

GOD WHO IS RICH IN MERCY



Essays presented to
Dr. D. B. Knox

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Chapter 12

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GOSPEL IN PHILIPPIANS

PETER T. O'BRIEN

I. Introduction

The theme of "gospel" has attracted the scholarly attention of our honoree, David Broughton Knox, during the last decade or so¹ and a number of his lectures and papers have dealt with this biblical motif. In particular, he has pointed out that it is pre-eminently in the gospel we know that "God is rich in mercy". However, the wonder of this truth is seen all the more clearly when it is recognized that mankind is spiritually bankrupt and deserving of God's judgment (Rom 1:18-3:20; cf. 3:23). In particular, Canon Knox has sought to show that this element of judgment is an essential part of the gospel message itself (cf. Rom 2:16, and note especially Rev 14:6), rather than being a kind of "optional extra" that is occasionally added in specific contexts. Accordingly he has argued that in the NT when *euangelion* draws attention to the content of the apostolic announcement it ought to be rendered by some term such as "news" or "message" rather than "good news". This is not to deny that the gospel is the joyful message of the grace of God. But it is the authoritative and eternal message of the King of Kings who calls upon all people everywhere to repent and to enter into a personal relationship with him through the work of his Son. In this sense it is bad news before it becomes good news.

The purpose of this paper, affectionately dedicated to Canon Knox, is threefold: first, to survey briefly a number of Paul's uses of *euangelion* and to outline some of the main features of his gospel. Secondly, to examine in detail the place and significance of *euangelion* in Philippians. Finally, to summarize the main conclusions.

II. *Euangelion* in Paul

The *euangel-* stem² turns up in the Pauline corpus on some eighty-four occasions: the noun *euangelion* ("gospel") is used some sixty times, the verb *euangelizomai* ("preach the gospel") twenty-one times, with the noun *euangelistēs* ("evangelist") twice (Eph 4:11 and 2 Tim

4:5) and the related verb *proeuangelizomai* ('preach the gospel beforehand') once (at Gal 3:8). Surprisingly, these terms appear less frequently in the rest of the NT. For example *euangelion* turns up on only sixteen other occasions, half of which are in Mark, while the verb *euangelizomai* (apart from the instances in Luke: Gospel 10, Acts 15) occurs only eight additional times.

Particularly significant is the fact that the noun is always used in the singular form within the NT although the plural featured often enough in the language of the emperor cult. *Euangelion* had already been in use in Greek literature and inscriptions long before Paul. In Homer, for example, it denoted 'a reward given to a herald of good news' (Od. 14.152, 166), and subsequently it came to be used in the sense of 'good news' or simply 'news'.³ On occasion in a religious context *euangelion* could designate a 'sacrifice' offered to the gods for good news.⁴ Of special importance are those instances of the plural *euangelia* in the language of the imperial cult to describe the emperor's birth, coming of age or enthronement as well as his speeches, decrees and acts that were regarded as the 'glad tidings which bring long hoped-for fulfilment to the longings of the world for happiness and peace'.⁵ The oft-quoted Calendar Inscription from Priene (in Asia Minor) says 'the birthday of the god [= Augustus] was for the world the beginning of good tidings [*ta euangelia*] owing to him'.⁶ The proclamation of these *euangelia* does not simply announce the new era: it actually brings it about.

In spite of the considerable Greek evidence of the use of *euangelion* in the contemporary world, one cannot simply ascribe Pauline usage, or that of the NT generally, to this background. While a number of scholars consider that the NT, and particularly Pauline, terminology developed by analogy out of that associated with the 'gospel' of the imperial cult (albeit in conscious opposition to the latter), this seems unlikely. First, it is difficult to prove. Secondly, a far closer theological usage occurs in the Greek OT where the verb *euangelizomai* denotes the heralding of Yahweh's universal victory over the world and his kingly rule (Pss 68:12; 96:2; Isa 41:27; 52:7). With his enthronement and his return to Zion a new era begins. The messenger of good tidings (the Heb. *mebasser* is rendered by the participle *euangelizomenos* in the LXX) announces this new era and inaugurates it with God's powerful word.⁷ This "gospel" is effective speech, a powerful saying, a word which brings its own fulfilment. In the mouth of his messengers God himself speaks: he speaks and it is accomplished'.⁸

J. A. Fitzmyer observes: 'the fact that Paul deliberately quotes Isa 52:7 in Rom 10:15, precisely in a context in which he is speaking of the preaching of the "gospel" (10:16), shows that his notion of *euangelion* is heavily dependent on the Old Testament idea of God's herald and his message'.⁹ This link fits neatly with the apostle's reference to the gospel promised beforehand through his [i.e. God's] prophets in the Holy Scriptures' (Rom 1:2; cf. Gal 3:8) and the promissory character of the gospel Paul himself preached.¹⁰

We have already observed that the greater number of the NT instances of the *euangel-* word-group is found in Paul's letters. That is not to suggest, however, that the apostle to the Gentiles was either the first to use this word or the first to employ it without qualification to describe the total content of the apostolic message. *Euangelion* is attributed to Jesus by the Gospel writers (Mark 1:15; 8:35; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9; Matt 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; 26:13) while Jesus himself indicated that the words of messianic expectation in Isa 35 and 61 were fulfilled in his words and actions (cf. Matt 11:5f.; Luke 4:18). Furthermore Paul's frequent use of the word *euangelion* without qualification (thirty-one times in the Pauline corpus) shows that he was employing a technical term already familiar to his readers.

