



Participating in Christ

Explorations in Paul's
Theology and Spirituality

MICHAEL J. GORMAN

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Introduction

Paul did not coin them [terms for communion with Christ] for the Universities of the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. If he had written his letters for future generations he would not have coined these wonderful expressions for Anselm or Johann Gerhard, but for Johann Sebastian Bach.

—Adolf Deissmann (1923)¹

Human existence is full of participation: in families, workplaces, groups of friends, society as a whole, and more. It is also replete, when at its best, with union: husband and wife, soul mates, partners in business or service or travel. The search for God—or, rather, God’s search for us—is also ultimately about participation (the heart of the incarnation); indeed, it is about union. How has God connected intimately with us, and how do we, in response, connect intimately with God?

The theme of participation, which includes or implies union, has captured my attention for a very long time. I remember, as a new Christian believer, being amazed at the words of Colossians: “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). At that time, of course, I had no idea where meditation on, and investigation of, such words would take me.² But in many ways those words have guided and shaped both my spiritual and my scholarly journey ever since I first encountered them.

1. Deissmann, *The Religion of Jesus and the Faith of Paul*, 202. The eminent theologian Anselm lived in the eleventh century; Gerhard, a Lutheran scholastic theologian, in the seventeenth.

2. For instance, wondering whether we should translate this verse as “Christ among you [plural], the hope of glory.”

Adolf Deissmann (quoted above), a New Testament scholar himself, believed that Paul's language of participation—"Christ in me . . . I in Christ"—was "not dogmatical but poetical" language.³ It is a mystical idiom, worthy of a setting by Bach, for when we sing, or perhaps listen to a Bach fugue, we pray twice. Despite Deissmann's comment, and in part because of it, the theme of participation is back in vogue within most theological schools and many universities across the theological and ecclesial spectrums. Moreover, this renewal exists within the various theological subdisciplines: biblical studies, systematic theology, historical theology, theological ethics or moral theology, spirituality, and practical theology. Participation has been proposed as an essential aspect of Christian theology and spirituality, of New Testament theology and spirituality more specifically, and of Pauline theology and spirituality in particular.⁴ Assorted terms are used to refer to this theme, including (in addition to "participation" itself), "union with Christ," "mysticism," and the "theosis" family of words: theosis, deification, divinization, Christosis, and Christification. Thus contributors to the conversation do not always agree about terminology or, more importantly, substance.⁵ But participation is on the table in a major way, and this development is one of the most exciting and fruitful directions in theology in recent decades. Moreover, inseparable from the theme of participation is its corollary, transformation.

My own participation in this participationist approach to the New Testament, especially to Paul (but also to John and the New Testament more broadly),⁶ has resulted in various publications. In this book I attempt first, in

3. Deissmann, *The Religion of Jesus and the Faith of Paul*, 202; cf. 201, 219.

4. For example, the annual Symposium on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture at North Park Theological Seminary near Chicago had "participation" as its subject in 2017. This interdisciplinary, international event was the culmination of years of planning by its organizers, especially Klyne Snodgrass and Stephen Chester. Biblical scholars, systematic theologians, ethicists, pastoral theologians, pastors, and others came together to discuss and debate the meaning of participation—specifically, participation in God, Christ, and/or the Spirit—in Christian theology and for Christian practice. Presentations focused on participation in Old Testament theology, Paul, Acts, Augustine, Calvin, and so on. The conference papers were published in *Ex Auditu* 33 (2017). The conference and journal volume are just the tip of the iceberg of interest in participation, as the journal's lengthy annotated bibliography indicates. Also in 2017, the Society of Biblical Literature included at least a dozen presentations on participation in the writings and theology of Paul in its annual meeting program. In addition to purely academic works, a number of scholarly books also have significant pastoral and practical implications. See, e.g., Billings, *Union with Christ*; Owens, *Shape of Participation*.

5. Richard Hays has proposed that we adopt the word for participation used by Gregory of Nyssa, *metousia*, but so far it has not caught on (Hays, "Apocalyptic *Poiësis* in Galatians," 214–15).

6. For participation in John, see my *Abide and Go*; for the New Testament more broadly, see my *Death of the Messiah*.

chapter 1, to briefly summarize some of my earlier work and offer my general perspective on Paul and participation. I then proceed, in subsequent chapters, both to explore some of the claims made in chapter 1 in more depth and to develop new areas of investigation.

Interest in participation in Paul has a long pedigree. An account of this development would take a full chapter, if not an entire book, but a few introductory remarks are in order.

The Study of Paul and Participation

Discussion of Paul, participation, and transformation (whatever theological label is given to it), as we will see below, has its roots in certain early church fathers, including Irenaeus and Athanasius. The discussion continues in many subsequent Christian theologians, whether Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, or Pentecostal/charismatic. Protestants are frequently surprised to see the theme of union with Christ (and even, according to some, deification), often connected to justification, in theologians such as Luther, Calvin, and Wesley.⁷ The seventeenth-century Scottish theologian Henry Scougal speaks for many from all the Christian traditions: “True religion is a union of the soul with God, a real participation of the divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul, or, in the apostle’s phrase, ‘It is Christ formed within us.’”⁸

In modern scholarship, interest in Paul and participation can be traced back especially to Adolf Deissmann, Albert Schweitzer, and James Stewart in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁹ These three were hardly in complete agreement, however. For example, Deissmann saw justification and union/participation as complementary realities.¹⁰ Schweitzer, however, famously claimed that “the doctrine of righteousness by faith,”

7. For Luther and Calvin, see Chester, *Reading Paul with the Reformers*. On Luther and theosis, an older, brief survey (with bibliographical references) is still valuable: Kärkkäinen, “Salvation as Justification and *Theosis*.” For John Wesley, a good place to start is Christensen, “John Wesley: Christian Perfection,” in Christensen and Wittung, *Partakers of the Divine Nature*. (That volume also has excellent articles on Paul, Luther, Calvin, and others.) For an in-depth study of Charles Wesley, see Kimbrough, *Partakers of the Divine Life*.

