

Article

Brave Priestesses of Philippi: The Cultic Role of Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2)

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Abstract: When Paul, in Phil 4:2, “pleads” with Euodia and Syntyche to “agree with one another in the Lord”, he is both commending them for their priestly role as gospel workers among his group of converts and at the same time calling them back to a single-minded focus on gospel mission. Throughout the letter, the apostle has forged a link between gospel mission and cultic imagery, depicting himself and his gospel co-workers as priestly agents accomplishing sacrificial service. Thus, when he comes to this climactic exhortation at the letter’s close, he deploys this imagery as a way both to commend and correct these female leaders within the Philippian community of Christ-believers.

Keywords: Philippians; women in ministry; cultic metaphors; Pauline ethics

1. Introduction

If one were to try uncovering female leaders within the early Christian movement, Philippi would be a great place to begin the search.¹ Women were uncommonly prominent in leadership roles within this Roman colony during the Imperial era. As Valerie Abrahamson’s extensive work on this subject has shown, the epigraphic evidence stemming from this site shows females in many prominent roles, particularly among the religious groups of the colony. Inscriptions present women as leaders in the Diana cult, as priestesses of the prominent Imperial cult to the divinized Empress Livia, and then as leaders (together with other men) in the emerging cult of Isis (Abrahamsen 1995).² The evidence prompts Abrahamson to conjecture that “the overall socio-political atmosphere of the city had to have been somewhat egalitarian and supportive of women, girls, goddesses and divinized females” (Abrahamsen 1995, p. 81).³ To be sure, there is “evidence of Greek women with Roman citizenship who held high civic office and were priestesses in the imperial cult [throughout] Asia” (Witherington 1994, p. 108).⁴ Still, the “predominance of females among the inscriptions in Philippi” makes this particular locale a hotbed for female leadership amid the Greek East (Keown 2017, p. 39). Serving in priestly roles, in Philippi, we see that women “were active participants in liturgies, composed hymns and rites, administered temple and cult finances, organized feast day celebrations, played music and made leadership decisions that affected large numbers of people” (Abrahamsen 1995, p. 194).

Hence, for Abrahamson, as well as for others, it is not surprising that “women figure in Christian lore at Philippi from the very beginning” (Abrahamsen 1995, p. 82). On the contrary, the influence of the many leadership roles held by female cult officials in the colony would have created an expectation, an “*assumption* that women were to be among the leaders of any religious organization”, and this expectation, Abrahamson argues, would have been “felt by the Christian community” (Abrahamsen 1995, p. 91 [italics original]). As Marchal states, rather than being viewed as anomalous for the early Christian community in Philippi, “women’s leadership and participation in cultic life. . . would have been *expected*” there (Marchal 2006, p. 90 [italics original]; cf. Ascough 2003, pp. 134–36). And so, when we find Acts depicting Paul’s first encounter when crossing over into Macedonia as being with a group of women leading a prayer gathering beside the river (Acts 16:13), from among whom Lydia steps forward into the role of hostess for the wandering preacher,



Citation: Blois, Isaac D. 2024. Brave Priestesses of Philippi: The Cultic Role of Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2). *Religions* 15: 127. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15010127>

Academic Editor: Corné J. Bekker

Received: 19 October 2023

Revised: 13 January 2024

Accepted: 15 January 2024

Published: 18 January 2024



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the picture coheres well with the egalitarian and female-supportive portrait of the colony that Abrahamsen uncovers in the archeological data. Similarly, when Paul mentions two women, Euodia and Syntyche, in his letter to this fledgling assembly at Philippi, women who seemingly hold a prominent leadership role among the community (Osiek 2000),⁵ we find again a picture of female leadership within Philippian religious life. In contrast to Malinowski's study, which relegates Euodia and Syntyche to the status of courageous but lay-level workers among the Philippian community,⁶ Winter's insightful work on the new Roman woman shows that "Christian women were not relegated to the private rooms in first-century households. That was an ancient Greek custom, . . . but not the convention that operated in either of the Roman colonies of Corinth and Philippi or Rome itself" (Winter 2003, p. 194). Instead, women could and did undertake roles of leadership within their spheres of influence in the Roman world into which Paul stepped as itinerant preacher upon entering the Roman colony of Philippi.

It is these two women, Euodia and Syntyche, that form the basis of the following study, which argues that the apostle, in what looks like a biting reprimand, instead commends this female pair for their priestly role among his group of converts, while at the same time calling them back to a single-minded focus on the gospel mission that formed the basis of their leadership role from the very beginning. In order to show how Paul's language can be viewed as a commendation for cultic ministry,⁷ I first undertake an analysis of the letter as a whole that shows how the apostle appropriates cultic language into the service of gospel mission.⁸ Next, I show how the context of Paul's address to the women (4:2–4) commends them for just such gospel service. Finally, I show how Paul's repeated imperative that these two women "think the same thing in the Lord" (4:2) indicates a return to the gospel mission that constitutes the basis for their cultic role as priestesses among the Philippian congregation.