Nevertheless, 'gospel' occupies an important place in Paul's theology.¹¹ In a number of passages *euangelion* denotes the content of his apostolic message: so he can speak of the gospel he preached (1 Cor 15:1, 2; 2 Cor 11:7; Gal 1:11), heralded (Gal 2:2; 1 Thess 2:9; Col 1:23), announced (1 Cor 9:14), told (1 Thess 2:2), offered (1 Cor 9:18), shared (1 Thess 2:8) and made known (1 Cor 15:1; Gal 1:11; Eph 6:19), while this authoritative announcement is said to have been heard (Eph 1:13; Col 1:5), received as 'tradition' (1 Cor 15:1, 3; Gal 1:9, 12), welcomed (2 Cor 11:4) and taught (Gal 1:12).

The content of that gospel can be stated in summary form as 'the gospel of Christ' (Rom 15:19; 1 Cor 9:12; 2 Cor 2:12; 9:13; 10:14; Gal 1:7; Phil 1:27; 1 Thess 3:2), 'the gospel of our Lord Jesus' (2 Thess 1:8), 'the gospel of his Son' (Rom 1:9), or 'the gospel of the glory of Christ' (2 Cor 4:4). At times the content of the gospel can also be expressed as 'the faith' (Gal 1:23) or 'the unsearchable riches of Christ' (Eph 3:8). In addition, a number of synonyms such as the 'word', 'the word of God', 'the mystery' and 'the testimony of Christ' also sums up the saving significance of Christ's death, resurrection and present lordship.

U. Becker and a number of others have rightly observed that *euangelion* as used by Paul signifies not only the content of what is preached, but also 'the act, process and execution of the proclamation'.¹² The two are closely related, and in the very act of proclamation

the gospel's content becomes a reality. Sometimes Paul stresses the content, at other times the process or activity. This act of proclamation is denoted not only by the verb *euangelizomai*, as one might expect, but also by *euangelion* used as a noun of agency, and we shall observe that most, if not all, of Paul's references to the noun in Philippians have this significance.

Fitzmyer¹³ has drawn attention to the following main characteristics or aspects of Paul's gospel:

- (i) it is *revelatory* or *apocalyptic* since God's saving activity towards men and women is manifested in a new way, in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the root of this saving activity is God's righteousness which has been revealed in the gospel (Rom 1:17);
- (ii) its *dynamic* character, through which men and women are saved (Rom 1:16) or delivered from the coming wrath (1 Thess 1:10);
- (iii) it is *kerygmatic* not only in the sense that it is preached or proclaimed (see above) but also in the sense that it is dependent on and related to prior tradition (cf. 1 Cor 15:1-8);
- (iv) it is *normative* in that it brooks no rival (Gal 1:6-9) and stands over congregations and individual believers. The gospel has a normative role because of 'its God-based origin'. Yet it is liberating for it stands over against the restrictions of man-made legalism (cf. esp. Gal);
- (v) it is *promissory* in that it was promised beforehand in the OT Scriptures (Rom 1:2; cf. Gal 3:8) and, finally,
- (vi) it is *universal* because it speaks of the power of God for salvation 'to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile' (Rom 1:16).

III. *Euangelion* in Philippians

The only term of the *euangel-* word-group which appears in Philippians is the noun *euangelion*, and it occurs nine times: 1:5, 7, 12, 16, 27 (twice); 2:2; 4:3, and 15. We shall examine them in the order in which they appear in the letter.

(a) *Partnership in the gospel (1:5)*

The first two occurrences of *euangelion* ('gospel') in Philippians are within Paul's introductory thanksgiving paragraph where the apostle, in an unusually earnest expression of gratitude, offers his heart-felt thanks to God for those who had been loyal partners with him in the gospel. In a glowing thanksgiving that evidences Paul's sense of close fellowship with his Philippian friends, he mentions the term *euange-*

lion (in a unique expression) as one of the grounds of his thanksgiving to God. The first basis of praise is mentioned in 1:3: '[thankful] for all your remembrance of me'.¹⁴ This is 'the most specific reason and alludes to the recent money gift as well as to the Philippians' help of Paul on previous occasions. Its meaning would have been clear and unmistakable to the first readers of the letter.

The second ground for Paul's thanksgiving contains the term *gospel*: '[thankful] for your partnership in the gospel [*koinōnia eis to euangelion*] from the first day until now (1:5). A number of commentators take *koinōnia* in a passive sense and render the whole phrase as 'your participation in the gospel'. This virtually means 'your acceptance of the gospel' and is almost equivalent to 'your faith'.¹⁵ But it is better to understand *koinōnia* in an active sense, so that the whole phrase means 'your co-operation [in aid of] the gospel'. A comparison is made with Rom 15:26 and 2 Cor 9:13 where a similar construction, unique to the NT,¹⁶ is used and points to 'a dynamic activity in progress'.¹⁷ The meaning is not to be restricted exclusively to the monetary support given by the Philippians to the apostle but, as Lightfoot pointed out over a hundred years ago, it

'denotes co-operation in the widest sense, their participation with the Apostle whether in sympathy or in suffering or in active labour or in any other way. At the same time their almsgiving was a signal instance of this co-operation, and seems to have been foremost in the Apostle's mind'.¹⁸

The alternative 'passive' view (of H. Seesemann and others) treats the word *euangelion* as a reference to the content of the gospel.¹⁹ Although this term is employed in a variety of senses in the NT, when it is combined with different verbs of speaking and hearing the term regularly specifies the content of the gospel (see above); on many of its sixty occurrences in the Pauline corpus, as we have noted, it is a noun of agency which describes the act of proclamation or the work of evangelism (cf. 2 Cor 2:12).