8. Scougal (1650–78), *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, 3.

9. See, e.g., Deissmann, *The Religion of Jesus and the Faith of Paul*; Deissmann, *Paul*; Deissmann, *Die neutestamentliche Formel “in Christo Jesu”*; Schweitzer, *Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*; Stewart, *A Man in Christ*. The German original of Schweitzer’s work was titled *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus*, published in 1930 (but first drafted in 1906, according to the preface to *Mysticism* [written on a ship returning him to Africa], xxiii), with a second edition in 1954.

10. See, e.g., Deissmann, *The Religion of Jesus and the Faith of Paul*, 175, 207–19.

or justification, is “a subsidiary crater, which has formed within the rim of the main crater—the mystical doctrine of redemption through the being-in-Christ.”¹¹ Like Deissmann, he called this “Christ-mysticism,” which for him was both sacramental—that is, effected by baptism (here disagreeing with Deissmann)—and eschatological/apocalyptic, meaning an experience of future redemption now.¹² Schweitzer rightly pointed out that Paul’s emphasis on being in Christ was no late development, for it had been worked out no later than his writing of 1 Thessalonians (probably the earliest extant letter), as evidenced by several occurrences of the “in Christ” formula in that letter.¹³

The interest in participation waned, though it never died,¹⁴ before it was dramatically jump-started in recent times by E. P. Sanders, one of the architects of the “New Perspective on Paul.”¹⁵ Sanders eschewed Schweitzer’s term “mystical” but still argued that participation in Christ—specifically Paul’s “participationist eschatology”—is at the center of Paul’s theology. Paul “is not primarily concerned with the juristic categories [of “righteousness by faith”],” for “the real bite of his theology lies in the participatory categories.”¹⁶ However, unlike Schweitzer but like Deissmann, Sanders did not see justification by faith and participation as ultimately disconnected or antithetical, but as connected and complementary.¹⁷

Since Sanders’s initial work on participation, this theme has been explored by a wide variety of Pauline scholars who might fervently disagree about, say, Sanders’s view of “works of the law” in Second Temple Judaism and in Paul. It is nearly impossible to engage Paul seriously today without recognizing the centrality of participation to his lived experience (“spirituality”) and his theology. Participation is not merely one aspect of Pauline theology and spirituality, or a supplement to something more fundamental; rather, it is at the very heart of Paul’s thinking and living. Pauline soteriology (theology of salvation) is inherently participatory and transformative.

11. Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, 225.

12. See the helpful discussion in Claussen, “Albert Schweitzer’s Understanding of Righteousness by Faith.”

13. Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, 224.

14. See, e.g., Tannehill, *Dying and Rising with Christ*.

15. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, esp. 447–74.

16. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 502; see 549 for “participationist eschatology.”

17. E.g., Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 440–41. See also Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle’s Life, Letters, and Thought*, 264–66, 611–14, 665–66, where Sanders says that “having righteousness by faith is the same as sharing the death and resurrection of Christ” (612) but that the “heart and soul” of Paul’s theology is not justification by faith but participation in Christ (666). Jeanette Hagen Pifer (*Faith as Participation*, 1–38) surveys recent scholarship on faith in Paul and concludes that the “bifurcation of justification and participation” is unnecessary (36).

It is sometimes said that Sanders was not quite sure what this participation actually entails, though this is to partially misread Sanders.¹⁸ Still, it has been left to others to further unpack the meaning of participation in Paul's theology, and also in terms of its significance for the church. For instance, James D. G. Dunn, another advocate of the New Perspective, pays significant attention to the theme of participation, especially in his Pauline theology.¹⁹ Dunn echoed Deissmann's and Sanders's claims that justification and participation are complementary.²⁰ Another theology of Paul that stresses participation is that of the German scholar Udo Schnelle.²¹

It is Richard Hays, however, who has responded directly to Sanders's incompletely developed discussion of the substance of participation. Hays wrote an essay dedicated to Sanders in which he outlined four aspects of participation in Christ according to Paul: (1) belonging to a family; (2) having political or military solidarity with Christ (as in Rom. 6, with its language of being baptized into Christ and presenting our bodily members as "weapons" of righteousness); (3) participating in the *ekklēsia* (Greek for "assembly," "church"), the body of Christ; and (4) living within the Christ-story ("narrative participation").²² It is the last of these four that Hays, as a major advocate of the participationist perspective, has emphasized in his own work,²³ and it has been central to my interpretation of Paul too.²⁴

Several contemporary interpreters of Paul who have stressed participation, including Morna Hooker, David Litwa, Ben Blackwell, and the present author, connect it implicitly or explicitly with the theme of theosis or deification. Blackwell has especially stressed the similarity between Paul's soteriology and that of some of the early church fathers. Blackwell sees the patristic claim that "God/Christ became what we are so that we could become what God/Christ is" as foreshadowed in Paul's soteriology of being conformed to Christ—what he calls "Christosis."²⁵ Morna Hooker focuses on similar "interchange" texts, such as 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Galatians 3:13.²⁶ Litwa is especially interested in versions of deification in Paul's own religious world.²⁷ My own approach,

18. See Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 447–73.

19. Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 390–441.

20. Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 396.

21. Schnelle, *Apostle Paul*.

22. Hays, "What Is 'Real Participation in Christ?'"

23. See, e.g., Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*; Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 16–59.

