

## *Paul and the Cruciform Way of God in Christ*

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“I resolved to know and make known among you nothing other than Jesus the Messiah—meaning Jesus the *crucified* Messiah.”<sup>1</sup>

THESE REMARKABLE WORDS summarize Paul’s bold claims about the interrelated identities of Jesus, himself as an apostle, and, at least implicitly, all Christian communities and individuals. In their immediate context (1 Cor 1:18–2:5), moreover, they also imply something profound about the nature of God and of divine activity, and about how we know what we know about God.<sup>2</sup> In other words, in this one sentence from 1 Corinthians we have an indication not only of Pauline Christology, but also of Pauline theology proper (i.e., the doctrine of God), pneumatology, ministry, ecclesiology, spirituality, epistemology, and morality—at least. In effect, Paul could not, and we cannot, speak about Christ without also speaking about a wide range of related topics, not least of which is what we today call “theological ethics” or “moral theology.”

This is the case, in large measure, for two reasons. First, Paul is a *mystical* theologian whose fundamental conviction about individuals and communities being “in Christ” means that Christology inherently has spiritual and ethical consequences (both personal and corporate), as well as theological consequences with respect to our overall understanding of the God encountered in Christ. Second, Paul is a *narrative* theologian whose Christological narrative carries within it a

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor 2:2 (author’s translation). Additional biblical texts will be cited in the NRSV translation unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> We should not follow the suggestion of some older interpreters that these words of Paul addressed to the Corinthians represent a change in his theological course prompted by a generally unsuccessful evangelistic effort in Athens that was allegedly built on an inadequate theology of resurrection (Acts 17:16-34). Nor should we think that Paul’s perspective in 1 Corinthians is uniquely formulated for the Corinthians and that he spoke in a different theological idiom elsewhere.

corresponding narrative spirituality, that is, an account of how participants in the reality of Christ crucified and resurrected (the paschal mystery, to put it in contemporary Roman Catholic terms) ought to live, including concrete practices that derive from the narrative itself.<sup>3</sup> (As we will see, the narrative character of Paul's Christology will also have something to say about theology proper).

Certain earlier accounts of Paul's "in-Christ mysticism" fell short of a full account of their subject, describing an individualistic communion with Christ that failed to recognize either the corporate or the narrative—and thus the inherently moral—dimensions of Paul's participationist language.<sup>4</sup> We might, therefore, call Paul a mystical-narrative, or a spiritual-narrative, theologian. "Christ crucified" always and everywhere implies "cruciformity," because those who confess Jesus as the crucified Messiah are now, through faith and baptism, "in" him, and he, by the Spirit (received through faith and baptism), is in them.

In this essay, we will explore this claim in more detail. First, we will define the term "cruciformity" and make some preliminary observations about its significance in Paul, highlighting its mystical and narrative dimensions. We will then explore three moral themes (one at length, two briefly) in Paul in which the story of Christ is interpreted *morally* as paradigmatic for the Christian life and also *theologically* as divine action—and the significance of that two-step dance. Finally, along the way we will briefly note some possible implications of Paul's perspectives for contemporary moral theology.

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<sup>3</sup> On Paul as narrative theologian, see Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Bruce W. Longenecker, ed., *Narrative Dynamics in Paul: A Critical Assessment* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002). On the narrative character of Paul's spirituality of cruciformity, see Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). On Paul, narrative, and ethics, see also Stephen E. Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus*, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement* 36 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> The term "in-Christ mysticism" summarizes the important but ultimately insufficient contribution of Adolf Deissmann to our understanding of the center of Paul's experience. See Adolf Deissmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. W. E. Wilson (New York: Doran, 1926). We should also note that such accounts of Paul's mysticism have generally failed to recognize the distinctively Jewish character of Paul's participationist spirituality. For a major corrective to this mistake, see N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, forthcoming 2013), esp. chap. 9.

### CRUCIFORMITY: ITS MEANING AND ITS MYSTICAL AND NARRATIVE CHARACTER

The term “cruciformity,” from “cruciform” (cross-shaped) and “conformity,” may be defined simply as conformity to Jesus the crucified Messiah. Cruciformity is the spiritual-moral dimension of the theology of the death of Jesus by crucifixion found in Paul, in the rest of the New Testament, and throughout much of the Christian tradition. With respect to Paul, at least, this conformity to the crucified Messiah is not an abstract moral principle but a spiritual, or even mystical, reality.<sup>5</sup> This mystical reality is rooted, paradoxically, in a profoundly this-worldly reality (Jesus’ crucifixion) and produces, no less paradoxically, a variety of very this-worldly results.<sup>6</sup>