2. Gospel Mission as the New Cult of the Spirit in Philippians

Paul employs cultic language in Philippians in a way that some have referred to as "spiritualized". We need to be careful, however, because it is not true that Paul is setting up a contrast with the Jerusalem cult (Schüssler Fiorenza 1976);⁹ rather, the apostle follows a trajectory of inwardly appropriating cultic realities, a trajectory which had prior roots in Judaism. Tassin traces the historical development of cultic elements from biblical Israel into the intertestamental period, where he finds the Qumran community being forced, through their experience of temple-less exile, into "spiritual creativity" to maintain their sense of sacred identity (Tassin 1994, p. 99).¹⁰ Particularly, Tassin uncovers at Qumran "the 'spiritualization' of the cult", in which this community enlarged upon the expression of the "interior cult", that is, taking the law into the heart, focusing intently upon ethical engagement with the law (Tassin 1994, p. 100).¹¹ Gupta posits the following plausible reason for Paul's appropriation of cultic language for his own communities and ministry: "Though persecution and social ostracization would have been devastating to the identity of the community, Paul's use of cultic language offered them a chance to see their experiences from God's perspective" (Gupta 2010, p. 139).

Thus, when Paul draws on purity language that would have been fitting for cultic sacrificial practice, terms like *εὐλικρινής* (pure), *ἀπρόσκοπος* (blameless), *ἄμεμπτος* (faultless), *ἀκέραιος* (innocent), and *ἄμωμος* (without blemish),¹² these descriptors are now applied to communal conduct and behavior.¹³ Rather than a cult that consists of traditional priests offering animal sacrifices, the apostle displays himself in his gospel work presenting his converts as holy offerings to God (Phil 2:17; cf. Rom 15:17).¹⁴ Therefore, purity within this spiritual cult is determined by one's relation to the gospel. It is those who live "worthy" of the gospel (1:27) that attain to this status of purity and, hence, acceptability as an offering within this new cult of the Spirit.¹⁵ As Newton describes, the apostle "utilizes terms, taken from the cultic language of purity, which embrace the whole realm of the believer's life in Christ. . . they must be, like the sacrificial offerings of the Jerusalem Temple, free from blemish" (Newton 2005, p. 86). Vahrenhorst discusses the way in which Paul uses "cultic

vocabulary” in 2:15 in order to mark the goal of his ministerial labors, which he introduced earlier in his central imperative (“live worthily of the gospel”) from 1:27. Vahrenhorst summarizes that the apostle’s paraenesis throughout the section of 1:27-2:18 explicates how a gospel-worthy way of life looks and that its goal is explicitly a “cultically-connotated blamelessness” (Vahrenhorst 2008, p. 245).¹⁶

Paul engages in active gospel mission, both through his ministry when present in Philippi and now while absent through his letter writing, with the explicit purpose of bringing about such cultic purity. Paul prays for this purity within his converts (Phil 1:9–11), and he strives and labors toward this end. When faced with powerful opposition to his ministry and even tempted to give up, Paul reaffirms his priestly vocation to remain with the Philippians so that his presence with them might entail “fruitful labor” (1:22) and might further their “progress and joy in the faith” (1:25), a progress that then culminates in their becoming “blameless” when Paul presents them to God as an offering on the day of Christ (2:15–16).¹⁷

Paul’s own priestly role of consecrating pure offerings to God is conjoined with the priestly activity of the community of Christ-believers at Philippi as well. In 2:17, Paul envisions a possible outcome for his upcoming trial verdict, over which he sees reason to rejoice, in which he is “poured out on the sacrifice and offering” of the Philippian believers’ faith. It is clear from this that Paul views his apostolic role as involving priestly service. In the words of Daly, “Paul sees his apostolic life and mission as a ‘priestly—i.e., sacrificial—service,’ as a liturgy of life” (Daly 2009, p. 58). Similarly, Denis argues that the context of cultic imagery in Phil 2:15-16 (that is, Paul calls his converts irreproachable and pure children of God) substantiates a cultic understanding of 2:17, where Paul shows that “the faith, that is, the life of the Christians is a liturgy comparable to that of the temple, and it is joined to the idea of a libation, accomplished, or rather suffered, by the apostle” (Denis 1958, p. 630).¹⁸ Hence, the Philippian believers enact a “liturgy of the temple”, which Paul then furthers through his additional libation (σπένδομαι) over-above their liturgical sacrifice (τῆ θυσίᾳ καὶ λειτουργίᾳ τῆς πίστεως) (Denis 1958, p. 629). In this case, both Paul and his converts participate in sacrificial activity within the new cult of the Spirit.¹⁹ He puts himself forward in kenotic, sacrificial gospel labor to the extent that he becomes a thing sacrificed (much like Christ does in the hymn at 2:8), whereas the believers enter into the role of liturgists of their faith, offering their own pure lifestyles in accord with the faith of the gospel as a sacrifice (θυσίᾳ) to God. As Strathmann summarizes about the Philippian believers’ participation in cultic activity: “In virtue of their faith they are both a sacrifice to God and priests who offer God sacrifices” (Strathmann 1967, p. 227).