24. See esp. my *Cruciformity*; Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*.

25. Blackwell, *Christosis*. Relevant texts from the fathers include, e.g., Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.preface.1, and Athanasius, *Incarnation of the Word* 54.

26. Hooker, *From Adam to Christ*, 13–69.

27. Litwa, *We Are Being Transformed*.

as this book will further display, is grounded primarily in textual analysis and connections within the Pauline corpus itself.²⁸

Furthermore, both Douglas Campbell (from the “apocalyptic” approach to Paul) and N. T. Wright (from the New Perspective—and beyond) occasionally use the word “theosis” to characterize Paul’s understanding of transformation.²⁹ Furthermore, and even more significantly, each of them agrees on the importance of participation in Paul. Wright views participation within the framework of covenant, while Campbell sees it within the framework of apocalyptic incursion and liberation.³⁰

Additionally with respect to theosis, in an important book edited by Orthodox scholar Athanasios Despotis, Orthodox interpreters of Paul—whose tradition sees theosis as the main substance of salvation—are brought into conversation with the New Perspective and with other Pauline interpreters. Among the contributors to *Participation, Justification, and Conversion: Eastern Orthodox Interpretation of Paul and the Debate between Old and New Perspectives on Paul* are Edith Humphrey, who is Orthodox, and the present writer. At the same time, there are of course interpreters who stress participation in Paul but who do not find terms like “theosis” and “deification” to be accurate descriptors. Grant Macaskill, for instance, prefers the term “union.”³¹

Another significant volume on participation is *“In Christ” in Paul: Explorations in Paul’s Theology of Union and Participation*, edited by Michael J. Thate, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Constantine R. Campbell. In addition to the editors, contributors include Douglas Campbell, Susan Eastman, Joshua Jipp, Grant Macaskill, Isaac Augustine Morales, and more. Vanhoozer’s survey of Pauline scholarship on participation is a helpful supplement to this brief overview.³² Coeditor Constantine Campbell has himself published an important book, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological*

28. See, e.g., my *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*; Gorman, “Romans: The First Christian Treatise on Theosis”; Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*.

29. See D. Campbell, *Deliverance of God*, 211, 265; Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 546, 583, 955, 1021–23, 1031. On various approaches to Paul, see my *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, 1–9.

30. Commenting on Gal. 3, for instance, Wright says, “What has been meant by ‘participationist’ theology joins up at once with the ‘salvation-historical’ perspective, both finding their meaning within a ‘covenantal’ frame of thought” (*Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 875). D. Campbell finds in Phil. 3, for instance, a “vibrant, participatory, and apocalyptic understanding of the Christ event” (*Deliverance of God*, 897)—which is a good, succinct description of his overall reading of Paul.

31. Macaskill, *Union with Christ*. See also Powers, *Salvation through Participation*.

32. Vanhoozer, “From ‘Blessed in Christ’ to ‘Being in Christ.’” For longer surveys, see Macaskill, *Union with Christ*, 17–41; C. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 31–58.

Study. Campbell calls union with Christ the “webbing” that holds Paul’s thought together.³³

The focus on participation has led in other interesting directions. A few recent examples will have to suffice:³⁴

- Douglas Campbell, a leading interpreter of Paul from within the “apocalyptic” school of Pauline studies for whom participation has always figured prominently, has written a major Pauline theology in which “Trinitarian communion”—participation in the eternal life of the Father, Son, and Spirit—is seen as the goal of God’s work in Christ and through the Spirit.³⁵
- Susan Eastman has produced an eloquent and insightful interdisciplinary study of Paul’s anthropology, arguing that participation is at the heart of being human and at the core of Pauline anthropology; moreover, human participation in Christ depends on, and is subsequent to, God’s participation with humanity in the person of Christ.³⁶
- Another interdisciplinary study, this time by Pathipati Victor Paul from a very different context (India), explores the sociocultural aspects of corporate participation in Christ in view of caste, racial, and other disunifying forces.³⁷
- Laura Hogan has written a careful study of Paul’s spirituality, a “living Christ pattern” grounded in Philippians 2:5–11, that has three dimensions: kenosis, enosis (presence, union, solidarity), and theosis.³⁸
- Jeanette Hagen Pifer demonstrates that, for Paul, faith means denial of any form of self-salvation, dependence on God, and self-involving participation in Christ’s death and resurrection.³⁹
- Haley Goranson Jacob’s study of glory in Romans interprets glorification as participation in Christ’s benevolent messianic rule.⁴⁰

33. C. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 441.

34. Because many of these volumes appeared after this book’s manuscript was largely complete, I have been unable to interact in substantive ways with most of them.

35. D. Campbell, *Pauline Dogmatics*. For Campbell, this communion/participation has concrete relational consequences (e.g., sharing meals and money).

36. Eastman, *Paul and the Person*. For a similar emphasis on divine participation (both within the Trinity and, especially, in the incarnation) preceding and enabling participation in Christ—with the incarnation being the “epicenter” of Paul’s theology—see Ware, *Paul’s Theology in Context*.