It will be helpful to summarize the basic roots and structure of this this-worldly Pauline spirituality, or mysticism. For Paul, Jesus is the crucified Messiah whom God raised from the dead, vindicating him as Messiah, validating his path of lifelong, self-giving, faithful obedience that led to the cross, and establishing him as the Lord of all who shares in the divine name, glory, and worship.<sup>7</sup> As the resurrected, glorified, and living Lord, Jesus remains the crucified Messiah. Those who respond in faith to the gospel of his death, resurrection, and lordship are baptized “into” him and henceforth live “in” him (see, e.g., Rom 6:3, 11; 8:1-2; Gal 3:23-29; Col 1:27). At the same time, this crucified but resurrected Jesus takes up residence in and among those who live in him (Gal 2:19-20; Rom 8:10), such that we can refer to the resulting mystical relationship as the mutual indwelling, or reciprocal residence, of the crucified but resurrected Messiah and his people. To further complicate matters, however, Paul can use the same language of reciprocal residence in reference to believers and the Spirit, who dwells in believers and they in him (e.g., Rom 8:9, 11).<sup>8</sup> To add even more complexity to this situation, Paul can speak

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<sup>5</sup> I define mystical experience as occasional or ongoing encounters with God (for Christians, this may mean specifically Jesus) in which God’s presence, holiness, power, and/or love are felt in an overpowering and transformative way. See further, Michael J. Gorman, “The This-Worldliness of the New Testament’s Other-Worldly Spirituality,” forthcoming in *The Bible and Spirituality: Interpreting Scripture for the Spiritual Life*, ed. Andrew T. Lincoln, J. Gordon McConville, and Lloyd K. Pietersen (Eugene: Cascade, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> On the significance of the “this-worldliness” of Jesus’ crucifixion for New Testament theology, see Paul W. Meyer, “The This-Worldliness of the New Testament,” in *The Word in this World: Essays in New Testament Exegesis and Theology*, ed. John T. Carroll (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 5–18.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Rom 10:8-13; Phil 2:6-11.

<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, at least once (twice, if Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians), Paul speaks of the church being in both God the Father and Jesus the Messiah and Lord (1 Thess 1:1; cf. 2 Thess 1:1).

of the Spirit both as the Spirit of Christ/the Son<sup>9</sup> and as the Spirit of God.<sup>10</sup> And, if that were not enough, he can do all of this in the same breath, specifically in the first half of Romans 8. Those who participate in this relationship of mutual indwelling thereby manifest the “fruit” of the Spirit, especially the qualities of faith (or faithfulness) and love that Jesus the Messiah exemplified in his death on the cross (Gal 5, esp. vv. 6, 22).<sup>11</sup>

Cruciformity, then, is cross-shaped existence in Jesus the Messiah. It is letting the cross of the crucified Messiah be the shape, as well as the source, of life in him. It is *participating in* and *embodying* the cross. Paul himself might put all this together this way (a paraphrase of Gal 2:19-20): “It is no longer I or we who live our own lives, but it is God’s crucified and resurrected Messiah who lives in me and in us by his Spirit, empowering us to embody his kind of faithfulness and love.” Because of the relational quality of this reality, we must be careful (as others have said) not to focus on “the cross” *per se* but on “the crucified.”<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, although Paul can use the language of imitation (e.g., 1 Cor 11:1), we must distinguish this Pauline spirituality from a simple ethic of *imitatio Christi*, since Paul’s focus is on the activity of the living, indwelling Messiah, which is at the same time the work of God’s indwelling Spirit. In fact, we might even refer to the ethical results of this indwelling as non-identical repetition, as long as the qualifier “by the power of the Spirit” is included.<sup>13</sup> As we will now see, the events that are repeated are constituted by the narrative of Christ’s self-giving faith and love that were quintessentially expressed in his (incarnation and) death on the cross. Cruciformity is, therefore, a *narrative* spirituality, a spirituality that tells a story, the story of Christ crucified.

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<sup>9</sup> Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Rom 8:9, 11, 14; 15:19; 1 Cor 2:11-14; 3:16; 6:11; 7:40; 12:3; 2 Cor 1:22; 3:3; Phil 3:3; 1 Thess 4:8.

<sup>11</sup> On the intimate link between Christology and ethics in Galatians, which is indicative of Paul’s thought more generally, see the classic article by Richard B. Hays, “Christology and Ethics in Galatians: The Law of Christ,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987): 268–90.

<sup>12</sup> See Herman-Emiel Mertens, *Not the Cross but the Crucified: An Essay in Soteriology*, Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs 11 (Louvain: Peeters, 1992). The point Mertens stresses is the plurality of soteriologies in Christianity and their unity in Jesus as the savior, with a special focus on liberation; my interest here is more in the book’s title than in its focus.

<sup>13</sup> On non-identical repetition, see Stephen Fowl, “Christology and Ethics in Philip-  
pians 2:5-11,” in *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2*, ed. Ralph. P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 140–53 (here 148).