The believers again are connected with cultic offerings when Paul turns to discuss the issue of their financial gift to Paul at the end of the letter.²⁰ Here again, at 4:18, the Philippian believers are depicted as having presented a “sacrifice” (θυσίᾳ) to God by means of their renewed financial support to the imprisoned apostle.²¹ Paul richly commends them for this liturgical effort, indicating that, just as the sacrificial offerings of ancient Israel’s cult, the Philippians’ sacrifice is “acceptable” (δεκτός), something that is “well-pleasing (εὐάρεστον) to God”.²² In order to capitalize on the nature of the Philippians’ sacrificial generosity as pleasing to God, Paul labels the offering a “fragrant aroma” (ὀσμὴν εὐωδίας),²³ which recalls a rich olfactory tradition associated with Israel’s cult (e.g., Lev 1:9; 2:2; 3:5; 8:28; 23:13).²⁴ Hence, just as Paul has developed in the letter a new form of cult that takes place in the Spirit and centers around the gospel,²⁵ so too does this new cult of the Spirit have its own version of sacrificial offerings.²⁶ In Phil 1:10 and 2:15, the offerings that Paul—as priest par excellence in this new cult—presents to God on the final Assize are the transformed lives of the Philippian believers themselves. In Phil 2:17, Paul spends himself sacrificially, while the Philippians offer their own faith(fulness) as their portion of sacrifice. Then again at the end of the letter, the Philippian assembly’s financial contribution to Paul’s gospel ministry becomes the sweet-smelling fragrance of this new cult.

Not only does the liturgy of the new cult have its own spiritualized, internally and morally pure sacrificial offerings, it also has its own system of liturgical worship. The

gospel around which this cult centers proclaims Jesus Christ as Lord (Phil 1:2). He has acquired this lordly status through undergoing his own sacrificial self-emptying (note the thematic connection between Jesus's kenotic self-giving in 2:6 with Paul's self-emptying sacrifice in 2:17), and the exaltation Jesus received from God on the basis of (διό, 2:9) this obedient self-offering becomes the foundation of a new cult of worshippers committed to confessing (ἑξομολογῶμαι) "that Jesus Christ is Lord" (2:11). Among those who are, thus, cultically committed to Christ, Paul, of course, counts himself, along with his Philippian audience, with whom he later joins himself in a communal self-description that "we are the circumcision", that is, "those who worship (λατρεύοντες) by the Spirit of God and who cultically celebrate (καυχώμενοι ἐν) Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:3).²⁷ Just as this new cult centers around the person of and message about Christ, so its liturgy is empowered by the Spirit of God. Members of this cult, having become sharers of Christ, have also become sharers in his Spirit (cf. 2:2), which now provides a new mode of worship, enabling liturgical activity that appropriately expresses their identity as God's own covenant people (the "circumcision", cf. 3:3). This is a radical assertion from the Jewish Paul, who presents this Gentile assembly as a true conduit of God's chosen people, accomplishing the key cultic markers and practices, namely circumcision and worship, in this new Spirit-empowered mode which Christ's Lordship has ushered in.²⁸

Not only is the mode of worship in this new cult shifted so that it is now accomplished "by the Spirit" (reading the ἐν as indicating the means of action), but also the sphere of worshipful joy becomes reoriented around the person of the newly proclaimed Lord. Paul describes his own party as constituting those who "boast in Christ Jesus" (3:3). This activity of worship, which represents "cultic adoration devoted to God",²⁹ is what separates the Jewish circumcision-of-flesh party from the Christ-believers, who are circumcised of heart and, therefore, are God's true people.³⁰ The activity of boasting has rich cultic resonances within Israel's worship, and Paul shows how such cultic joy and pride now occur "in" (ἐν) the Messiah.

Thus, we have seen how Paul has gone out of his way to incorporate numerous elements from Israel's cultic system into the gospel movement of Christ for which he energetically labors, thereby crafting a new liturgy of the Spirit.³¹ He presents the offerings of this new cult in morally transformed lives and in sacrificial giving, and he depicts the form of the new worship as Christologically-focused and Spirit-empowered. In what follows, however, we still need to address the question of who makes up the cultic personnel devoted to serving in this new cult. While we have already discussed the ways in which Paul presents himself as a priest in the letter (i.e., he is the one offering to God the sacrifice of the transformed lives of his converts),³² we next turn to the other liturgists that arise within the letter, among whom stand the two women Euodia and Syntyche.

3. Priestly Personnel in the New Cult of the Spirit

First, though, we find Epaphroditus, the Philippian assembly's representative whom they sent to transport their financial gift to Paul and to aid him in prison, depicted as occupying a liturgical role. We saw earlier in our brief look at Phil 2:17 that the Philippian believers en masse are enacting a "liturgy" (λειτουργία) of their faith, most likely in connection both with their commitment to moral purity and their dedication to financially supporting the imprisoned apostle (cf. 4:18). This widespread participation in the new cult of the Spirit by the whole assembly then becomes focused through the efforts of their apostle, Epaphroditus. Having been sent out by the assembly, Epaphroditus is a "liturgist" to Paul's needs (2:25).³³ While the cultic undertones might get overlooked here,³⁴ becoming subsumed under the broader idea of help and service, the cultic associations resurface with a repeated use of the λειτουργ- root at the end of the passage. Whereas in the imperial Roman context of first-century Philippi, *leiturgia* "entailed public works projects that Roman and provincial elites often took on at their own expense, as a means of enhancing their status in the eyes of the people", Paul transforms the use of the term so that it "takes on [the] sense of 'sacrificial service' to God and on behalf of the gospel

community” (Agosto 2000, pp. 427–28). Here, the imprisoned Paul commends Epaphroditus because, like Christ and like Paul himself, this beloved brother has been engaged in sacrificially expending his own life for the work of the gospel (2:30). In so doing, Epaphroditus is filling out whatever was lacking in his assembly’s λειτουργία to Paul (2:30). As Paul presents it, the Philippian believers’ participation in the new cult of the Spirit entails that they owe a liturgy to God and Christ but also to Paul as the servant of Christ.³⁵ They are, thus, simultaneously engaged in fulfilling this liturgy both to God (2:17) and to Paul (2:30; 4:18) through Epaphroditus. Thus, in his role as conveyor of this sacred financial offering, Epaphroditus possesses an important mediating, even priestly, role within the new cult of the Spirit.³⁶ His status as a “co-laborer” (συνεργόν, 2:25) alongside Paul combined with his energetic, sacrificial efforts on behalf of the “work of Christ” (2:30) earn him a glowing commendation from Paul such that he is then included within the list of godly models (Paul, Christ, Timothy, etc.) held forth in the letter.