If, as we have suggested, it is better to understand *koinōnia* ('fellowship, participation') in an active sense at Phil 1:5, then *euangelion* is a noun of agency and has this dynamic sense of proclaiming the gospel. Such an interpretation is consistent with Paul's other uses of the word in the letter as a whole, as we shall seek to show. J. Gnlika is right we believe when he observes that the references to *euangelion* in this epistle show the word to be 'almost personified'.²⁰

Furthermore, the dynamic sense is consistent with the apostle's uses in other introductions to his letters. I have argued elsewhere²¹

that a striking feature of Paul's introductory thanksgiving paragraphs of his epistles is the frequent use of 'gospel' and its synonyms (Rom 1:9; 1 Cor 1:6; Eph 1:13; Col 1:5-6; 1 Thess 1:5-6; 2:13; 2 Thess 2:14; cf. even Gal 1:6-8; 2 Thess 1:8). It is often depicted as a powerful force working mightily in the lives of people. So, for example, at Col 1:5-6 *euangelion* is spoken of in this personal way: it has come to the Colossian Christians, and remained with them, having a firm place in their lives. Like the seed in the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-9, 13-20) it continues to produce a vigorous fruit, not only among the Colossians themselves (vv6, 10) but also in the rest of the world (v6). Describing his initial evangelistic activity at Thessalonica Paul, at 1 Thess 1:5, might well have written 'we came with the gospel' (cf. 2 Cor 10:14). However, by stating 'our gospel came', he puts the emphasis on the activity of the message. The manner of its coming was truly powerful, for it was not simply in word but also 'in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction'. Gospel is again regarded as a living force. Its dynamic activity did not cease with the expulsion of the missionaries from Thessalonica. Later in the same letter Paul asserts that 'the word of God' (here synonymous with *euangelion*) which the Thessalonian believers welcomed into their hearts is continually effective in their midst (1 Thess 2:13). Not only was the gospel active when they first believed; but also their continued Christian existence even now depends on it.

The second reason then for Paul's thanksgiving to God was the Philippians' co-operation with him in his ministry of the gospel to the Gentiles. The whole phrase, *koinōnia humōn eis to euangelion*, draws attention to a many-sided activity²² on the part of Paul's friends. It is not to be restricted to monetary assistance, though this was obviously in the apostle's mind having been referred to in v3. It probably includes the idea of their actual proclamation of the gospel message to outsiders (cf. vv27, 28), their suffering along with Paul for the gospel's sake (note 1:30; 4:14-15), as well as their intercessory activity on his behalf (cf. 1:19), an activity which the apostle knew they were engaged in at the time of his writing to them. And from the words that follow in v6 this 'fellowship in the gospel' was an evident sign to Paul that God had already begun his work of a new creation in the Philippians' lives.

(b) The defence and confirmation of the gospel (1:7)

Paul uses *euangelion* a second time within the thanksgiving paragraph of vv3-11, when he speaks directly to the congregation, assuring them of the warm affection he has for them. He tells his Philippian friends: 'in my bonds as in the defence and confirmation of

the *gospel* you are all sharers with me in God's grace' (v7). Once again *euangelion* turns up in a unique expression (at v16 the nearest parallel occurs; *eis apologian tou euangeliou*, 'for the defence of the gospel'). The preceding words, 'in my bonds', draw attention to Paul's personal circumstances in prison (in Rome?) while the expression which contains the term 'gospel' describes his personal activity in those circumstances: 'engaged in the defence and confirmation of the gospel'. *Apologia* and *bebaiōsis* were both part of a technical, legal vocabulary attested in the papyri. The former could denote an action in court as a 'defence' against a judicial accusation (Acts 25:16; 2 Tim 4:16). So it is likely that Paul is alluding to his imminent appearance in court before the Roman authorities. At the same time the language does not appear to be exhausted by reference to the trial proceedings.

'Defending the gospel' (cf. Phil 1:16; 1 Pet 3:15) probably also includes all his efforts at disarming prejudice and overcoming objections to the preaching of the message (cf. 2 Cor 7:11). Similarly *bebaiōsis* on the positive side was a legal technical term for 'guaranteeing or furnishing security' (cf. Heb 6:16).²³ It has been suggested that because of the defence Paul will put up before his judges and because of his probable acquittal the gospel will be confirmed. Once more, however, the meaning does not seem to be limited to the legal nuances; it may also point to that aspect of Paul's apostolic work in which he sought to corroborate the truth of the gospel by proof, testimony and forthright declaration (cf. Heb 6:16; Rom 15:8). An instance of this kind of 'confirmation' during the earliest period of the apostle's activity in Rome is recorded at Acts 28:23. Of particular note here at Phil 1:7 is that our term *euangelion*, which turns up in an unusual expression, is used again (as a noun of agency) in a dynamic way to describe the activity of proclaiming or furthering the gospel.

(c) *The progress and defence of the gospel (1:12,16)*

The body of Paul's letter to the Philippians begins at 1:12 and in a lengthy section which extends to v26 (or at least until v20) issues of the gospel dominate. Not only does the term *euangelion* itself occur (at vv12 and 16), but also several equivalent expressions appear: so speaking the word of God is mentioned (v14), while reference is also made to preaching Christ (v15 and it is implied at v16), proclaiming Christ (v17) and Christ being proclaimed (v18). Even more significant than these statistics is the fact that Paul describes his personal circumstances by the yard-stick of the gospel. Its progress is paramount so that Paul's personal circumstances, including his sufferings and imprisonment, serve this end.

By means of a construction known as 'a Disclosure form'²⁴ the apostle informs his readers not of the facts of his imprisonment which they already knew but of its effects. Within this construction Paul uses a common contemporary idiom (*ta kat' eme*) which was normally employed to describe the situation of a person. We are thus led to expect that he is about to pass on news of his own circumstances. Surprisingly, however, he offers no abundance of details, and his 'miserliness' in this regard has often caused surprise.²⁵ Instead, he brings the basic significance of the events he has experienced into relationship with the progress of the gospel.