Fundamental to Paul's Christology is the narrative poem included in his letter to the Philippians (2:6-11). Whether or not Paul wrote it (and the older consensus that he did not do so has been gradually disintegrating), he clearly owned it, both internalizing it and proclaiming it as his story, meaning his gospel, or at least one articulation of it. In fact, I have argued elsewhere, on the basis of the importance of this narrative in Paul's theology and his widespread use of it throughout his letters, that we ought to call it his master story.<sup>14</sup> Space does not permit an extended analysis of this narrative poem, this epic in miniature, so we will need to limit our remarks to three basic points.<sup>15</sup>

First, the Christological story has a clear structure and movement. This has sometimes been represented graphically as a parabola, indicating movement from height ("form of God... equality with God") to depth ("emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness... humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross") and back to height ("Therefore God also highly exalted him"). A closer examination of the text, however, reveals that the first part of the poem (vv. 6-8, before the exaltation), in which the Messiah Jesus (rather than "God") alone is the actor, has a syntactical and narrative structure that can be described as "although [x] not [y] but [z]" and represented as follows:<sup>16</sup>

Syntax	Narrative	Sense
although [x]	though he was in the form of God	possession of status
not [y]	[he] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited	rejection of selfish exploitation of status
but [z]	but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.	decision to act in self-giving

<sup>14</sup> See especially Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 23, 88–94, 164–75, 214–15, 366–67.

<sup>15</sup> For further discussion, see Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 9–39; and N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 56–98, and *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, ch. 8.

<sup>16</sup> For fuller discussion, see Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 91, 165–74, 186–88, 192, 197, 230–36, 243, 252, 261, 330.

It is possible to further divide the [z] portion of the narrative into two parts [z<sub>1</sub>] and [z<sub>2</sub>], corresponding to Jesus' self-emptying (incarnation) and self-humbling (crucifixion), but the point in each case is the same: the rejection of selfish exploitation of status in favor of self-giving action. Theologically, we would say that for Paul the Messiah's incarnation and crucifixion are two stages in a unified act of self-donation, and that therefore his death on the cross is not a unique, independent, or unexpected act but rather a continuation of the "mind" expressed in the incarnation.<sup>17</sup>

Paul uses this narrative structure throughout his letters, abridging it here, adapting it there, sometimes alluding to it fleetingly, to express his Christology, but also to describe the nature of apostolic ministry and of general "Christian" existence that is appropriate for those who live in this Messiah.<sup>18</sup> In fact, although Paul will most often highlight Jesus' death when he uses this narrative, he can also point to the incarnation as the warrant for specific Christian practices (e.g., generous giving, as in 2 Cor 8:9, discussed below).

Second, then, already here in Philippians, Paul offers the poem to his readers as the Christological basis for their life together, and this in two ways: Jesus the incarnate, crucified, and exalted/living Messiah is both the *paradigm* and the *provider* of the rights-renouncing, others-regarding, cruciform humility and love that are needed for existence in the Christian community.

That Jesus is the paradigm of such cruciform love is clear from the parallels between the actions ascribed to him in Philippians 2:6-8 and the communal practices expected of the Philippians that are enunciated in Philippians 2:3-4: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others." One could hardly ask for a more succinct application of the Christ-narrative to life in Christian community.

No less important, however, is the mystical, or spiritual, aspect of this life together. It is an expression of life "in Christ" and of "sharing [participation—*κοινωνία*] in the Spirit" (Phil 2:1). It is an instantiation of the "mind" of the Messiah Jesus (Phil 2:5). The transition in Philippians 2:5 between the exhortations in Philippians 2:1-4 and the narrative poem in Philippians 2:6-11 makes this clear. The NRSV translates it, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,"

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<sup>17</sup> See Gorman, *Inhabiting*, 9-39.

<sup>18</sup> For an example of this pattern in a description of apostolic ministry, see 1 Thess 2:5-12. The various uses are discussed in *Cruciformity*.

but a preferable rendering would be, “Have this mindset in your community, which is also a community in the Messiah Jesus.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, it is by virtue of their being *in* the Messiah, which means also their participation in the Spirit, that the Philippians will be able to embody in their corporate life the narrative *of* the Messiah. The indwelling Messiah creates and shapes a community that manifests his presence in concrete practices of Messiah-like love.

Third, and perhaps most controversially in some circles, the poem suggests that what Christ did is not only rewarded by God but is also a manifestation of Godlikeness.<sup>20</sup> For Paul, the Messiah’s refusal to exploit his existing equality with God (Phil 2:6) for selfish advantage does not imply that the essence of deity is the possession of some sort of status (glory, power, etc.) that is, or can be, exploited for the deity’s own self-serving benefit. Paul’s point is, rather, that although “normal” deities in the pagan world might be expected to act in such a way, Jesus the Messiah’s equality with the one true God, the God known in Israel’s Scripture and history, was displayed in radical self-giving. Implicitly here, then, Paul is associating the activity of Jesus the Messiah with the activity of God (the Father). In other texts, as we will see below, this association is more explicit, with Christ’s death interpreted as an act of divine love (e.g., Rom 5:6-8 and 8:32), and the entire Christ-event as an act of divine reconciliation (e.g. 2 Cor 5:19). The ethical payoff of this association is that those who become like Christ by the power of the Spirit are instantiating not only the narrative of Christ but also the story of God.