When, in the letter, Paul turns at 4:2 to the two women, Euodia and Syntyche (and it is a noticeable turn in light of the direct address through using their proper names),³⁷ the apostle’s attitude is not so glowing, yet his overall treatment of the women still issues in commendation, particularly on account of their energetic efforts for the gospel ministry of establishing the new cult of the Spirit.³⁸ Paul’s positive description of how these women have behaved in the past shows their prominence as leaders within the new cult of the Spirit that is dedicated to gospel ministry, and it does so by recalling key language from earlier in the letter.³⁹ Paul recollects how Euodia and Syntyche have “striven together” (συνήθλησάν) with him “in the gospel” (4:3).⁴⁰ This repeats language that Paul used earlier in his central admonition to the entire assembly, urging them in 1:27 to “strive together” (συναθλοῦντες) in the faith “of the gospel”.⁴¹ Hence, the apostle can commend the two women for modeling precisely that type of behavior to which he exhorts the entire group, namely a perseverance in and participation with Paul’s own sacrificial, cultically described labors of proclaiming the gospel so as to produce a fruitful offering of holy lives for God.⁴² Striving for the gospel leads directly to bringing about a “sacrifice and service of faith” (in 2:17),⁴³ and it is likely that the same cultic outcome holds true for Euodia and Syntyche’s gospel-striving as does for the assembly as a whole.

Secondly, Paul refers to these two women as numbering among a larger group whom he labels “my fellow-workers” (συνεργῶν, 4:3).⁴⁴ This is the same term used to commend Epaphroditus earlier in the letter, where this title of “fellow-worker” is linked explicitly with that individual’s important cultic function as the community’s liturgist. In light of this connection between Paul’s commendation of Euodia and Syntyche with two earlier key references to cultic activity on the part of the Philippian Christ-believing assembly, it is possible that these two women are being held forth as occupying important, leading cultic roles within this budding Christian community,⁴⁵ hence my reference to them in the title of this study as “priestesses”.⁴⁶ Such a cultic role would, of course, reside within the redefined cult of the Spirit that, as has been shown above, Paul is developing throughout the letter.⁴⁷ These women’s laudatory commitment to gospel work is what the apostle acknowledges, holding them forth to the wider community as praise-worthy for their past contributions to the central focus of the cultic community, which is the progress of the gospel.⁴⁸ Such a role, as praise-worthy priestesses in the past, however, would not exempt them from receiving admonishment in the present to a renewed focus on their priestly task. So now, in the final section of this study, I address the apostle’s admonition that these two women “think the same thing in the Lord” (4:2).

4. Auto-Phronos as Unified Purpose of the New Cult

Just as Paul’s language of commendation for the women recalled key language from earlier in the letter, so too does Paul’s injunction to them that they “think the same thing in the Lord”. Shortly after the epistle’s central imperative that the community “strive together for/in the faith of the gospel” (1:27), Paul gives a second, corollary imperative that they would complete his joy by “thinking the same thing” (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε, 2:2).⁴⁹ It would

seem that gospel labor, which forms the central driving focus of the new cult of the Spirit, is intricately linked with unified thinking. Shared work requires a shared mind, and so this letter that aims at celebrating and fostering gospel partnership is riddled with references to one's pattern of thought. The version of *auto-phronos*, of unified thinking, envisioned throughout the letter encompasses commitment to sacrificial self-giving, which reflects the new version of sacrificial offerings within the newly established cult of the Spirit. Hence, Paul speaks of this community embracing "the same" (τὸ αὐτόν) struggle and sacrifice that he is undergoing (1:30). This unity in the face of struggle and opposition is balanced by a similarly unified experience of cultic celebration and joy, since after both he and they enact their cultic sacrifices in 2:17, Paul rejoices and "in the same way" (τὸ . . . αὐτό) the Philippians are invited to rejoice (2:18). Sharing a communal stake is an important element of the new cult of the Spirit, and thinking with—or rather patterning one's life around—this unified purpose is the goal of Paul and of all his fellow-workers.