37. Paul, *Exploring Socio-cultural Aspects of Pauline Ecclesiology*.

38. Hogan, *I Live, No Longer I*.

39. Pifer, *Faith as Participation*.

40. Jacob, *Conformed to the Image of His Son*.

- Wesley Thomas Davey has produced a study of the theme of suffering as participation in Christ, including its missional impact, in both the undisputed and the disputed Pauline letters.⁴¹
- Finally, Siu Fung Wu has edited a collection of essays on suffering in Paul, written by scholars from across the globe, that focus on the importance of various social locations for suffering but are united by the Pauline motif of participation in Christ.⁴²

The Conversation Continues

Although participation is now widely recognized by Pauline scholars as a significant dimension of Paul's theology and spirituality (or "mysticism"), some interpreters have made it the focus, or a major aspect of the focus, of their own interpretation of Paul over time.⁴³ This book, and the rest of my work on Paul, is representative of this sort of "participationist perspective."⁴⁴ This perspective is intended not to exclude other approaches to Paul but to give pride of place—with Deissmann, Schweitzer, and Sanders—to "being in Christ" when interpreting Paul. My own contributions, like those of Hays, have a specifically narrative approach to participation that understands dying and rising with Christ as taking on a particular shape, or embodiment, in the world that resembles the trajectory of the Christ-story. My work has also attempted to end the divide between theology and spirituality, as well as the one between justification and participation. My challenge to Adolf Deissmann would be that participation in Christ is worthy of both the most serious academic theological investigations and the most profound expressions of Christian spirituality—precisely what we find in Paul himself.

It is clear that the study of participation in Paul shows no signs of abating. There are many texts to examine more carefully and important questions to explore more fully. The primary focus of this book is an array of specific texts, yet certain big questions will inevitably arise. One of these is the relationship between participation and justification. Despite recent developments in the study of Pauline soteriology, many students of Paul remain unconvinced that

41. Davey, *Suffering as Participation with Christ*.

42. Wu, *Suffering in Paul*.

43. Some interpreters who identify primarily as part of the apocalyptic school of Pauline interpretation see participation as a major aspect of that approach. I think especially of Douglas Campbell and Susan Eastman. Richard Hays could be identified primarily as part of the participationist approach to Paul, but with a strong apocalyptic emphasis as well.

44. For an excellent overview of this perspective that mentions much of the recent literature and has a focus on narrative (and with which I am largely in agreement), see Aernie, "Participation in Christ."

justification is anything other than a declaration of acquittal. This book again challenges that understanding, proposing (as I have before) an interpretation of justification as both participatory and transformative. Another big issue that emerges in Pauline studies is that of imitation, or mimesis. We will look carefully at the issue of whether Paul advocates the imitation of Christ, and what that has to do with participation. Yet another important question that will surface repeatedly is the relationship between a cross-centered and a resurrection-centered spirituality and theology. I will refer to this relationship as *resurrectional cruciformity*, developing it in various chapters. Still another significant issue is whether and how the term “theosis” is a good characterization of Paul’s theology and spirituality.⁴⁵

The present book, then, continues the participationist and narrative perspective on Paul’s theology and spirituality I have developed especially in three major monographs, two editions of a comprehensive textbook on Paul, and numerous articles. This volume is neither a summation of those publications nor a complete, systematic treatment of participation in Paul. Rather, it is a set of interconnected explorations in Paul’s participatory theology and spirituality that look in depth, and in new ways, at certain critical components of that theology and spirituality. Some of these components are examined in print here for the first time; others expand, deepen, or reiterate arguments (or suggestions) that have been made elsewhere. The chapters build logically on one another, yet many can also be read as stand-alone contributions. My intent is to offer a coherent reading of Paul that helps all interpreters of the apostle, in both academy and church, see him and his efforts through a fully participatory lens.

In much of my previous work, pride of place has gone to certain texts, among which are especially Philippians 2:6–11 (which I call Paul’s master story), Galatians 2:15–21, and Romans 6. These texts continue to function significantly in the interpretation of Paul offered in this book. But if there is a highlighted letter in this volume, it is 2 Corinthians, and if there is a “theme text,” it is 2 Corinthians 5:14–21, with special emphasis on verse 21: “For us [or “For our sake”] God made the one who did not know sin [the

45. One issue not addressed in this book, however, is the question of origins: What is the source, or what are the sources, of Paul’s theology and spirituality of participation? Elsewhere (Gorman, “Romans and the Participationist Perspective”) I have suggested that its source is likely the participationist implications of (1) the prophetic promise of the indwelling of God’s Spirit that (2) the Jesus tradition connects to Jesus’ baptizing with the Spirit and his death as a baptism. For other recent proposals, see, e.g., Jipp, *Christ Is King* (ancient and messianic royalty); Macaskill, *Union with Christ* (representative scriptural/messianic figures and corporate solidarity); and Nikkanen, “Participation in Christ” (covenant/Torah, Passover, pre-Pauline eucharistic practices).

Messiah Jesus] to be sin so that we ourselves would become the justice [or “righteousness”] of God in him” (my translation).⁴⁶ We will return frequently to this letter, this passage, and this verse.

I conclude this introduction with a brief overview of what is to come. Part 1, “Paul and Participation,” consists of nine chapters. Chapter 1 is an overview of various aspects of being in Christ, presented as thirteen propositions. Many of these are developed more fully throughout the book. Chapter 2 examines the revelatory function of the cross and thus of life in the crucified Messiah. Chapter 3 considers the paradox that life in Christ—who is the *resurrected* crucified Messiah—is not only cruciform but also resurrectional. Chapter 4 proposes a new translation of a disputed text (Phil. 2:5) and the importance of that translation for Paul’s in-Christ theology and spirituality. Chapter 5 explores aspects of life in the Spirit according to Galatians.

Chapters 6–8 follow a “justification” trajectory, looking at connections among Galatians 2:15–21 (chap. 6), 2 Corinthians 5:14–21 (chap. 7), and Romans (chap. 8) that show the participatory and transformative character of justification. Chapter 9 returns to 2 Corinthians and argues for the appropriateness of the term “theosis” for Paul’s theology and spirituality.

Part 2, “Paul and Participation Today,” consists of two chapters, one more general (though focused on the North American context) and one focused on the resurrection. These chapters reflect on the significance of Paul’s participationist theology and spirituality for contemporary Christian praxis.⁴⁷

46. From now on, my own translations will be indicated by “MJG.”

47. It is encouraging to see other interpreters of participation in Paul engaging in similar sorts of reflections. See, e.g., Billings, *Union with Christ*, and now Macaskill, *Living in Union with Christ*.