To summarize: Paul’s mystical and narrative Christology provides both the framework and the content for his vision of cruciform existence. At the same time, this Christology is inseparably connected to Paul’s theology proper, expressed in the spiritual reality that existence in Christ is existence in the Spirit of God, and in the narrative reality that what Christ did on the cross was also the activity of God. It is nearly impossible to avoid the conclusion that Paul has experienced God in Christ by the Spirit in a way that can only be described as Trinitarian in nature.<sup>21</sup> At the very least, we could speak, as others have, of Paul’s Christological monotheism or Christology of divine

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<sup>19</sup> For the justification of this translation, see *Cruciformity*, 39–44.

<sup>20</sup> For further exploration and defense of this claim, see *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, 9–39. Most exegetes now agree that the poem’s grammar affirms that Jesus possessed equality with God, but the full implications of that affirmation are still being debated.

<sup>21</sup> See further my *Cruciformity*, 63–74 and Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, ch. 8.

identity.<sup>22</sup> Here, however, I would suggest that a more appropriate term might be Paul's Christological theology, or, better still, his theological Christology.

As we move beyond these general observations about Christology and cruciformity in Paul, there are several possible ways to organize our discussion. One approach would be to take each of the three so-called "theological virtues" of faith, love, and hope—a triad that seems to have originated with Paul<sup>23</sup>—and explore their relationship to the story of Christ. Cruciform faith and love, for instance, would be closely connected to Christ's death on a cross in itself, whereas cruciform hope would be closely linked to the narrative connection between cross and exaltation/resurrection. Elsewhere, in fact, I have pursued this structure at great length, with the addition of cruciform power to the Pauline triad.<sup>24</sup>

Another approach would be to trace the links between the teaching of Jesus, as preserved in the canonical Gospels, about the significance of his death and the theology of Paul. This approach would focus especially on Jesus' passion predictions and their corollary summons to discipleship as the means of sharing in his own "baptism"/death. In this way of looking at cruciformity, which I have also pursued elsewhere, three key themes would emerge: cruciform witness to the gospel, even to the point of martyrdom; cruciform hospitality to the weak; and cruciform power as loving service.<sup>25</sup>

There is obviously some overlap in these two approaches, even though the former represents a narrative Christology with Jesus as dramatic actor, while the latter focuses on a Christology of Jesus as teacher and interpreter of his drama. Both are legitimate and significant.

In the present essay, however, I wish to focus on yet another aspect of Pauline theology, namely what we have just referred to as Paul's theological Christology—that is, the relationship between God the Father and Christ the Son in Paul's understanding of the cross and of cruciformity. This approach will of course also overlap some-

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<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), esp. 182–232.

<sup>23</sup> See 1 Cor 13:13; Gal 5:5–6; 1 Thess 1:3; 5:8.

<sup>24</sup> See my *Cruciformity* and, more briefly (and with less attention to power), *Reading Paul* (Eugene: Cascade, 2008), 145–66.

<sup>25</sup> See "Cruciformity according to Jesus and Paul," in *Unity and Diversity in the Gospels and Paul: Essays in Honor of Frank J. Matera*, Early Christianity and Its Literature 7, ed. Christopher W. Skinner and Kelly R. Iverson (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 173–201.



what with each of the other two possible approaches, but it will lead us specifically to focus on the following aspects of this God-in-Christ activity:

- the cruciform, reconciling enemy-love of God in Christ;
- the cruciform generosity of God in Christ; and
- the cruciform hospitality of God in Christ.

We turn now to consider each of these, with reconciliation receiving the most attention, followed by much briefer comments (due to limitations of space, not significance) about generosity and hospitality. We will look at what Paul says about God in Christ and about cruciform existence, offering occasional hints at how moral theologians might incorporate Paul's perspectives more fully into their own.

### **THE CRUCIFORM, RECONCILING ENEMY-LOVE OF GOD IN CHRIST**

Few passages in the Pauline correspondence are as rich or as dense as 2 Corinthians 5 and Romans 5, each of which describes the reconciling enemy-love of God in Christ and also provides, either explicitly or implicitly, implications for cruciform existence. We begin with 2 Corinthians 5.

#### *2 Corinthians 5*

At the heart of 2 Corinthians 5 is the affirmation that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself...” (2 Cor 5:19). There are several significant translational and interpretive problems in this verse that we cannot examine here. One critical issue is simply the translation and meaning of the opening phrase; is it “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself...” (NRSV; a sort of instrumental Christology), or, similarly, “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ” (NAB; NIV), or “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself...” (more of an incarnational Christology; cf. NRSV mg.; NASB; KJV). In any case, as I suggested above, it is probably best to understand the text as a reference to the entirety of the Christ-event (or at least those aspects of it that Paul stresses in his letters), inclusive of Christ's death (as 5:21 makes clear in the immediate context) but also of his incarnation (especially in light of 2 Cor 8:9, in the wider context).