It seemed the Philippians were concerned that the consequences of Paul's imprisonment might have been a hindrance to the gospel and such a fear was both natural and reasonable. However, Paul assures them that far from having the results feared by them, his affairs had actually served to advance the gospel. This expression *eis prokopēn tou euangeliou elēluthen*, like the previous two instances, is unique. *Prokopē* ('progress, advancement, furtherance') occurs for the first time in the Hellenistic period, being used in everyday non-literary Greek to denote progress and prosperity in the physical, economic and social sphere.²⁶ In Stoic philosophy *prokopē* denoted an advance 'essentially connected with the acquisition of individual virtues to be gained or developed from man's own natural disposition'.²⁷ This kind of ethics of personal achievement is not found in Paul, rather here he speaks of the progress of the gospel (at 1:25 the progress of the congregation is in view).

As in the two preceding references (vv5, 7) *euangelion* is used absolutely, so indicating that the notion of gospel was already known to the Philippians and did not need further explanation. To speak of the 'progress' of the gospel is to draw attention to its dynamic, almost personal, character and is akin to the apostle's statement at 2 Thess 3:1 where the word itself is personified as a runner: 'Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honoured, just as it was with you'. The verb used at Phil 1:12, *elēluthen*, on occasion referred to significant events in salvation history such as Christ's first (1 Tim 1:15; Eph 2:17) and second comings (1 Cor 4:5; 11:26; 16:22; 1 Thess 5:2), as well as to Paul's coming to his churches (Rom 15:29, 32; 1 Cor 2:1; 4:21). Here the expression has to do with the results of Paul's circumstances, while the perfect tense draws attention to the continuing effects and how the matter now stands, i.e. 'has redounded, has served' to advance the gospel. For Paul this goal overrides all else; personal inconveniences, sufferings and imprisonment serve this end.

But how does the apostle know the gospel has made such considerable and unexpected progress during his imprisonment? Because of certain results. In the following two verses Paul shows that the advance has occurred (a) outside the Christian community (1:13), and (b) within it (v14). The *hōste* ('so that') introduces the *actual* results of that advance, at the same time giving a more precise statement of its nature.²⁸

The first verse (1:13) has been rendered: 'it has become clear . . . that I [Paul] am in chains for Christ' (NIV) and understood to mean that Paul is a prisoner wholly for Christ's sake and not because he is a political or civil wrong-doer. The question may be raised, however, as to whether this does full justice to the phrase 'in Christ'. Earlier commentators such as Ellicott considered the expression meant Paul's bonds were 'manifestly borne in fellowship with him, and in his service'. Men and women have become cognizant of the fact that Paul is bearing it in Christ, that is, they mark the Christian spirit in which he endures it. However, F. Neugebauer has put forward the thesis that the expression 'in Christ' is a circumstantial or adverbial modification which speaks of Christ's saving activity, particularly his death and resurrection, by which one's life is now determined. If his thesis is accepted then the word order enables us to understand the whole clause as meaning that 'the manifestation of [Paul's] chains' is really 'in Christ'.²⁹ In other words, his imprisonment was a demonstration or manifestation of Christ's saving activity and therefore contributed to the spread of the gospel among those who made up the praetorian guard as well as among other Gentiles.

Next Paul indicates the gospel has made progress within the Christian community as well. As a second consequence of the news of Paul's activity others within the Christian fellowship have been given fresh stimulus for the work of evangelism. The apostle goes out of his way to accumulate terms expressive of courage (*pepoithotas*, 'persuaded'; *perissoterōs*, 'so much more'; *tolmao*, 'dare, have the courage'; and *aphobōs*, 'fearlessly') to show the Philippians that the majority of the believers in Rome, having had their confidence in the Lord strengthened by his example, have been encouraged to set forth the apostolic message more boldly.

This is not to suggest, however, that all has been plain sailing. Far from it. Indeed, while Paul rejoices that Christ is proclaimed (1:18), some unfortunately preach him from motives of jealousy and ambition because of an arrogant spirit of self-seeking. They apparently had no worthier motive than to rub salt into the apostle's wounds and so add to his sense of frustration which he might well feel in his restricted situation (vv15, 17).

Others preached Christ from much higher motives: they recognize the divine acceptance of Paul's ministry (1:15) and being inspired by love (v16) they are able to bear testimony to Christ in truth (v18). They are distinguished in their perspectives from those who preach from motives of jealousy and selfish ambition. The latter 'suppose' (*oimenoι*, v17) that through their preaching they will stir up trouble for Paul as a prisoner. In fact, what they 'imagine' fails to happen. By contrast, those who are inspired by *agapē*, true Christian love, 'know'³⁰ of Paul's responsibility for advancing the gospel and rightly interpret his imprisonment.³¹ They are aware that in his capacity he discharges faithfully the gospel ministry (see 1:7). What is more, they recognize that he has been set for (*keimai*) that defence by God (v16). There is no sense of divine disfavour in his captivity. Quite the reverse. Because he has been divinely appointed for the defence of the gospel his captivity is entirely understandable. They are not embarrassed or put off by his bonds. Instead they identify with him in proclaiming Christ, doing so out of true Christian love.

Several important points emerge from this significant paragraph (1:12-20) that bear on our theme of 'gospel'. First, as we observed in the case of the two earlier instances (vv5, 7) *euangelion* is a noun of agency (a *nomen actionis*) in which the emphasis falls not so much upon the content of the message as upon its dynamic, and almost personal, progress (vv12, 16). Consistent with this observation we note that the apostle does not speak of 'preaching the gospel' as such, though he does so on a number of occasions elsewhere (see above). It is quite clear, however, that the proclamation of the kerygma is a highly significant theme in this paragraph. Reference is made to the proclamation of the apostolic message three times explicitly (vv15, 17 and 18) and twice implicitly (vv15 and 16 — where the expression 'they preach Christ' is understood but not actually repeated). But Paul uses a number of expressions other than 'preaching the gospel' to make the point, viz. speaking the word (v14), preaching Christ (v15), proclaiming Christ (v17) and Christ being proclaimed (v18). Neither *euangelion* nor its cognate verb *euangelizomai* appears in this regard.