Paul and Participation

The nine essays in this first part of the book are primarily careful exegetical studies of various key passages in Paul's letters that demonstrate the significance of participation for the apostle's theology and spirituality. These exegetical studies are connected to one another and thus also make claims about Paul's theology and spirituality as a whole. Furthermore, this part of the book also makes claims—often more implicit than explicit—about the significance of that theology and spirituality for today. Some of these claims are addressed more explicitly in the two essays in part 2.

Participating in Christ

An Overview

Participation is back in the (theological) news. The energy and, indeed, excitement about participation is palpable at conferences, in publications, and even occasionally from the pulpit. This renewed interest in participation is due in no small measure to the apostle Paul. This chapter briefly considers Paul's language of participation before sketching some of the major aspects of Paul's theology and spirituality of transformative participation in Christ. This sketch will take the form of thirteen propositions divided into four sections: the cross, cruciformity, dying and rising with Christ, and mission. These propositions do two things: they summarize much of my previous work on Paul and participation, and they anticipate some of the areas that will be explored in more depth in later chapters of this book.¹

Paul's "In Christ" and "With Christ" Language

Paul expresses participationist ideas in several ways.² One common way is by using prepositions and prefixes. He often uses the language of being "in Christ," as well as related phrases like being "with Christ." This assumes that there has been an initial movement, through faith and baptism, from "outside

1. For another brief overview of the participationist approach to Paul, see Gorman, "Romans and the Participationist Perspective."

2. See, e.g., his various metaphors, discussed in C. Campbell, "Metaphor, Reality, and Union with Christ."

of” and “away from” Christ to being “in” and “with” Christ: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized **into Christ Jesus** were baptized **into his death?**” (Rom. 6:3).³

For Paul it is as natural to speak about a person or persons being “in Christ,” “in Christ Jesus,” “in the Lord Jesus,” or “in the Lord” as it is for Christians today to refer to themselves as “Christians.” Take, for instance, the evidence from his letter to the Romans; all the boldfaced phrases begin with the Greek preposition *en* (“in”):⁴

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God **in Christ Jesus**. (6:11)

¹There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are **in Christ Jesus**.

²For the law of the Spirit of life **in Christ Jesus** has set you free from the law of sin and of death. (8:1–2)

I am speaking the truth **in Christ**—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit. (9:1)

So we, who are many, are one body **in Christ**, and individually we are members one of another. (12:5)

I know and am persuaded **in the Lord Jesus** that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. (14:14)

In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to boast of my work for God. (15:17)

¹I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, ²so that you may welcome her **in the Lord** as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well. ³Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me **in Christ Jesus**. (16:1–3)

⁷Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were **in Christ** before I was. ⁸Greet Ampliatus, my beloved **in the Lord**. ⁹Greet Urbanus, our co-worker **in Christ**, and my beloved Stachys. ¹⁰Greet Apelles, who is approved **in Christ**. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. ¹¹Greet my relative Herodion. Greet those **in the Lord** who belong to the family of Narcissus. ¹²Greet those

3. As we will see throughout this chapter, the connection between being in Christ and being “in” his death is absolutely central to Paul’s theology and spirituality.

4. For a helpful analysis of “in Christ” language in Paul generally, including the history of interpretation and a brief note on Romans, see R. Longenecker, *Epistle to the Romans*, 686–94.

workers **in the Lord**, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard **in the Lord**.¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen **in the Lord**; and greet his mother—a mother to me also. (16:7–13)

I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you **in the Lord**. (16:22)

The natural way in which Paul uses this “in” language does not mean he is unreflective about it or that it is void of content. Rather, such expressions are rich in meaning; they constitute Paul’s main idiom for “the intimate and personal relationship that exists between the exalted Christ and those who have committed themselves to him.”⁵ Some of the phrases in Romans, especially in chapter 16, use “in Christ” almost as a title. But in earlier chapters there is clearly significant theological content associated with the various phrases. To be in Christ is to have life and to be alive to God (6:11; 8:1–2); it is to live according to certain ethical norms (9:1); it is to be part of a community, a body (12:5); and it is to possess certain convictions and attitudes (14:14; 15:17).

We should assume that most, if not all, of these theological dimensions of being in Christ—and more, if we look outside Romans—are also to be associated with the various people described as being in Christ/in the Lord in chapter 16. At the same time, aspects of chapter 16 can also be generalized with respect to all who are in Christ: being in Christ is the result of a transfer from being outside Christ (16:7); there is missional work to be done in Christ (16:9, 12–13); and there is accountability in Christ (16:10). Moreover, it is clear that being in Christ both includes and transcends the local community; those who are in Christ in Corinth (like Paul) and in Rome are in Christ *together*. “In” language is a spatial idiom that signifies a relational reality that is both personal and corporate, both “vertical” and “horizontal,” both local and universal.

Not to be forgotten in considering this language is that “Christ” (Gk. *Christos*) means “Messiah.” Paul is saying that he and all believers are located in the crucified and resurrected Messiah and Lord whose name is Jesus. And this reality reminds us, furthermore, that our participation in the Messiah is possible only because God the Father has first participated with us by being present in the Messiah Jesus, a presence revealed both in the Messiah’s incarnation and death and in his ongoing resurrected life.⁶

5. R. Longenecker, *Epistle to the Romans*, 692. Longenecker (691–92) rightly stresses that “in Christ” is more than an adjective (i.e., “Christian”) for Paul.

