmities with which our nature is burdened because of sin, to be like the rest of men, even though His flesh, since it was without sin, could have been free from and immune to these things.”<sup>87</sup> Johannes Quenstedt described the humiliation of Christ negatively and positively, depicting it as consisting of “two acts, viz., the abdication of the full and universal use of imparted majesty, and the assumption of the form of a servant.”<sup>88</sup> It was “in the interest of His office” as Savior, Francis Pieper says, that Christ “limited the use of his divine majesty,”<sup>89</sup> that he, on behalf of sinners, might be punished for sins he had not committed and experience the wrath he did not deserve.

Recognizing that the Fathers sometimes spoke of incarnation as if it were synonymous with exinanition, equating “taking the form of a servant” with becoming human, while at other times differentiating between the two, Gerhard distinguishes between humiliation in a broad sense and in a narrow sense. What he terms the “ecclesiastical” or “broad” sense of humiliation is “the merciful inclining by which the Word bent down to have mercy on us and to help us and that he deigned to come down from heaven and assume the human nature.”<sup>90</sup> In that sense, the Fathers could refer to incarnation as humiliation. Narrowly or properly, however, Gerhard says, “‘emptying’ is taken for the actual *κένωσις* of Jesus Christ or the Word Incarnate.”<sup>91</sup> If incarnation were indeed humiliation, then Christ, in the exaltation, would have to set aside the human nature he assumed. But Christ remains in the flesh, demonstrated in the resurrection appearances, in which many witnesses could see that he still had flesh and blood. Even now, seated at the Father’s right hand, where he intercedes for his church as the High Priest with a permanent priesthood, he remains incarnate. With that in mind, Heinrich Schmid emphasizes that the act of taking on flesh is not to be equated with the humiliation because “the condition of self-renunciation is designated as temporary, while the incarnation is permanent.”<sup>92</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Chemnitz, *Two Natures*, 54.

<sup>88</sup> Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Verified from the Original Sources*, 3rd ed. trans. Charles Hay and Henry Jacobs (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1899), 393.

<sup>89</sup> Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951), 286.

<sup>90</sup> Gerhard, *Person and Office*, 298.

<sup>91</sup> Gerhard, 298-299.

<sup>92</sup> Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology*, 376.

The one who humbled himself became ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου, θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ. Even those who reject the *genus maiestaticum* believe this to be a reference to the incarnate Christ. Though he was in a position to command, he chose the obedience of a slave, opting for what Hellerman refers to as “the course of shame”: Christ willingly descended from enjoying the benefits of being equal with God, to the status of slave, who owes obedience to another, and ultimately to the slave’s punishment, the shameful death of crucifixion.<sup>93</sup> Paul is not saying, with the expression ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου, that Jesus was “subservient to death. Death was never His master. On the contrary, He was always the master of death. When he died, he did so of his own volition.”<sup>94</sup> The point rather is, as Fee notes, that “Jesus’s obedience took him to the *n*th degree.”<sup>95</sup> “Obedience” is, both here and in Rom 5:19,<sup>96</sup> a comprehensive term meant to summarize all of Christ’s work as the great High Priest in freely choosing to live perfectly under the law of God and to be cursed in place of sinners as he hung on a tree. According to Hansen, “This hymn celebrates the death of a *slave* on a *cross* because, although he is forever the one existing in the form of God, he is on that cross by his own deliberate choice to *empty himself* and *humble himself*.”<sup>97</sup> That willing obedience is critical, not just as an example for Christians to follow, but particularly because it was the price required to redeem sinners, as Adolf Hoenecke says: “And just for that reason—because Christ was not subjected to death, because he did not have absolutely to demand death from Christ, but Christ voluntarily suffered the death due the sinner—his suffering is vicarious.”<sup>98</sup>

### A High-Level Look at Phil 2:9-11 and the *Genus Maiestaticum*

While there is debate about certain details of verses 9-11, there is far more consensus on these verses than on verses 6-8. With διὸ καὶ the Apostle speaks of the natural result or logical conclusion to Christ’s willing obedience and his service as a δοῦλος. Jesus experienced the fulfillment of the principle he had outlined for his

<sup>93</sup> Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor*, 129-130. Hellerman speaks of Jesus’s “course of shame” beginning with the preincarnate Christ deciding to take on humanity, thus equating the incarnation with humiliation. His explanation of the “course of shame” works as well, however, if not better, when one views the incarnate Christ as the subject of verse 6.

<sup>94</sup> George Reule, “The Christology of Philippians 2:5-11,” *The Springfielder* 35.2 (1971): 84.

<sup>95</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 216, footnote 9.

<sup>96</sup> “For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”

<sup>97</sup> Hansen, *Letter to the Philippians*, 159, emphasis original.