Secondly, it is clear that the 'advance of the gospel' (1:12) is of paramount importance to the apostle; hence his own personal interests are subordinated to the wider interests of the gospel and are read in the light of its advance. His own circumstances in prison, which one would have thought might have hindered the gospel, had surprisingly (note the *mallon*, 'rather, instead', in v12) served to advance it. Even the self interests of one group of preachers (vv15, 17-18) are necessarily subordinated to the gospel's. The amazing irony is

that their efforts, while motivated by antagonism towards Paul, 'actually further "his" interests'.³² They suppose to raise up affliction for him in his imprisonment but fail in their objectives.

Thirdly, one can speak of this *prokopē* ('progress') because of clear, observable facts. Paul is able to tell his Philippian friends that Christ has been at work in and through his imprisonment so that outsiders know he is suffering for Christ's sake, and that others within the Christian fellowship have been given fresh courage to proclaim the word of God. Paul knows of the progress of the gospel through these empirical, observable results. Their presence shows to him that the gospel is making headway in the capital. At the same time one can refer to these results or observable events as the advance of the gospel itself, or at least as significant elements in its progress. The *hōste* ('so that') clause of 1:13 not only introduces the two *actual* results of that advance (in vv13 and 14), but also gives precise statements as to its nature.

Fourthly, it is in the proclamation of Christ, not in the specific results of the preaching (e.g. conversions), that the progress of the gospel occurs. At a number of important points in his letters Paul makes it plain he desired that men and women might be saved (note his great concern for his own people, Israel, in Rom 9:1-3; 10:1). The *locus classicus* is probably 1 Cor 9:16-23 where he states that as one under divine compulsion to preach the gospel (v16) he desires to 'win' (*kerdainō* is used five times) Jews, Gentiles and 'the weak'. He has 'become all things to all men so that by all possible means [he] might save some' (v22). Convincing men and women of the truth of the gospel (cf. Gal 2:5) was of great importance. Yet here in Phil 1:12-18 the advance of the gospel is described in terms of boldly speaking forth the word of God (and its equivalents), not in terms of the number of converts or external responses made to the message. There seem to have been these positive results; but it is not the results as such which determined whether the gospel had been advanced.

Even when Christians preached Christ from improper motives (vv15, 17-18) the apostle could still rejoice that 'Christ is proclaimed' (v18), and thus the gospel was making its dynamic headway. The touchstone of that advance was not the motives of the preachers, though it is clear that Paul wished their orientation was otherwise for he speaks of them being moved by 'jealousy and rivalry' (v15), and of their preaching as a cover or mask for personal and selfish ends (contrast 1 Thess 2:5) since they supposed that through their preaching they would stir up trouble for Paul. But the apostle knew that in the proclamation of Christ, his death, resurrection and present

lordship, God was mightily at work. It was in the preaching of the gospel that God drew men and women to himself (2 Thess 2:13-17).

(d) *Conduct worthy of the gospel (1:27)*

Towards the end of the first chapter Paul turns from his own situation and directs the attention of his Philippian friends to what is required of them in his absence. Whatever may happen, whether he visits them again or not, one thing his readers must not fail to do: they must conduct their lives in a manner worthy of the *gospel* of Christ. Twice in 1:27 our term *euangelion* is employed and each of these occurrences in its own way is significant.

Although a fresh subject is opened up in this sentence as Paul turns directly to exhortation,³³ the links with the preceding are clear, and the parallels with 1:12-26 have been noted by a number of scholars. As K. Barth³⁴ has rightly observed the theme of the gospel is particularly significant: just as the apostle read his own circumstances in the light of the gospel's progress, so now he desires that the Philippians' behaviour be entirely worthy of that same gospel of Christ, resulting in their contending together with one accord for the faith of the gospel (*pistei tou euangeliou*).

By means of the introductory word *monon* (1:27) Paul focuses his attention on one highly significant demand: 'now the important thing' is this: 'see to it that you live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ'. He does not set forth a series of exhortations but only one, and it is crucial. Yet this one admonition is comprehensive as it covers every aspect of the readers' lives. Paul adds 'nothing more for this includes everything'.³⁵ Because of the comprehensive nature of the exhortation several commentators have suggested it stands as a heading to the whole section 1:27-2:18, and that the subsequent admonitions and statements expand and explicate what is involved in living worthily of the gospel. If this observation is correct, then (i) the appeal to unity and courage in the face of opposition (1:27-30), (ii) the exhortation to unity through humility (2:1-4) with (iii) Christ as the supreme example (vv 5-11), and (iv) the admonition for them to shine as stars in the universe (vv 12-18), are all elements in that worthy conduct.

In the clause 'conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ' the verb *politeuomai* has occasioned considerable discussion as to its precise nuance. Deriving from the word *polis* ('a city, city-state') the primary meaning of this verb was 'to live as a citizen, discharge one's obligations as a citizen'. (i) R. Brewer argued that *politeuomai* was used 'when conduct relative to some law of life — political, moral, social or religious — is signified'.³⁶ Consequently, the political overtones must be regarded as paramount in a highly

Romanized Christian congregation in the *colonia* of Philippi, and thus he paraphrased the clause: 'Continue to discharge your obligations as citizens and residents of Philippi faithfully and as a Christian should'.

(ii) Most commentators have rightly observed that *politeuomai* is not Paul's customary word to describe Christian conduct or behaviour. This is usually *peripateō* ('live, conduct oneself, walk'; cf. Rom 13:13; Eph 4:1; Col 1:10; 1 Thess 2:12; 4:12). Some have therefore concluded that Paul's term here is fully synonymous with *peripateō*. But probably *politeuomai* pointedly suggested itself to Paul as a distinctive term in the context of the city of Philippi, and by using it he drew attention to the mutual responsibilities his Philippian friends had as members of the local Christian community.