What is fascinating about this passage is that it is a clear example of how the Messiah's death is, for Paul, both an act of Christ's love and an act of God's reconciliation and forgiveness—that is, of divine love:

For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all (u9pe\r pa/ntwn); therefore all have died. And he died for all (u9pe\r pa/ntwn), so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them (u9pe\r au0tw=n). (2 Cor 5:14-15)

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.... For our sake (u9pe\r h9mw=n) he made him [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor 5:18-19, 21)

In the first text (5:14-15), Christ is the actor, the one who displayed his love in his death “for all,” another way of saying “for their sins” (cf. Rom 5:6; 1 Cor 15:3; Gal 1:4; 3:13; 1 Thess 5:10). In the second text (5:18-19, 21), God is the actor and apparently even the originator of Christ’s atoning death, as the source of “all this,” as the one acting “in the Messiah,” and as the one who made the Messiah to be sin, however that is to be interpreted, “for our sake” (cf. Rom 3:25; 5:8).

What both texts have in common, however, is that the goal of this messianic and divine action is human transformation: “that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them” (5:15); “so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (5:21b). More precisely, we can say that the goal is transformation into Christlikeness and Godlikeness. Those transformed by Christ’s death will stop living for themselves and live for Christ, meaning implicitly to live *like* Christ, that is, with others-centered love.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, those reconciled to God by the Messiah’s death will “become the righteousness [or “justice;” Gk. dikai-osu/nh] of God,” which, at the very least, means to embody the kind of righteousness or justice that is characteristic of God as displayed in Christ’s death.<sup>27</sup> In context, this justice is clearly associated with reconciliation, suggesting that the righteousness/justice expected of the community is above all the practice of what we would

<sup>26</sup> The connections between love for neighbor and devotion to Christ are developed more fully and explicitly in 1 Cor 8 and Rom 14.

<sup>27</sup> On this text, see A. Katherine Grieb, “‘So That in Him We Might Become the Righteousness of God’ (2 Cor 5:21): Some Theological Reflections on the Church Becoming Justice,” *Ex Auditu* 22 (2006): 58–80. See also my “Justification and Justice in Paul, with Special Reference to the Corinthians,” *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 1 (2011): 23–40.

call restorative justice, that is, bringing people together with God and one another.<sup>28</sup>

Each of these texts also contains at least a faint echo of the narrative structure we found in Philippians 2:6-11. The deep structure, so to speak, of 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 can be summarized as follows: “Although the Messiah Jesus could have selfishly ignored the plight of humanity in its self-centered existence, he did not do so but freely and willingly expressed his love for all by dying for them, and now, by virtue of his resurrection, he is able to empower those who believe this good news to live for him by living in love for others, too.” Similarly, 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, 21 could be summarized in these words: “Although God was fully aware of humanity’s sins, unrighteousness, and alienation from himself, God did not leave humanity in this condition but entered fully into it in the Messiah, whose death was God’s act of forgiveness, reconciliation, and transformation for all.”

In 2 Corinthians 5, then, Paul presents us with brief narrative summaries of the reconciling love of God in Christ and with (even briefer!) summaries of the transformative power and the existential consequences of this divine action. Reconciliation, therefore, is a central aspect of Paul’s understanding of God’s crucified Messiah and therefore of loving, righteous/just cruciform existence “in him” (2 Cor 5:21). Cruciform reconciliation grounded in this text will have two critical dimensions: forgiveness and restoration. One thinks immediately of the Truth and Reconciliation commissions, and of certain Christian (and other) groups that seek reconciliation between victims of crimes, and/or their families, and those who have perpetrated crimes against them. Such forms of reconciliation require a spiritual depth and power that is also reflected in our text, the source of a love that empowers a person or community to forgive even though it has every right to seek retribution. In this regard, of course, we remember the Amish community of Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, after the schoolhouse shooting in October 2006.

Why is it that Truth and Reconciliation commissions and Amish communities appear to be the exception rather than the norm in Christian practice? No doubt there is no single or simple answer to this question. But one wonders whether cruciform reconciliation receives the attention in Christian moral theology and theological ethics, and in Christian spirituality and theology more generally, that it

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<sup>28</sup> I agree with Grieb (“So That in Him”) that the “we” of v. 21 refers to the entire believing community, as does the “us” that is the object of reconciliation (v. 18), even if the “we” and the “us” of vv. 18-20 that are linked to “ambassadors” refer only to Paul and his colleagues in apostolic ministry.

deserves.<sup>29</sup> In this regard, two positive examples of appropriate attention are the Center for Reconciliation at Duke Divinity School, with its programs and publications that foster reconciliation rooted in Christian faith, and the more politically oriented Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame.<sup>30</sup> One suspects that other similar centers of scholarship and activism are needed.