6. Both here and in the next group, the Greek preposition *en* is used in all the boldfaced phrases.

In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. (2 Cor. 5:19)

³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from **the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord**. (Rom. 8:38–39)

Sometimes the “God in Christ” and “us in Christ” realities seem to merge, for Christ is the place where human beings meet God and receive salvation:

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is **eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord**. (Rom. 6:23)

They are now justified by his grace as a gift, through **the redemption that is in Christ Jesus**. (Rom. 3:24)

As noted above, the close association between believers and Christ is also expressed in the language of “with Christ,” a reality that is both present and future (and is expressed, grammatically, in several ways).⁷ For example:

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. **I have been crucified with Christ** [*Christō synestaurōmai*]. (Gal. 2:19)

And if [we are God’s] children, then [we are also] heirs, heirs of God and **joint heirs with Christ** [*synklēronomoi de Christou*]—if, in fact, we **suffer with him** [*sympaschomen*] so that we may also **be glorified with him** [*syndoxasthōmen*]. (Rom. 8:17)

But if we have **died with Christ** [*apethanomen syn Christō*], we believe that **we will also live with him** [*kai syzēsomen autō*]. (Rom. 6:8; cf. 1 Thess. 4:17)

I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and **be with Christ** [*syn Christō einai*], for that is far better. (Phil. 1:23)

Because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus **will raise us also with Jesus** [*kai hēmas syn Iēsou egerēi*], and will bring us with you into his presence. (2 Cor. 4:14)

7. The “with Christ” idea can be expressed by means of a preposition (*syn*, “with”; sometimes *pros* [2 Cor. 5:8]), a prefix (*syn*, meaning “with” or “co-,” and its various forms), or case usage; see C. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*.

Of course, participating in Christ in Paul is about more than a handful of expressions, no matter how often they are used or how important they are. We turn now, therefore, to a more careful, if basic, analysis of participation in Paul by considering the thirteen propositions, divided into four sections, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. (The thirteen propositions are also collected together at the end of the chapter.)

The Cross

We begin with the cross, because Paul proclaimed to the Corinthians, “I resolved to know nothing among you except Jesus the Messiah—that is, Jesus the *crucified* Messiah” (1 Cor. 2:2 MJG). To be sure, for Paul, Jesus would not have been the Messiah had he not been raised from the dead, and on many occasions the apostle speaks specifically, in the same breath, of Jesus having both died and been raised (e.g., Rom. 4:25; 6:10; 8:34; 14:9; 1 Cor. 15:3–4; 2 Cor. 5:15; 1 Thess. 4:14). And yet Paul grants a certain priority and emphasis to the death of Jesus, to his being the Crucified One. Why is that so? Three main points may be offered in response to this query.

1. The cross is “the signature of the one who is risen.”

These words come from the pen of the great twentieth-century German New Testament scholar Ernst Käsemann.⁸ Käsemann was insisting, against perverted forms of theological and political notions of power and glory, that the resurrected Lord of the church is continuous with the crucified Jesus. The cross remains forever a part of the identity of the Messiah.

Paul is not alone among New Testament writers in making this point. For instance, the Gospel of John depicts this reality in the most literal way possible by noting that Jesus appeared to the disciples and to Thomas with his scars (John 20:19–29). The book of Revelation portrays the same reality in the image of the Lamb who was slaughtered and yet stands (Rev. 5:6–14). Though once dead and now alive forever (Rev. 1:18), this Jesus can only be encountered and worshiped as the slaughtered Lamb (see also Rev. 13:8), the one forever marked with his own blood (Rev. 7:14; 12:11; 19:13).⁹ And the Gospel of Luke represents the same reality, though more subtly, when the resurrected Jesus is identifiable only when he is associated with the breaking

8. Käsemann, “Saving Significance of the Death of Jesus,” 56.

9. There is debate about whose blood covers the robe of “the Word of God” (Christ) in Rev. 19:13, but given the significance of associating blood and death with Jesus throughout Revelation, it is almost certainly his own blood.

of bread, the remembrance of the meal that is both the predecessor and the symbol of his death (Luke 24:13–35, esp. vv. 30–31, 35).

For both Paul and these other New Testament theologians, the cross is a Christophany—a manifestation of Christ’s identity, not merely a moment in his life that is succeeded and superseded by the resurrection. He is forever the crucified Messiah, the crucified Lord. Yet Paul wants to say something more about the cross of Christ.

2. The cross is not only a Christophany but also a theophany—the definitive self-revelation of God, which means that God is kenotic (self-emptying) love; the cross is the signature of the Eternal One.

One of Paul’s most radical claims about the cross and about the character of God is that the cross reveals not only the identity of Christ but also the identity of God. That is, the cross is the signature not only of the Crucified One but also of the Eternal One.

The text of 1 Corinthians 2:2 quoted above (“I resolved to know nothing among you except Jesus the Messiah—that is, Jesus the *crucified* Messiah”) is found within the context of Paul’s asserting that the crucified Messiah is the definitive revelation of divine power and wisdom. Over against both Jewish and gentile notions of these essential divine attributes, says Paul, “we proclaim a crucified Messiah . . . the Messiah who is God’s power and God’s wisdom” (1 Cor. 1:23–24 MJG). If, philosophically and theologically speaking, we cannot separate God’s attributes from God’s actual identity, then we can only conclude that Christ crucified reveals the divine identity; the cross is a theophany. In the same context, Paul also implies that the Messiah who “became” wisdom from God—that is, who revealed divine wisdom on the cross—“became” and thus revealed divine justice/righteousness as well (1 Cor. 1:30). Paul restates this claim with emphasis in Romans 3:21–26.