Elsewhere the apostle urges Christians to live lives worthy of God (1 Thess 2:12), of the Lord (Col 1:10), or of the calling to which they were called (Eph 4:1). Here by admonishing the Philippians to live worthily of *the gospel of Christ* Paul draws their attention again to that dynamic personal entity he has referred to so often in the chapter, in which Christ is mightily at work in its proclamation and which at the same time has him at the centre of its content. By calling his readers to live worthily of the gospel Paul is reminding them of the prior action of God in their midst.³⁷ At the same time 'the gospel establishes the norm of the Philippians' conduct'.³⁸ As they are wholly committed to the advance of the gospel, that is, its dynamic onward march, they will walk worthily of the gospel by holding fast to it, preaching and confessing it in spite of opposition and temptation.

Further, if the suggestion that 1:27 heads the section ending at 2:18 is correct, then behaviour consistent with the gospel will include unity through humility, following Christ's example and shining as lights in the world.

(e) *Contending for the faith of the gospel (1:27)*

The final reference to *euangelion* in chapter 1 turns up in the expression 'contending for the faith of the gospel'. Walking in a manner worthy of the gospel will involve standing fast or secure with a common purpose ('in one spirit') in the face of attacks upon that gospel progress. The following clauses explain positively (1:27b, 'struggling for the faith of the gospel') and negatively (v28, 'without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you') what this 'remaining steadfast' (*stēkete*) signifies.

In the positive statement *euangelion* appears in a phrase that has no parallel in the rest of the NT, 'for the faith of the gospel' (v27). The verb *sunathleō*, originally an 'athletic' metaphor meaning to 'contend, struggle along with', draws attention to the point that the Philippians

are to present an united front against the attacks of the enemy in their conflict for the gospel. Although the notions of hostility and persecution are present in the context, V. C. Pfitzner claims it would be wrong to view the struggle 'as a head-on frontal battle between the faith, and its enemies: "The purpose of this struggle is not the conquest and defeat of the enemy as such, but the spread and growth of faith, the same goal which was set before all Paul's work".³⁹ Here the stress is on unity and the need for a concerted effort among the Philippians themselves: the *sun-* in the verb is to be understood in this sense and may be paraphrased by 'contending as one man'. If the genitive *tou euangeliou* ('of the gospel') is one of origin, then it draws attention to the faith which is based on or arises out of the gospel. And it is for the cause of this faith that the Philippians are to stand united in their struggle.

By standing firm in the face of attacks made upon the gospel, Paul's Christian friends show that their goal is the same as his own, viz, the spread and growth of the faith which arises from this *euangelion*. Although their circumstances differ, Paul and the Philippians are engaged in the same struggle (*ton auton agōna*, 1:30), a struggle which Pfitzner⁴⁰ has shown conclusively is for the gospel and its progress. The paragraph (vv27-30) draws attention to two related motifs: (a) the *steadfastness* of the Philippians in the midst of suffering for the gospel, and (b) the *opposition* of their enemies to them and their stand for the gospel. It is this *euangelion*, the apostolic message which is here of paramount importance, and in v28 two sharply contrasting attitudes to it are set forth. Such a state of affairs (*hētis*, v28) with its opposite responses to the divine, authoritative message is a sign (*endeixis*) of two facts (*estin*): the perdition of the enemies of the gospel, and the salvation (*sōtēria*) of the Philippian Christians who have appropriated this dynamic word for themselves. *Euangelion* occupies a central role and the response of a person to it is a clear sign: either of their being on the road to destruction or on the road to salvation. A similar point is made by Paul at 1 Cor 1:18: 'For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God'.

(f) *Serving together in the gospel (2:22)*

Another instance of the absolute use of *euangelion* occurs at 2:22 where Paul states of Timothy that 'as a son with his father he has served with me in the gospel' (*eis to euangelion*). Once again *euangelion* is a noun of agency and, as E. Molland rightly pointed out, here too it denotes the work of evangelism.⁴¹ A number of English versions make this same point with their renderings, e.g. 'in the work

of the gospel' (NIV).⁴² *Euangelion* cannot refer simply to the content of the message.

Within the chapter, as G. F. Hawthorne correctly notes,⁴³ Paul seeks to deal with the problem of the Philippians being too concerned about their own interests (2:4). He mentions first the servant role of Jesus (vv 6-11), then the example of his own life which he is prepared to pour out as an offering for others (v 18), and finally the model of Timothy who was genuinely concerned for the Philippians' welfare (v 20) and made himself a slave for the furtherance of the gospel (v 22). This last expression occurs within a *hoti* clause and explains Timothy's 'proven worth'. His ongoing commitment to the gospel was evidence of this.

But a further point may be added. J. A. Motyer has suggested that 2:21 and 22 are linked together so that the facts mentioned in the latter are evidence of Timothy's 'pre-eminent devotion to the Lord Jesus'.⁴⁴ Motyer states: 'just as verses 20-21 identified seeking the good of other Christians with giving the prior place to the interests of Jesus Christ, so verses 21-22 identify giving the prior place to the Lord Jesus with being a slave for the gospel's sake'. So Timothy 'puts the Lord first by seeking the spiritual good of others through a sacrificial gospel ministry'. Paul had subordinated his own interests to those of the gospel; he desired that the Philippians focus their attention on one thing — lives consistent with the gospel. Now he states of Timothy, a pre-eminent Christian, that he has served as a slave in the furtherance of that same gospel.