### Romans 5

A passage similar in theme to 2 Corinthians 5 is Romans 5. The subject is once more reconciliation, and its source is again stated both as the Messiah's death and as God's activity in that death. These two aspects of the chapter emerge in the following verses:

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.... For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly (u9pe\r a0sebw=n). Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us (u9pe\r h9mw=n). Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (Rom 5:1, 6-11)

There are several striking features of this passage. For one thing, one of Paul's most distinctive theological themes, justification, is here equated with reconciliation.<sup>31</sup> Reconciliation, in turn, is described in the vivid image of dying for people who are unjust, sinners, and enemies of God. The Messiah's death is here depicted as his own death for (u9pe/r) the ungodly, which should be understood primarily as

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<sup>29</sup> I cannot speak with any authority about the field generally, but the general inattention to peace-making in New Testament ethics has been rightly documented—and to a degree corrected—by Willard M. Swartley in his *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> See <http://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives-centers/center-reconciliation/> and <http://kroc.nd.edu/>.

<sup>31</sup> The parallels between v. 1 and v. 11 make this especially clear. 2 Cor 5:18-21, with its language of reconciliation and transformation into the justice/righteousness of God, makes the same connection, though perhaps not as clearly (the verb “to justify” not being present, though the noun “justice/righteousness” is).

an act of love (cf. 2 Cor 5:14-15, discussed above) rather than as a substitutionary death; as the demonstration of God's love for sinners; and as the means of God's reconciliation and justification of enemies. The syntactical and narrative parallels are quite striking:

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. (v. 6)

But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. (v. 8)

For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son... (v. 10)

Thus this death "for us" occurred, on the one hand, at the initiative of the Messiah and out of his love for others and, on the other hand, at the initiative of God and out of God's *own* love (τῆς ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἀγάπης) for us.

Most importantly here, the Messiah's death is the demonstration of God's way of dealing with rebellious humanity—spiritual insurgents, so to speak. It is the definitive sign of God's love for enemies and God's nonviolent reconciliation of them.<sup>32</sup> There is once again, at least at the semantic level, an echo here of Christ's love depicted in Philippians 2. Although God had every right to allow sinful humans to receive the just consequences of their actions—the divine wrath (Rom 5:9),<sup>33</sup> God chose not to allow humanity to stew in its own juices forever but rather, in an act of unexpected and unheard of love, sought his enemies' reconciliation and ultimate salvation in and through the Messiah's death.

What is absent from Romans 5, however, is any explicit call to cruciform existence in the form of loving enemies or practicing reconciliation. This lacuna is more a function of context than conviction, however. At this point in Romans, Paul has been establishing the need for, and the reality of, God's rescue of sin-enslaved humanity through the Messiah's death and resurrection. Romans 5:1-11 serves as a sort of bridge passage to the apostle's discussion of the existential significance of that reality. Later in the letter Paul will, in fact, draw parallels between the love of God and Christ for enemies and the praxis of those in Christ. But even here, there is a hint in that direction, as Paul indicates that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (v. 5). In other words, those who have received the Spirit of God have also re-

<sup>32</sup> See further my *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, 129-60.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Rom 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5.

ceived the dynamic love of God and will, implicitly, love others—even enemies—as God in Christ has loved them.

This implicit call to enemy love becomes explicit in Romans 12. After a general overview of the new life as the spiritual sacrifice of daily, bodily existence (Rom 12:1-2) and remarks about the use of gifts in the corporate body (Rom 12:3-7), Paul introduces the subject of love as a community practice:

<sup>9</sup>Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; <sup>10</sup>love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.... <sup>13</sup>Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. <sup>14</sup>Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup>Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup>Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. <sup>17</sup>Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup>If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup>Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” <sup>20</sup>No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Though much could be said about this highly significant text, for our purposes we focus first on the exhortations in v. 14 and vv. 17-21 and then on the creative tension regarding believers and evil that emerges in this passage, especially in vv. 9, 17, and 21.

The call to bless rather than curse persecutors (v. 14) is likely an echo of the Jesus tradition preserved in Gospel texts such as Matthew 5:43-48 and Luke 6:27-33.<sup>34</sup> If that is true, then we have in Romans a remarkable confluence of the *teaching* of Jesus and the *death* of Jesus on the subject of loving enemies/persecutors, for although Romans 5 is not explicitly recalled here, the astute hearer/reader of the letter will not have forgotten the triple emphasis in that chapter on Jesus’ death as God’s reconciling of enemies. Moreover, Paul is calling his Roman audience to do precisely what he claims to have done himself throughout his cruciform ministry “for the sake of Christ”<sup>35</sup>: “When

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<sup>34</sup> There is some scholarly debate about this, since Jewish traditions also preserve texts about enemy love, and Paul may have been influenced by such sources. But since we know he had some access to the Jesus tradition, it is at least as likely, if not more so, that he knew Jesus’ views on the subject.

<sup>35</sup> 1 Cor 4:10. Cf. his self-description in 1 Cor 4:17: “my ways in Christ Jesus.”

reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly” (1 Cor 4:12b-13a).