In two other key texts, Paul also likely refers to Christ’s cross and to the incarnation that both preceded it and, in important ways, resembled it as divine revelation.¹⁰ First, we have 2 Corinthians 8:9. The critical word in this text, a Greek participle (*ōn*, from the verb “to be”), is normally translated as a concessive participle, with the word “though”: “For you know the generous act [*charin*, “grace”] of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was [*ōn*] rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.” But as John Barclay has persuasively argued, the context here makes it

10. On the appropriateness of the language of incarnation in reference to Paul, see Macaskill, “Incarnational Ontology.”

likely that the participle should be translated causally, not concessively.¹¹ Thus we might render the verse as follows: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that *because* he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (emphasis added).

This translation means that Christ acted in self-giving graciousness *because* of the richness he possessed—not *in spite* of it. That is, the Messiah’s self-impoverishment, probably meaning both his incarnation and his crucifixion, was a Christophany: a true revelation of his identity. The text does not explicitly say that the incarnation and cross also constitute a theophany. Nevertheless, we should still draw that conclusion because, in the same context, Paul tells us that the grace of Christ was also the “indefinable gift” of God (2 Cor. 9:15). This is the case because “God was in the Messiah, reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor. 5:19 MJG).

Our second key text on this subject is more explicit. In Philippians 2:6, which is part of the famous “Christ-hymn” or “Christ-poem” of Philippians 2:6–11—a text that likely stands behind the briefer theological statement of 2 Corinthians 8:9—we find a situation similar to that of 2 Corinthians 8:9. Once again there is a participle that is normally translated concessively (“though”) when it could, even should, be translated causally (“because”). The NRSV, for instance, has “though he was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited.” But a good case has been made by numerous scholars that another rendering is both possible and correct: “*because* he was in the form of God . . .” (emphasis added).¹² In other words, Christ did what he did—what the poem narrates as his self-emptying (kenosis) and self-humbling in both incarnation and death (Phil. 2:6–8)—not *in spite* of his equality with God but *because* of it.

If this translation is correct—and it seems to be completely in line with the implications of the texts from 1 and 2 Corinthians cited above—then, once again, we have Paul asserting that what Christ did in his self-giving incarnation and death was a revelation of divinity, a theophany. Since the context of both Philippians 2:6–8 and 2 Corinthians 8:9 tells us that Christ’s incarnation and death constituted an act of gracious love (not to mention other texts about both his love and the Father’s love),¹³ we can only conclude

11. Barclay, “Because He Was Rich He Became Poor.”

12. See my *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, 9–39, which is a revision of “Although/Because He Was in the Form of God.” More precisely, the view developed there is that we should read the text with both causal and concessive senses, but the argument for that view cannot be delineated here.

13. E.g., Rom. 5:8; 8:35–39; 2 Cor. 5:14; Gal. 2:20. Cf. Eph. 5:2, 25.

that the cross, as the culminating revelation of Christ's kenotic, cruciform love, is simultaneously the revelation of God's self-giving love.

This fundamental divine trait of self-giving, kenotic love, which has manifested itself concretely and supremely in the cross of Christ, is also for Paul the essential trait of the person and the people who have received this divine love in Christ.

3. The cross is not only the definitive revelation of Christ and of God (i.e., it is both Christophany and theophany) but also the definitive revelation of what humans and the church are to be.

What does it mean to say that the cross reveals what *we* are to be, both as individuals and as the corporate body of the church (Gk. *ekklēsia*)? This query is one of the driving questions in all my work on Paul, but for the purposes of this chapter I can respond briefly in three ways.¹⁴

First, the word "incarnation" means not only that God became human but also that God became *true* humanity; that is, God became the kind of human that humans were intended to be.¹⁵ For Paul, then, the story of Christ, the Incarnate One, is both the story of God and the story of what humans were meant to be. Paul refers to this interconnection between Christ and God the Father, on the one hand, and human beings, on the other, as a process of being transformed into the image of Christ, which means the image of God (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:4).

Second, as is well known and has already been noted, a critical element of Paul's theology and spirituality is expressed in the language of being "in Christ," or "in the Messiah." The Messiah is where "the action" was and is. He is both the "place" where God has acted ("God was in the Messiah," 2 Cor. 5:19) and the "place" where believers now are, individually and corporately. And if the exalted Messiah in whom believers live remains forever the crucified Messiah, then his cross defines both him and those who indwell him. Furthermore, it is "in him" (Christ), as Colossians puts it, that "all the fullness of God dwells bodily" (Col. 2:9 MJG; cf. 1:19), and thus it is "in him" that "you are completely fulfilled" (Col. 2:10 MJG). As in 2 Corinthians 5:14–21, according to Colossians the incarnation was for the purpose of reconciliation

14. See also chap. 2 below, where I will introduce the terms "anthrophany" and "ecclesio-phany" to indicate that the cross reveals what humanity and what the church are supposed to be in Christ.

15. Although Paul does not use the exact language we find in John 1:14 ("the Word became flesh"), we have a similar theological claim in Phil. 2:6–8, especially if the interpretation of that text just offered is taken into account. Moreover, Paul also uses the language of the Father sending the Son (e.g., Gal. 4:4), which is similar to the frequent "sending" language in John and which implies both Christ's preexistence and his incarnation.

through the cross (Col. 1:20). In other words, the incarnation of God and the cross of Christ are inseparable; to be Godlike and thus “full” as a human being, then, will mean to be cross-like. (We will have much more to say about “cross-shaped Godlikeness” below.)

Third, one of Paul’s favorite images of the church is that of the Messiah’s body (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12; cf. Eph. 4). More than a metaphor, this reality implies that Jesus continues to live in and as his church. As the body of Christ, the church continues, in a sense, the incarnation and therefore continues its inseparable connection to the cross. The body of Christ is inherently a cross-shaped body, a people that incarnates the self-emptying, self-giving Messiah who is the incarnation of the kenotic God. It is this cross-shaped existence of the church that is summarized in the term “cruciformity.”