(g) *Contending with Paul in the cause of the gospel* (4:3)

At 4:3 the athletic metaphor of 1:27 is again used in relation to the gospel, as Paul admonishes the congregation: 'help these women who have *contended* at my side in the cause of the gospel' (NIV). Euodia and Syntyche were highly valued fellow-workers of the apostle, and he underscores this point by reference to their participation in the work of evangelism (*en tō euangeliō*, 4:3). They had not only suffered for the gospel's sake — a point which is implied by the verb *sunathlein* ('contended') but had also taken an active part with Paul in his own struggle for the spread of that gospel.⁴⁵ A number of terms *suzugos* (lit. 'yoke-fellow'), *sunathleō* ('struggle along with') and *sunergoi* ('fellow-workers' — with the threefold repetition of *sun-*'with') draw attention to their co-operation with the apostle in this activity. They had participated in Paul's apostolic mission, his struggle for the gospel, perhaps even in the founding of the congregation at Philippi. This made Paul's appeal all the more urgent:⁴⁶ those who were his valued co-workers in the gospel should live in a way that is fit

and proper for all who have come under the lordship of Christ. Paul's exhortation for them to be of the same mind recalls 2:1-5 where the self-serving attitude of the Philippian Christians generally is set over against the self-sacrificing, self-giving attitude of Christ who was in the form of God but who poured himself out unselfishly for the good of others'.⁴⁷

(h) *The beginning of the gospel (4:15)*

The apostle's final reference to *euangelion* occurs in a concluding paragraph of his letter in which he expresses his gratitude to them for their generosity (4:10-20). The phrase in which our substantive appears is unusual: *en archē tou euangeliou* (lit. 'in the beginning of the gospel'; note Mark 1:1, which has a different meaning, however). Commentators are puzzled over the expression used by Paul in which he tells the Philippians that they were 'uniquely his partners in his missionary endeavours'.⁴⁸ The following temporal clause, 'when I went out from Macedonia', gives a more precise definition of the expression, though it does not solve the problem of its meaning. The suggestion of Gnlika, among a number of others, is that when Paul came into Macedonia and moved out from there he became entirely responsible for the mission of the gospel. Prior to this he had been second to Barnabas (Acts 13, 14).⁴⁹

But this option places too much weight on the gospel mission as being Paul's. It seems better to regard the expression from the standpoint of the Philippians, an interpretation the NIV clearly endorses with its rendering 'in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel', i.e. from the time of their active participation in it. This view fits neatly with the reference in 1:3-5 where God is thanked for the Philippians' partnership in the gospel 'from the first day until now'. Both passages have a number of linguistic parallels and both refer to the Philippians' financial support of Paul.⁵⁰ It seems appropriate, then, to regard the time reference as denoting the beginning of the gospel from the standpoint of the Philippians. And again *euangelion* is used to denote the dynamic progress of that gospel, its onward march, this time into the lives of the Philippians themselves.

IV. Conclusions

It is time to draw together the main results of our study and to summarize our conclusions. They are:

- (a) The *euangel-* word group occurs frequently in the Pauline corpus with the noun *euangelion* turning up the greatest number of times. This substantive often denotes the content of the message and thus means 'news' or 'good news'. A large number of instances of the word, however, draw attention to

the act, process or execution of the proclamation. The two meanings are often closely related since the gospel's content is set forth in the act of proclamation.

- (b) In Philippians only the noun *euangelion* appears, although it is used nine times in the space of four short chapters. Apart from one occurrence in 1:27 it is employed without modifiers; its meaning is not explained by Paul because it has become a technical term whose content and significance were already known to and accepted by the Philippians. *Euangelion* turns up in a number of unique expressions (e.g. 1:5, 7, 12 etc.) and almost always denotes the act of proclamation or gospel mission. At v 27 we noted, however, that the content of the gospel was in view since the Philippians were exhorted to conform their manner of life to that *euangelion* of Christ.
- (c) Six of the nine references to 'gospel' in Philippians are found in chap. 1: two instances turn up in Paul's introductory thanksgiving paragraph, while issues of the gospel clearly dominate the chapter from v12 onwards. The term is used of the Philippians first becoming Christians (1:5, 4:15), and their commitment to the dynamic spread of the gospel is ground for joyful thanksgiving to God.
- (d) The advance of the gospel is enormously important to Paul. He subordinates his own personal concerns to the wider interests of the gospel and reads his own personal inconveniences, sufferings and imprisonment in the light of its progress. The dynamic, onward march of the gospel can be discerned by a number of observable results both outside the Christian community as well as within it (1:13, 14). The ultimate touchstone, as Paul makes plain through a number of synonymous expressions, is that 'Christ is being proclaimed'. Even when some preach Him from improper motives such as jealousy and selfish ambition Christ is still being proclaimed (v18) and in this Paul rejoices for finally it is in this gospel that God works mightily. Further, it is in the preaching of Christ (his death, resurrection and present lordship) rather than in the specific results of the preaching (e.g. conversions) that the progress of the gospel occurs.
- (e) Not only does Paul subordinate his own personal concerns to the wider interests of the gospel. He also desires that the Philippians will focus their attention on living lives thoroughly consistent with that gospel (1:27). This will involve standing firm in the face of attacks made upon that gospel progress. Although the circumstances of Paul and the

Philippians differ they are involved in the same struggle (v 30) for the faith. Further, behaviour consistent with the gospel will mean demonstrating unity in humility among themselves and thus of following Christ's example, as well as shining like lights in the world.

- (f) A godly pattern whom Paul commends is Timothy. The apostle speaks of him in glowing terms. He puts the Lord Jesus first by seeking the spiritual welfare of others through a sacrificial *gospel ministry*.
- (g) Finally, attitudes to the gospel are of ultimate and eternal significance: the opposition of the Philippian populace to the believers in their stand for the gospel is a clear sign that these enemies are on the road to perdition and the Philippian believers themselves are on the way to salvation (1:28; cf. 1 Cor 1:18).

Notes

1. After attending the International Congress on World Evangelisation at Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974, Canon Knox wrote three articles (*The Australian Church Record* 1582 [Sydney, 1975] 4-5) on "World Mission". The first of these centred on "The Message".

2. For details see R. Morgenthaler, *Statistik des neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes* (Zürich: Gotthelf, 1958) 101; G. Friedrich, "euangelion", *TDNT* 2 (1964) 707-37; P. Stuhlmacher, *Das paulinische Evangelium. I. Vorgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1968) 56-108; and U. Becker, "gospel", *NIDNTT* 2 (1976) 107-15.