<sup>98</sup> Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, vol. 3, trans. James Langebartels (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2003), 184.

disciples—"those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Luke 14:11). Just as Isaiah had prophesied about the Suffering Servant, that he would be "raised and lifted up and highly exalted" (Isa 52:13) after being "despised and rejected by mankind" (Isa 53:3) and after the Lord had "laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa 53:6), God highly exalted (ὑπερύψωσεν) Jesus after his humiliation. Those who consider the ὄς in verse 6 the preincarnate Christ believe that ὑπερύψωσεν ought not be considered a comparative term, as if the Father had granted Christ a higher authority than he had previously enjoyed, but rather as superlative<sup>99</sup> or relative.<sup>100</sup> Those who regard the ὄς in verse 6 as the incarnate Christ concur with that judgment. The one who was obedient "to the *n*th degree"<sup>101</sup> has been exalted "to the highest possible degree."<sup>102</sup> According to Quenstedt, "in the exaltation Christ was not given new power, excellence, and majesty, which he did not formerly have, but the full ability to administer his rule was attributed to him which he received through the union itself."<sup>103</sup>

The exaltation consists in first, setting aside the form of the servant, not the human nature itself and the infirmities common to human beings, and second, taking up the "*unrestricted, continuous, and perpetual use* of the μορφή θεοῦ communicated to the human nature on the incarnation of the Logos."<sup>104</sup> The divine majesty the incarnate Christ always possessed in his exinanition he now always and fully employs. Gerhard describes Christ's being highly exalted as "the solemn enthronement of Christ to the full and perfect use of the lordship given Him according to the human nature."<sup>105</sup> The same incarnate Christ who humbled himself is the very one who is exalted above all. The exaltation, like the humiliation, applies to the person of Christ in general, since Paul speaks of Christ Jesus as the one who humbled himself and was also highly exalted. However, properly speaking, it would be better to say, "According to the human nature, Christ humbled himself and was later exalted," because humiliation and exaltation can only apply to the human nature, since the divine nature is immutable, incapable of experiencing either decrease<sup>106</sup> or increase.

<sup>99</sup>Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 91: "Christ, who made himself so very lowly, was made by God very high, so high in fact, that he is placed over (ὑπέρ) all things."

<sup>100</sup>Moule, "Further Reflexions," 269: "indicating not an additional exaltation to a status higher than before, but simply the highest possible exaltation."

<sup>101</sup>Fee, *Philippians*, 216, footnote 9.

<sup>102</sup>Hellerman, *Exegetical Guide*, 119.

<sup>103</sup>Quoted in Hoenecke, *Dogmatics*, 109.

<sup>104</sup>Schaller, *Biblical Christology*, 97, emphasis original.

<sup>105</sup>Gerhard, *Person and Office*, 314.

<sup>106</sup>The Lutheran dogmaticians stress that there is no *genus tapeinotikon*, because the deity is not lowered in the communication of attributes. Reformed dogmaticians consider it an inconsistency in the Lutheran position.



With an exegetical *καὶ* the apostle then explains what it means that God had highly exalted Christ according to his human nature: *καὶ ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντων ὀνομάτων*. The verb *χαρίζομαι*, meaning "to give freely as a favor, give graciously,"<sup>107</sup> argues also for seeing the exaltation as referring only to the human nature. There would be no need for *gracious* giving if it were the divine nature of Christ under consideration. A gracious gift to the human nature fits, because "whatever gift is bestowed by God on man is always a gift of grace."<sup>108</sup> God graciously gave the incarnate Christ the name above all names, the greatest reputation and the highest honor as the world's Redeemer. He is *κύριος*, the only true God. By the time Paul wrote this letter to the saints in Philippi, the title *κύριος* was being used to refer to the Roman emperor. "In a Roman colony," Hansen suggests, "Philippians would hear the acclamation that Jesus is Lord as a shocking allusion to the declaration of the Roman imperial cult that Caesar is Lord."<sup>109</sup> The Roman emperor, who exploited his position for personal advantage, was not Lord; that name belonged rather to the one who freely surrendered his position for the sake of serving, even to experiencing the shame of dying on a cross. Hellerman emphasizes the significance of *θεὸς* exalting Christ and giving him the name above all names: "God has assigned to Jesus the highest in honors specifically because of the manner in which Jesus chose to use the power at his disposal. And God's unique position at the apex of the social pyramid guarantees both the efficacy of his grant of honor and the public acknowledgement of Jesus's exalted status on the part of all created beings."<sup>110</sup> In status-conscious Philippi, what mattered was being praised by a praised man. In his exaltation, encompassing his descent, resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand, the incarnate Christ received praise from *θεὸς*, the one most highly praised.