Ultimately, thinking "the *same* thing" involves thinking "*this* thing" (τοῦτο φρονεῖτε), namely becoming unified around the pattern of Christ's thinking (2:5). Quite likely this is what Paul implies when he pleads with Euodia and Syntyche to think the same thing "*in* the Lord". He is calling them back into the kind of cultic priestly leadership that embraces Christ for a model,⁵⁰ willingly expending oneself in kenotic self-sacrifice rather than jealously pursuing "one's own things" (τὰ ἑαυτῶν, 2:4). This other, selfishly motivated form of leadership, with a pattern of thought and behavior that diverges from Christ, appears in 3:15 as a form of *hetero-phronos* (thinking otherwise) and stands opposed to the *auto-phronos* (thinking the same) or *touto-phronos* (thinking like Christ) into which Paul invites his audience throughout the whole of the letter.⁵¹ Rather than each individual pursuing her or his own goal, the new cult of the Spirit established by Christ's exaltation and proclaimed by the apostle calls its adherents to gather around one unified goal, namely the advance of the gospel about this exalted and eagerly awaited Savior. Within this new cult of the Spirit, Christ models appropriate priesthood, which involves surrendering the penchant for "considering one's own things" so as instead to "think the one thing", the advance of the gospel which alone will bear the kind of fruit which serves as "a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God" (4:18). These two women, Euodia and Syntyche, have committed themselves as priestesses to just such a gospel ministry in the past, and it is to this that Paul is inviting them to return once again in the present here at the close of his letter. Hence, when understanding Euodia and Syntyche, rather than primarily envisioning a pair of quarrelsome and catty women with some petty—or even significant—interpersonal strife, we should call to mind a team of committed and faithful female ministers of the gospels. They might need a reminder about the main focus of that ministry, but their overall characterization by Paul, when seen in light of the letter's larger flow, is glowingly positive.

5. Conclusions

What this study has argued is that Paul's appeal at the close of his letter to the Philippians, given to two named female individuals, must be understood within the context of the redefinition of cult depicted throughout the letter as a whole. Paul has envisioned a new cult of the Spirit, which is empowered by the Spirit's presence in the community and which focuses on the exalted Lord Jesus, and it is as liturgists within this new cult that Paul and his co-workers enact their labors. Euodia and Syntyche are members of this union of co-laborers, fellow liturgists alongside Epaphroditus, Clement, and even Paul himself, all of whom expend themselves for the sake of the community's progress in the gospel. Having begun this good work, the apostle finds it necessary to call them back to this foundational focus of their ministry, namely to re-pattern their mindset in leadership around Christ. Ultimately, we discover at the end of this warm letter from Paul to his friends at Philippi a picture of shared leadership within the community of faith that is committed to serving others through the power of and after the manner of Christ Jesus.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- 1 (Ascough 2003, p. 52): “The women of Macedonia had a reputation and tradition of initiative and influence”.
- 2 On the shift of female allegiance from the cult of Diana to that of Isis, (Marchal 2006, p. 78), notes that, because there was a temple to Isis, serving the Isis cult allowed for more status than that of Diana.
- 3 We must balance, however, this optimistic appraisal of the situation in Philippi for women, with Abrahamsen’s sobering statement in a later publication, (Abrahamsen 2015, p. 25): “In the patriarchal and imperial Greco-Roman culture of Philippi, women at all levels of society—slave, free, and freed—suffered certain degrees of oppression and marginalization”.
- 4 (Burnett 2020, p. 132), uncovers numerous inscriptions from first-century Philippi indicating “that women were cultic officials of nonofficial cults and exercised some authority over men”.
- 5 Cf. (Luter 1996, p. 412), who presents the following as one reason for the “importance” of women disciples in Philippians: “The mention that Euodia and Syntyche were formerly ‘striving together in the gospel’ (Phil 4:3) indicates that they had previously been models of the kind of behavior Paul was now urging (1:27) for the Philippian congregation”. Cf. (Belleville 2021b, p. 86): “Paul’s public appeal. . . says something about their stature within the Christian community”.
- 6 (Malinowski 1985, p. 63), specifically delimits the two women off from being among the leadership roles of the “overseers and deacons” whom Paul mentions in Phil 1:1. Even worse than Malinowski’s relegation of Euodia and Syntyche to lower levels of ministry is the slighting jab by (Furnish 1985, p. 103), that the situation Paul depicts in Phil 4:2 entails “just a case of two bickering women”. This criticism of the two women continues in the scholarship, with their being described as “wrangling” (Garland 1985, p. 172), “squabbling and cavilling” (Peterlin 1995, p. 103), and “quarrelsome” (Caird 1976, p. 149).
- 7 Along these lines, see (Fellows and Stewart 2018, p. 223), who argue also that Euodia and Syntyche have a “leadership function within the church” and, additionally, that Paul’s opaque reference to the “loyal yokefellow” in 4:3 is in fact a “compliment” for the entire Philippian Christ-believing community.
- 8 On Paul’s appropriation of priestly service for gospel work, see (Bloomquist 2016, p. 282): “Paul invoked priestly discourse, which concerns sacrificial life performed for the purpose of beneficial exchange between God and humans”. See also (Ware 2011, p. 317), who draws on 2:17 and 4:18 to present the Philippians as a “community of priests”. Cf. (Patterson 2015, p. 101).
- 9 (Finlan 2004, pp. 50–51), helpfully distinguishes between six ways in which Paul “spiritualizes”, among which he places Paul’s strategy “to redefine terms” as he does in Phil 3:3 within Level Four spiritualization, namely, the “metaphorical application of cultic terms to non-cultic experiences”. In Finlan’s analysis, p. 63, this version of spiritualization “rethink[s] cult by reinterpreting. . . the cult’s rationale”. I disagree, however, with Finlan’s proposal, p. 219, that in Phil 2:14–17, “Paul’s ‘high-group’ side comes out”, such that he uses cultic metaphors “to encourage subjugation to the group”. For a thorough discussion of the issues involved, see (Marlatte 2017, pp. 17–33). Cf. (Song 2021, pp. 6–8).
- 10 Cf. (Schiffman 1999, p. 272): “Once the [Qumran] sectarians had decided to refrain from Temple rituals, two basic strategies were adopted: seeing the sect as a substitute for the Temple, and using prayer as a substitute for sacrifice”. (Schiffman, p. 274), notes that, in light of the fact that the sect itself was regarded as a Temple, “it was obligatory to maintain Temple purity laws within the context of the life of the group”.
- 11 (Stettler 2014, p. 539), uncovers a similar trajectory in which Paul’s reference to spiritual offerings brought by the church (in 2:17 and 4:18) hearkens back to the idea at Qumran of the community as a spiritual temple.
- 12 This term reproduces the privatized version of μῶμος, which the LXX translator of Deuteronomy employs to render מום when describing the rebellious nature of Israel (Deut 32:5).
- 13 See (Vahrenhorst 2008, p. 241), who comments on the fairly uniform way in which Paul in Philippians makes use of cultic language “zur Charakterisierung gemeindlicher Lebensführung”.
- 14 (Vahrenhorst 2008, p. 230), argues that the cultic terminology within Philippians serves Paul’s greater purpose in the letter of exhorting these believers to unity and to a lifestyle corresponding to Christ’s example. (Schlier 1968, p. 256), concludes his treatment of Paul’s liturgical ministry in Rom 15:15–19 with a recognition of the existential nature of this ministry: “Dann den Opferdienst der priesterlichen ‘Liturgie’ des Evangeliums durch den Apostel, der sich in seiner Hingabe an und für das Evangelium auch existentiell vollzieht”.
- 15 I draw here on the phrase “new liturgy in the Spirit” from the title of the seminal article on the subject by (Denis 1958). Note the similar notion in the characterization by (Baldanza 2006, p. 53), of Paul’s cultic language in Phil 3:3 about the Pauline community being those who worship in the Spirit of God: “the Spirit is the principle, the dynamic fount of the *new cult*” (translation and added emphasis are mine). Cf. (Dürr 2021, p. 244).