Verses 17-21, using the ancient image of heaping coals of fire on people’s heads, offer a prohibition of practices that would contradict the call to bless persecutors. Christians are to hate evil but not return evil to the evildoer. Paradoxically, Paul suggests that the ability to love enemies depends, not on ignoring evil, but on recognizing and naming it. Just as God in Christ named humans as sinners and enemies, Paul’s audience must “hate what is evil” (v. 9) and must be able to name it as such in order not to “repay” it (v. 17) or “be overcome” by it (v. 21):

Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. (v. 17)

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (v. 21)

This is precisely what God has done in the Messiah: overcome evil with good.

Following the infamous text in Romans 13:1-7 (which might be, in part, a practical example of how to love enemies), Paul returns to the topic of love as the *sine qua non* of life in Christ, claiming that those who love (by the powerful presence of God’s Spirit—Rom 5:5) fulfill the divine law (Rom 13:7-10). Then vividly, in his apocalyptic dialect, Paul calls his audience to disrobe themselves of inappropriate practices characteristic of “the night” and to clothe themselves instead with “the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 13:11-14). The wider context, then, suggests that Paul considers non-retaliation and enemy-love as constitutive of being in Christ; they are two of the cruciform practices that are characteristic of the new day, the new creation, ushered in by the Messiah’s death and shaped by it. In addition to being Christlike practices, however, they are also Godlike practices. To be like Christ is to be like God, for God was in Christ, loving enemies, reconciling the hostile world. Cruciformity is, therefore, theoformity.

One therefore suspects that Richard Hays is absolutely right in his claim that “[t]here is not a syllable in the Pauline letters that can be cited in support of Christians employing violence.”<sup>36</sup> Hays implies that Paul would not allow us to distinguish between personal and state violence, or between justified and unjustified violence, as in the case, for example, of war.

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<sup>36</sup>Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 331.

I agree with Hays on this point, but I would nonetheless like to engage in a thought experiment. How would Paul structure an argument with someone who claims, let us say, the right to the use of violence in self-defense? Paul would not be afraid to name the perpetrator's evil act as such. He might even be willing, for the sake of argument, to grant the existence, and the Christian appropriation, of the just-war tradition and thus of the so-called "right" of self-defense. But then he would almost certainly turn the logical consequence of accepting that tradition, with its implicit right, on its head:

- [x] Although you have been wronged, and although you do have an authoritative tradition that gives you the right of self-defense as a last resort,
- [y] do not make use of that right and thereby return evil with evil, but rather
- [z] continue in practices that overcome evil with good.

To the pragmatic, Paul (or at least this argument put on his lips) will sound naïve. After all, human beings are not God; they cannot overcome evil at will. Of course not, Paul would say. But then he would add that this is not the point. Christian existence requires conformity to the pattern of God's action in the Messiah, meaning good in the face of evil, even when logic and moral authority seem to say otherwise.

That Paul would actually construct such an argument seems quite clear from a careful reading of 1 Corinthians 9, where he offers just this type of Christological moral reasoning for his self-support by tent making and against his being supported financially by Corinthian patrons. In making that case, he argues Christologically against the moral norms of apostolic example, common sense and practice, Scripture, and even the teaching of Jesus:

Do we not have the right to our food and drink? Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who at any time pays the expenses for doing military service? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not get any of its milk? Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law also say the same? For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Or does he not speak entirely for



our sake? It was indeed written for our sake, for whoever plows should plow in hope and whoever threshes should thresh in hope of a share in the crop. If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we still more?... Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is sacrificed on the altar? In the same way, the Lord [Jesus] commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. (1 Cor 9:4-12a, 13-14)

Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.... But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing this so that they may be applied in my case.... For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. (1 Cor 9:12b, 15a, 19)

I am not so naïve or foolish as to think that this one example from Paul, or his hypothetical argument in response to the use of the right of self-defense in war, will become the norm in Christian moral reasoning about complex matters. But I would contend that in a moral universe like ours that is so dependent on the establishment and exercise of rights, with respect to warfare and much more, Paul offers a uniquely Christocentric and theocentric way of moral reasoning that we neglect to our own detriment.

### **THE GENEROSITY AND HOSPITALITY OF GOD IN CHRIST**

The overall moral-theological point I have been arguing in this essay has two foci: (1) the specific narrative shape of Paul's cruciform gospel, existence, and moral reasoning, and (2) the theological (meaning referring to God) character of that Christological narrative ethic/spirituality. We have focused at length on the cruciform, reconciling enemy-love of God in Christ. Although space does not permit an extended discussion of other themes that demonstrate the overlap of Christological and theological action, and thus moral reasoning, in Paul, we may briefly mention two significant examples.