The ethical exhortation of Phil 2:5-11 is strengthened by understanding the exaltation of verse 9 as applying to the incarnate Christ according to his human nature. The apostle, in encouraging the Christians in Philippi not to adopt the attitude of those engaged in the *cursus honorum* but rather to serve others with everything they have, points them to what God always does for his people. He exalted their brother in the flesh, the one who was despised and rejected by mankind. Christ is the paradigm for their lives, as they serve under the cross for the time God has decided and then receive, by his grace, the crown he has prepared. He exalts those who humbly serve. Faith in that promise enables and powers the service the Lord desires.

<sup>107</sup>Danker, 1078.

<sup>108</sup>Wenzel, *Commentary*, 70.

<sup>109</sup>Hansen, *Letter*, 163.

<sup>110</sup>Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor*, 148.

God's purpose in exalting Christ according to his human nature and giving him the name "Lord" was "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10-11). Everything has been made subject to Jesus, under whose feet God has placed all things "and appointed him to be head over everything for the church" (Eph 1:22). All will ultimately acknowledge him as the Savior of the world and the ruler over all, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isa 45: "Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, 'In the LORD alone are deliverance and strength.'" All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame" (Isa 45:23b-24). Some will bow before him joyfully and willingly, others unwillingly and to their everlasting shame. One way or another, all will do so, as Paul emphasizes by the words, "in heaven and on earth and under the earth," which may be a reference to the ancient view of a three-storied world, meant to express universality.<sup>111</sup> Fowl thinks it best not to pinpoint exactly who might be meant by each term, but to see all rational beings included and to view the verse asserting "the universal scope of the homage paid to Jesus."<sup>112</sup> The homage paid to Jesus will not set him up as a rival to God the Father, as one who might take the glory belonging only to him. Instead, through the exaltation of the incarnate Christ, "God finally receives the public recognition that is his due,"<sup>113</sup> as the one who loves undeserving sinners and rescues them in the life and death of his Son.

### Concluding Thoughts

"In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Col 2:9). At the moment the Logos assumed a human nature, the assumed nature received the fullness of the Deity, the attributes of God. Those attributes belong only to the divine nature essentially and never become the essential attributes of the human nature, yet the human nature nevertheless possesses the divine majesty as a gift. This scriptural teaching, known by the ecclesiastical term *genus maiestaticum*, does not result in a confusion of the two natures in Christ or in any way destroy Christ's genuine humanity. Rejecting the *genus maiestaticum* because of the principle that the finite is not capable of the infinite leads people to approach Phil 2:5-11 with a bias against the simplest reading of the text.

The simplest way to read this section is to consider the  $\delta\varsigma$  in verse 6 as the incarnate Christ. The incarnate Christ, from conception and

<sup>111</sup> Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 93.

<sup>112</sup> Fowl, *Philippians*, 103.

<sup>113</sup> Hellerman, *Exegetical Guide*, 125.

throughout his earthly life, was, by virtue of the personal union, ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ. People could see the form of God by the miracles he performed and the authority with which he spoke. Yet rather than exploit the divine majesty for his own benefit, the incarnate Christ decided to humble himself and take the form of a servant. "Taking the form of a servant" cannot be a reference to the incarnation, because there is no humiliation in having human flesh. In the state of exaltation, for example, as Christ sets aside the form of a servant and makes full use of the divine majesty, he remains in the flesh. When the Lord exalts all who trust in Christ on the Last Day, they will be in the flesh. Properly speaking, the humiliation is not incarnation, but rather Christ's deciding, day after day, not to utilize fully the power he possessed in his human nature, so that he might carry out the saving mission for which he had been anointed: to live and die on behalf of sinners. As a result, he was exalted. The ethical exhortation at the heart of this section of Phil 2 fits better with the ὁς as the incarnate Christ, as the apostle points Christians to the example of their brother in the flesh and encourages them to serve with his attitude. Christians are not to be obsessed with the "course of honors," of moving up in status so that they might be served, but are instead to follow the one who opted for the "course of shame" and served for the benefit of others, without regard to the cost to self. What God did for their brother in the flesh, he will do for them, too—he will exalt them by his word of commendation on the Last Day and by the glorification of their bodies in the new heavens and the new earth.

One hesitates to make this a litmus test for orthodox Christology, insisting that only those who teach that the ὁς in verse 6 is the incarnate Christ are orthodox. However, the Lord's Word in Col 2:9 and the clear teaching of the communication of attributes from the divine to the human nature in Christ simply must impact a person's teaching of Phil 2:5-11. When so many within Christendom reject the communication of attributes because of a rationalistic principle, and have allowed reason to dictate their understanding of Phil 2, it is incumbent upon those who know the truth of the *genus maiestaticum* to confess it carefully and accurately. The ὁς in Phil 2:6 is the incarnate Christ, our brother, in whom all the fullness of the Deity lived and lives in bodily form.