- 16 Cf. (Stettler 2014, p. 541), who points out that the *Hauptmotivation* for holiness in the letter is the gospel itself, which is the source of the believers becoming holy and that which then motivates them to continue living “worthily”.
- 17 The apostle’s hope that the transformed lives of his converts will furnish “boasting” (εἰς καύχημα) for him on the day of Christ could indicate that Paul envisions himself as participating in the glorious adornment which was the prerogative of the high priest. Elsewhere, Paul can claim that his converts represent “his crown of boasting” (στέφανος καυχήσεως) (1 Thess 2:19; cf. Ezek 16:12 LXX; Prov 17:6). See the conglomeration of the καυχ-lexeme when describing the high priest Simon’s glorious apparel in Sir 50, on which, see (Aitken 1999). Cf. (Burton 2019, p. 295), who points out that תפארת (often translated καύχημα throughout LXX) “as a form of garment is entirely confined to the category of priestly wearers”. While Paul does not speak of *dressing* himself in καύχημα at 2:16, he does describe the glory arising for him from the Philippians’ faithful adherence to Christ as constituting them to be his “crown” (στέφανός μου, 4:1), which proves a wearable and, in light of this connection, a priestly form of glory. On the mutuality of boasting in the letter, see (Blois 2020).
- 18 My translation.
- 19 (Strathmann 1967, p. 227), argues, in light of the proximity to θυσία, for a “cultic nuance for λειτουργία” in Phil 2:17. He concludes that through these two terms, Paul intends “the sense of cultic and priestly ministry” to characterize “either the missionary work of Paul or the Christian walk of the Philippians”.
- 20 See the insightful discussion by (Patterson 2015, p. 106), where she describes the movement of the financial gift “from the hands of the Philippians to those of Epaphroditus, to those of Paul”, which ultimately becomes “reinscribed” by Paul “as an ascent to God”. Thus, through “this fairly simple sacrificial metaphor, Paul has enlarged the context in which all of the actions of the Philippians are to be interpreted”.
- 21 Cf. (Strathmann 1967, p. 227), discussing the Philippian financial gift to Paul in Phil 4:18: “The collection is thus brought into sacral and cultic relation”, though Strathmann then denies the possibility of such cultic relation in light of his opinion that in Paul’s use of λειτουργία in Phil 2:30 “there is no sense. . .of the priestly cultus”.
- 22 Note the possible connection with Phil 2:13 between εὐάρεστον (4:18) and εὐδοκίας (2:13); the latter term links up to Jesus’s baptism (i.e., Mk 1:11).
- 23 Note also the similarity to Euodia’s name. This is no coincidence; Paul has intentionally chosen a way to describe the sacrificial financial gift of the community in a way that links it with (one of) the two women, thereby further praising them through his commendation of the community’s commitment to financially supporting the apostle’s gospel ministry.
- 24 (Denis 1958, pp. 432–33), argues in connection with 2 Cor 2:11–14 that Paul’s usage of this olfactory image is “stereotypical” in the LXX for characterizing “sacrifices that God accepts as pleasing” (cf. Sir 24:15). Denis notes that in Sir 39:14 “the spiritualization has become moral”, since the actions of the just are characterized there by the same expression, thereby linking Wisdom and cultic traditions together.
- 25 (Brunner 1968, p. 327), argues for a close connection between the early church’s usage of liturgical language and its gospel proclamation, noting that both of these tools enable believers to span the gap between the church today and those early experiences of God’s saving wonders in the Christ-event. Brunner goes so far as to say that it is precisely the New Testament’s liturgical language that prompts the “Aktualisierung der biblischen Botschaft” (p. 328).
- 26 Note the astute observation of (Nasrallah 2019, p. 126): “The rapid-fire exchange of images and terminology renders cash, or things, into sacrifices”.
- 27 For a justification of this translation, which links the boasting terminology of this passage to the cultic worship of Israel, see the chapter on pride in my forthcoming LNTS monograph on the Role of Emotions in Philippians.
- 28 See (Zoccali 2011, p. 31), whose careful analysis of how Paul’s Gentile converts relate to the apostle’s Jewish heritage concludes thus: “While the question of the place of the other nations *vis-à-vis* Israel in God’s redemptive purposes was answered in various ways in early Judaism, with no real consensus view, the understanding of what Paul had come to embrace was that with the coming of the Christ and dawning of the new age Jews *qua* Jews and Gentiles *qua* Gentiles were joining together into a single, and necessarily unified community of the redeemed”.
- 29 (Cipriani 1994, p. 232), discusses the key eschatological expectation of Israel that God would circumcise their hearts in Deut 30:6 in connection with Paul’s description of the believing community at Philippi in Phil 3:3, noting the cultic aspects of this hope, since the heart-circumcision prepares God’s people explicitly for worship (Deut 10:16).
- 30 (Weiß 1954, p. 359), notes how Paul’s depiction of worship “by the Spirit” in Phil 3:3 is divinely producing the “kultische Qualität” of circumcision. (Gathercole 2002, p. 265), discussing Romans 1–5, notes how Jewish emphasis on boasting “in the law” (cf. Sir 39:8) becomes redefined by Paul into a new version of boasting in Christ: “Paul’s boast in God was defined as a boast through the Lord Jesus Christ” which “excluded a reliance on obedience to Torah leading to final justification”.
- 31 (Strack 1994, pp. 304–6), argues in reference to Phil 2:17 that Paul employs the help of “einer kultischen Deutungskategorie” when enumerating (1) his own ministry of gospel proclamation and (2) the faith of the Philippian believers.
- 32 See also (Klauck 1986, p. 115), who in discussing Rom 15:16 writes that Paul “hat einen besonderen Auftrag, und den umschreibt er mit sakralen Termini, die er aber aus dem kultischen Bereich ins Christologische und Eschatologische überträgt. Sein