In chapters 8 and 9 of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, the apostle appeals to his problem children in Corinth to fulfill their commitment to the collection for the church in Jerusalem. He grounds his appeal first of all in the self-giving of Messiah Jesus, using language that echoes his master story from Philippians 2:6-11: "For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). Paul also grounds his appeal in

the generosity of God, who is himself a generous giver and the one who supplies the needs of those who are generous in return (2 Cor 9:6-15). Paul concludes his brief discussion of God's generosity and provision with an exclamation: "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (2 Cor 9:15)—a clear reference to the gift of Jesus, the Son and Messiah. Taking these two chapters together, we see once again what "in Christ God was reconciling the world..." (2 Cor 5:19) means for Paul on the ground, so to speak. The Corinthians are to embody the Christ-narrative of generous self-giving (even to the point of renouncing their implied "right" to hold on to their money), which is in turn a narrative of divine giving. The goal of their generosity is, in some unspecified but tantalizing way, economic "equality" (2 Cor 8:14).<sup>37</sup> They will become the justice of God (2 Cor 5:21; 9:9-10).

Once again, I am not so naïve as to think that international economic crises or long-term issues such as global poverty will be solved simply by appeal to Paul's theological argument for economic justice and "equality" among early Christian communities. Nevertheless, Paul's argument means that Christians in general, and moral theologians in particular, exercise their vocational and existential obligations properly only when they do so within the framework of Christologically construed divine generosity and justice; that is, when they operate with a theological end (justice, shalom) and a theological means (generosity, self-giving) as their starting point. Such a framework will generate a hermeneutic of suspicion vis-à-vis certain aspects of common approaches to economics even as it affirms others.

As in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, we find in Romans 14 and 15 both Christological and theological grounds for Paul's call to practices of hospitality within the multicultural (Gentile and Jewish) Christian communities in Rome. At that moment, mutual judgment was the order of the day in Rome, but the Christ-story and the divine actor within it will not countenance such inhospitality:

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. <sup>8</sup>If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the

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<sup>37</sup> So NAB, NIV. NRSV's "fair balance" may approximate Paul's point, but it aborts the interpretive summons issued by the noun *ἰσότης*. For a helpful analysis of the Jerusalem collection as the expression of an unprecedented challenge and alternative to Greco-Roman social and economic structures, see Julien M. Ogereau, "The Jerusalem Collection as *κοινωνία*: Paul's Global Politics of Socio-Economic Equality and Solidarity," *New Testament Studies* 58 (2012): 360-78.

dead and the living. Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. (Rom 14:7-10)

For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The one who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and has human approval. Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. (Rom 14:17-19)

Already in these (and other) verses, the blending of Christology and theology is evident. It becomes much more poignant in chapter 15:

We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor. For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, “The insults of those who insult you [God, being addressed by Christ] have fallen on me.”... May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. (Rom 15:1-3, 5-9a)

Paul then goes on to cite several Scripture texts that point to God’s plan to include Gentiles in the family of God.

Thus, in this section of Romans, Paul calls the story of Jesus both the paradigm of Christian hospitality and the fulfillment of the divine hospitality initiative itself. As in the case of reconciliation/peace-making and in the case of generosity, the story of Christ is both a normative ethical narrative and a narrative of divine action for the good and salvation of humanity.

Paul’s theological Christology and its existential corollaries may again inform contemporary moral reasoning. To return to the fundamental narrative logic of Paul’s spirituality, we remember that “although [x] not [y] but [z]” underlies all of Paul’s accounts of God’s action in Christ and thus of cruciform existence. The Christological logic of Paul might result today in a sentence such as this: “although we have the ‘right’ to neglect or even reject certain people because of their status in the eyes of the law, we will not do so because we have been saved by, and now will live by, a different law, namely the law of divine hospitality, the law of Christ” (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2).

## CONCLUSION

This essay has explored Paul's notion of cruciformity as the central spiritual and moral dimension of his story of the crucified Messiah. We have considered the distinctive narrative pattern Paul puts forward in a variety of ways, and we have looked at three moral themes—reconciliation, generosity, and hospitality—in Paul's letters as aspects of his message of cruciformity. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, we have seen that this Christological narrative is inherently and simultaneously also a story about God, and that therefore Paul's call to *cruciformity*, or *Christoformity*, is also a call to *theoformity*—perhaps even *theosis*.<sup>38</sup> Paul does not speak about Christ's salvific and paradigmatic death without also speaking of it, both theologically and morally, as the action of God. His is a theological Christology.

Christian moral theologians, we have suggested, need to take both dimensions of this Pauline contribution seriously. It will not be sufficient, if we follow Paul's lead, to speak about God and morality without also speaking about Christ and morality, or vice versa. And it will not be sufficient to speak about Christ and morality without speaking of the mystical-narrative reality to which he attests in his letters.

In terms of concrete moral consequences, Paul offers a vision of divine enemy love/reconciliation, generosity, and hospitality that, he says, must be embodied in Christian communities. Moral theologians and biblical scholars need to work together to discern the concrete ways in which we can instantiate the story of God in Christ in our own communal practices by the power of the Spirit of the Father and the Son. **M**

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<sup>38</sup> See further my *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*.