3. Friedrich, "euangelion", 721-5; Stuhlmacher, *Evangelium*, 189-206.

4. Cf. J. A. Fitzmyer, "The Gospel in the Theology of Paul", in *To Advance the Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 161.

5. Becker, "gospel", 108.

6. For references see *ibid.*

7. *ibid.*, 109; note the careful treatment of the LXX evidence by Stuhlmacher, *Evangelium*, 109-53.

8. G. Gloege, cited by Becker, "gospel", 109.

9. Fitzmyer, *Gospel*, 159.

10. *ibid.*

11. Note the earlier studies of J. Schniewind, *Evangelion. Ursprung und erste Gestalt des Begriffs Evangelium* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1927 and 1931), E. Molland, *Das paulinische Evangelion: Das Wort und die Sache* (Oslo: Dybwad, 1934), and J. W. Bowman, "The Term *Gospel* and its Cognates in the Palestinian Syriac", in *New Testament Essays: Studies in Memory of Thomas Walter Manson* (ed. A. J. B. Higgins; Manchester: Manchester University, 1959) 54-67. More recently note H. Schlier, "Euangelion im Römerbrief", in *Wort Gottes in der Zeit: Festschrift Karl Hermann Schelkle zum 65. Geburtstag dargebracht* (ed. H. Feld and J. Nolte; Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1973) 127-42.
12. Becker, "gospel", 111; cf. Stuhlmacher, *Evangelium*, 58.
13. Fitzmyer, *Gospel*, 152-58.
14. For a discussion of this disputed phrase see P. T. O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul* (NovTSup; Leiden: Brill, 1977) 41-46.
15. H. Seesemann (*Der Begriff KOINONIA im Neuen Testament* [Giessen: Töpelmann, 1933] 73-4, 79) championed this view and he was followed by a number of other influential Continental writers.
16. i.e., *koinōnia* with *eis* and the accusative case.
17. G. Panikulam, *Koinōnia in the New Testament* (AnBib; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1979) 82, and M. McDermott, 'The Biblical Doctrine of KOINONIA', *BZ* 19 (1975) 71.
18. J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (London: Macmillan, 1890) 81.
19. F. Hauck, "koinōnos", *TDNT* 3 (1966) 805.
20. *Der Philipperbrief* (Freiburg: Herder, 1968) 44.
21. "Thanksgiving and the Gospel in Paul", *NTS* 21 (1974-75) 144-55.
22. So rightly L. M. Dewailley, "La part prise à l'Évangile (Phil. 1.5)" *RB* 80 (1973) 247-60.
23. A. Deissmann, *Bible Studies* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901) 104-9. Cf. BAG, 138.
24. T. Y. Mullins, "Disclosure. A Literary Form in the New Testament", *NovT* 7 (1964) 44-50; J. L. White, *The Form and Function of the Body of the Greek Letter* (SBLDS; Missoula: Scholars, 1972) 121-2.
25. See, for example, J. F. Collange, *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Philippians* (London: Epworth, 1979) 51.
26. G. Stählin, "prokopē", *TDNT* 6 (1968) 704-5.

27. V. C. Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agōn Motif* (NovTSup; Leiden: Brill, 1967) 152, following Stählin, "prokopē", 706-7.
28. H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1875) 31. M. R. Vincent (*Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897] 16) correctly observes that the *hōste* ('so that') has an explanatory force with the explanation being regarded as a result of the notion of *prokopē* ("progress").
29. F. Neugebauer, *In Christus. Eine Untersuchung zum paulinischen Glaubensverständnis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1961) 121, and R. Jewett, "Conflicting Movements in the Early Church", *NovT* 12 (1970) 366-7.
30. *Eidotes* ("know") stands in deliberate contrast to *oiomenoi* ("suppose, imagine").
31. J. H. Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* (SNTSMS; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1975) 163.
32. Schütz, *Paul*, 165.
33. E. Lohmeyer, *Der Brief an die Philipper, an die Kolosser und an Philemon* (KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1964) 70; C. J. Bjerkelund, *Parakalō. Form, Funktion und Sinn der parakalō — Sätze in den paulinischen Briefe* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1967) 175. It is surprising that the directly exhortatory material occurs so early in the letter.
34. K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Richmond: Knox, 1962) 46.
35. W. Michaelis, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Philipper* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1935) 29.
36. R. R. Brewer, "The Meaning of *Politeuesthe* in Phil. 1:27", *JBL* 73 (1954) 76-83, esp. 80.
37. Cf. G. Friedrich, *Der Brief an die Philipper* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1962) 105.
38. Schütz, *Paul*, 50. To speak, however, of the gospel as a 'life-norm' is not to suggest that it has become a new law, cf. Fitzmyer, *Gospel*, 156.
39. Pfitzner, *Paul*, 116-7.
40. *ibid.*, 82-129.
41. Molland, *Euangelion*, 50; cf. Stuhlmacher, *Evangelium*, 58-9.
42. Cf. NEB, "in the service of the Gospel", and NASB "in the furtherance of the gospel".

43. G. F. Hawthorne, *Philippians* (Word Commentary; Waco: Word, 1983) 108.
44. J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians* (The Bible Speaks Today; Leicester: IVP, 1984) 141.
45. Pfitzner, *Paul*, 118-9.
46. Grammatically the relative pronoun 'who' (*haitines* of v3) introduces a subordinate causal clause and thus introduces an important reason for the two women urgently reconciling their differences — they had laboured together with Paul in the gospel: cf. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 180.
47. *ibid.*, 179.
48. *ibid.*, 203-4.
49. Gnilka (*Philippenerbrief*, 177) who is followed by several others.
50. O'Brien (*Thanksgivings*, 45-6) following the earlier researches of P. Schubert.