Dienstherr ist Christus, sein Priesterdienst besteht in der weltweiten Evangeliumsverkündigung, die sich vor einem endzeitlichen Horizont vollzieht”.

- 33 (Strack 1994, p. 47), summarizing his analysis of the Greco-Roman and Second-Temple Jewish usage of λειτουργός, argues that, while a cultic connotation is not necessitated in Paul’s usage of the term, it is possible. (Strack 1994, p. 45) shows how in pagan usage the term began with describing public service to the polis but then acquired an extended sense “im sakralen Bereich”. (Strack 1994, pp. 45–46) similarly uncovers numerous instances of emphatically cultic ways in which the λειτουργό-root appears in early Jewish texts (Test Levi 4:2; 2:10). While, in Josephus, λειτουργία occurs exclusively describing the priestly cult (e.g., *Bell.* 2.417; *Ant.* 20.218), Philo uses it to describe spiritual worship apart from the temple cult (*Post.* 185). On the whole, though, (Strack 1994, p. 46) argues that in Philo and across the LXX, λειτουργία is used as a “terminus technicus für den priesterlichen Kult”.
- 34 Although, (Williams 2013, p. 337), similarly notes that the title of λειτουργός that Paul applies to Epaphroditus “denotes distinguished service, likely of a priestly type of activity which resembled Paul’s service” (emphasis added).
- 35 Cf. the interesting conjecture that Paul viewed his prerogative to financial support in terms of the priestly right to eat a portion of the sacrificial offerings in (Weiß 1954, p. 357): “Wie konkret Paulus seine Rolle als Priester gesehen hat, wird durch Phil 4:17–18 beleuchtet, wo er die ihm für seine Bedürfnisse überbrachte Gabe als Opfer bezeichnet und also die Regel anwendet, daß die Priester Anteil haben am Altare”.
- 36 On the important role that Epaphroditus played in mediating the relational connection between Paul and the Philippian community, see (Metzner 2002).
- 37 (Cassidy 2020, p. 132), points to the two women’s names as evidence for the possibility that either of them “was a slave or a former slave”, which thereby heightens the significance that such individuals of lower status were held in “prominence” among the community and by the apostle. Cassidy notes that Pliny “identified two slave women as ‘ministers’ (*ministrae*) within the Christian community of Bithynia-Pontus before he tortured them” (*Letters* 10.96.8).
- 38 Cf. (Sergienko 2013, p. 106), who argues against Malinowski: “The fact that Paul puts them alongside other ‘co-workers’ who struggled for the sake of the gospel puts them into an active role, meaning ‘that these women were involved in the evangelization of nonbelievers’” (citing from (Osiek et al. 2009, p. 227)). (Frederickson 2013, p. 117): “the repetition of τὸ αὐτὸ φρόνειν in 4:2 casts Euodia and Syntyche into a favorable light by connecting them to longing, the central theme of the Christ Hymn, just as other leaders, Timothy and Epaphroditus, were earlier linked to Christ’s passion”.
- 39 Many scholars see 4:2 as climactic and summative for the message of the letter as a whole. See (Garland 1985, p. 173). In the view of one scholar, (Marchal 2015, p. 164), “reflecting upon the role of Euodia and Syntyche in this letter reveals the arc and disposition of the letter overall”. Cf. (Belleville 2021a, p. 87), who, discussing Paul’s description of the letter’s recipients as “overseers and deacons” (1:1), argues that “Euodia and Syntyche could well have been part of this group of leaders”.
- 40 (Pfitzner 2013, p. 105): “Agonistic language no longer expresses competition and rivalry in the human quest for honor and status. It instead illustrates the vocation Paul shares with his audience; they are in a common contest (*agon* or *athletis*) for the gospel, and that in a double sense: it is a struggle to promote the gospel (Philippians 1:27, 4:3) and to withstand opposition in the process (Philippians 1:30). . . Individual achievement here gives way to total teamwork as fellow believers strive together ‘in one spirit, with one mind’ (Philippians 1:27)” (emphasis added).
- 41 Cf. (Amadi-Azuogu 2007, p. 14), who points to the honorific context of these two women’s role as Paul’s “fellow athletes”, constituting their enjoyment of the “highest privileges available in the community”.
- 42 Noting the counterintuitive nature of the claim, (Frederickson 2013, p. 118), points to Paul’s striking athletic commendation of the two women: “thinking of Euodia and Syntyche as leaders is like imagining females showing up at the stadium and digging in at the starting line with the men. . . [I]t is precisely in the athletic prowess (in Philippians a metaphor of longing for communion) they share with Paul that Euodia and Syntyche excel”.
- 43 Cf. (Strack 1994, pp. 306–7), who notes how Paul’s usage of πιστις in 2:17 recalls the similar idea of striving for the “faith of the gospel” in 1:27, such that the holiness entailed in the Philippian believers’ participating in cultic ministry at 2:17 represents the Ziel toward which Paul’s entire ministry of Evangeliumsverkündigung has been aiming.
- 44 (Ollrog 1979, p. 72), conclusively states about Paul’s usage: “Der Begriff συνεργός ist. . .ein höchst sachlicher Titel” insofar as it indicates both a common task and a shared labor in the gospel; hence, it is for Paul both a “Zentralbegriff und terminus technicus für die mit ihm in der Missionsarbeit stehenden Personen”.
- 45 See the observation in (Hull 2016, p. 6): “That [Euodia and Syntyche] are included ‘with Clement and the rest’ of Paul’s ‘co-workers’ . . . underscores their status as missionaries [*sic.*], with the same standing as Paul’s male associates”. Cf. (Cotter 1994, p. 353), who argues that, on account of their belonging “to a team of men and women evangelizers, . . . Paul joins both in his praise”.
- 46 On the notion that two female evangelists might be viewed as “priestesses”, despite the acknowledgment that women were excluded from the priesthood in Jewish tradition, (Grenz 2021, p. 315), argues that all believers are brought into the role of priests, with no gender exclusions: “Because Christ has qualified all believers to stand in God’s presence, regardless of race, social status, or gender, we are all ministers within the fellowship. As priests of God—and only because we are priests—we are called by the Spirit to ministries among Christ’s people, and some of these ministries include positions of leadership”.
- 47 (Dahl 1995, p. 14), argues convincingly that this admonition serves as a climax for the entire letter.

- 48 As (Dickson 2003, p. 142), comments: “The exact form of gospel proclamation cannot be ascertained, but that these women engaged in such missionary activity (most likely at the local Philippian level) seems clear”. (Keown 2008, pp. 198–99), argues that “without a doubt women were involved in evangelistic ministry in the Paulines”, showing that Euodia and Syntyche’s “function was active proclamation”.
- 49 For an insightful treatment of the inherent connection between thinking “the same thing” (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν, 2:2b; 4:2) and thinking “the one thing” (τὸ ἓν φρονεῖν, 2:2e; cf. 3:13), see (Heriban 1983, pp. 190–91).
- 50 Note the astute observation by (Hull 2016, p. 6): “It is important to emphasize the function of these women as both positive and negative examples in the letter. . . They are negative examples, because they do not ‘think the same in the Lord’ (4:2). At the same time, they are positive examples because have ‘struggled together with [Paul] in the gospel’ (4:3), which is precisely what Paul indicated in 1:27 as his hope for all the Philippians. . . But note that Paul ends on a positive note, aligning the two ‘with Clement and the rest of my co-workers whose names are in the book of life’ (4:3)”.
- 51 See (Becker 2020a, p. 255), who, in discussing the paradigmatic function of the other *exempla* besides Paul in the letter (i.e., Christ, Timothy, Epaphroditus), speaks of how the apostle develops “eine brieflich vermittelte *Isophronie*” (most likely drawing on the language of 2:20, ἰσόφρωνον). Elsewhere, (Becker 2020a, p. 318), speaks of the “*Henophronesis*” between his own manner of thinking and that of the Philippian believing community which Paul seeks to forge throughout the letter (drawing on Paul’s exhortation in 2:2 that they would be those who τὸ ἓν φρονοῦντες). Cf. (Becker 2020b, p. 80): “The apostle requires from the Philippians a τὸ ἓν φρονοῦντες (2.2), a ‘one-mindedness,’ a *henophronesis* or an *ipsophronia*, which applies to the individual. . . in the life of the community”. Cf. (Keown 2017, pp. 63–66). For a contrasting view, see (Marchal 2006), who highlights reiterated appeals for “sameness” across the letter but criticizes this as a tactic for Paul to reinforce his own authority.

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