Cruciformity

The term “cruciform,” meaning cross-shaped, was originally applied to churches that were built in the form of a cross. Over time, it came to be used in biblical and theological circles as an adjective to describe the form of life inspired and shaped by Jesus’ crucifixion—that is, by the values and practices that both led up to the cross and were displayed on the cross. The adjective was, and is, frequently used to characterize certain aspects of New Testament theology, such as Mark’s vision of cruciform discipleship, or Paul’s understanding of cruciform ministry. When transformed into a noun, “cruciform” becomes “cruciformity.”¹⁶ What can be said about it briefly?

4. The cross is not only the source but also the shape of our salvation, and cross-shaped living (cruciformity) means that all Christian virtues and practices are cruciform: faith/faithfulness, love, power, hope, justice, and so forth.

Most Christians believe that the cross of Christ is the source of their salvation and that Paul himself affirms that conviction. To be sure, neither Paul nor good theology limits the source of salvation to the cross, for it involves also Christ’s incarnation (as we have already noted), earthly ministry, resurrection, ascension, and parousia (coming). Moreover, some Christians, especially Orthodox Christians, put at least as much weight on the incarnation as on the cross. But no one should deny the role of Jesus’ death in salvation.

16. In addition to my *Cruciformity*, see esp. my *Apostle of the Crucified Lord* for the importance of cruciformity throughout Paul’s writings.

Debates about the “mechanics,” or specific means and meaning, of the atonement have swirled around the church for centuries. Moreover, several new theories, or “models,” of the atonement, in addition to the three or four principal ones, have been proposed in recent times.¹⁷ Whatever one’s preferred model of the atonement, what is often lacking in the models is any application of the model to actual life. For Paul, however, the cross is more than the *source* of salvation; it is also its *shape*. Paul cannot talk for long, if at all, about the cross without connecting it to life in Christ, and he cannot speak of life in Christ for long, if at all, without linking it to Christ crucified.

Of particular importance is the way Paul interprets the theological virtues of faith(fulness), love, and hope (a triad that he was likely the first to formulate), plus the practice of power, in light of the cross.¹⁸ Love, for instance, is cross-shaped in many ways, not least because it seeks the good and edification of others, rather than of the self.¹⁹ Love “does not seek its own advantage” (1 Cor. 13:5 MJG) but rather, in humility, seeks the good of others, because that is what Christ did on the cross (Phil. 2:3–4, 6–8). The strong or powerful in the church must look out for the weak, because that is what Christ did on the cross, welcoming the weak (Rom. 15:1–4; cf. 5:6).

So too, faith is connected to the cross; Paul seems to have claimed that Christ displayed his faith, or faithfulness (Rom. 3:22, 26; Gal. 2:16, 20; 3:22; Phil. 3:9), toward God,²⁰ which means his obedience (Rom. 5:19; Phil. 2:8). For this reason, Paul describes the goal of his ministry as eliciting “the obedience of faith” (“faithful obedience,” or even “believing allegiance”), especially from the gentiles (Rom. 1:5; 15:18; 16:26; cf. 10:16; 11:30–32).²¹ The positive reputation of a particular church can be described in terms of its faithfulness (1 Thess. 1:8) or its obedience (Rom. 16:19; Phil. 2:12²²). Even hope for Paul is cruciform, because it is experienced, paradoxically, most fully when suffering with Christ (Rom. 8:17–25).²³

17. For a survey, see Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*. For my own proposed model, see *Death of the Messiah*.

18. Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 95–348.

19. See esp. Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 155–267.

20. This is not the place for a full discussion of this issue, to which we return briefly below. For the discussion, see Bird and Sprinkle, *Faith of Jesus Christ*. For my own defense of the subjective-genitive reading (“the faith of Christ”), see *Cruciformity*, 95–121.

21. See, e.g., Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*, 85–87. Bates uses terms like “enacted allegiance” and “embodied allegiance.”

22. The NRSV’s rendering of Phil. 2:12 erroneously introduces the pronoun “me” after “obeyed.”

23. See Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 304–48.

Furthermore, other virtues and practices are likewise defined in terms of the cross. For instance, Paul exhorts the Corinthians not to practice the injustice of taking their “siblings” to the pagan courts, and even to accept rather than inflict injustice (1 Cor. 6:1–11).²⁴ Why? Explicitly, it is because believers have identified completely with the identity of Christ at their baptism into his name. This was the public expression of their justification, their being incorporated into the community of the just (1 Cor. 6:11). Implicitly, it is because accepting rather than inflicting injustice is precisely what Christ himself did on the cross.²⁵

There is a fairly consistent pattern that Paul either uses explicitly or implies throughout his exhortations to cruciformity. He grounds these exhortations in the narrative of Christ’s incarnation and crucifixion found in Philippians 2:6–8. The basic pattern is that those who have a certain status, right, or prerogative are called, shaped, and empowered by Christ to relinquish the right for the good, edification, or salvation of others. The grammar of the pattern is “although [x] not [y] but [z],” meaning “although [status], not [selfishness] but [self-giving].”²⁶ This is the pattern of Christ’s own kenosis and crucifixion.

By the power of the indwelling Christ/the Spirit (Phil. 2:1, 5), the story of Christ is “re-incarnated” in the church and in each individual believer.²⁷ Paul calls the members of the church to embody this narrative in the way they deal with divisions over the eating of meat offered to idols (1 Cor. 8:1–11:1), the practice of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:17–34), the use of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12–14), and more. Moreover, Paul himself serves as a kind of “middle term” between Christ and the churches. He calls on them to become imitators of him, but only inasmuch as he is an imitator of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1), for he embodies the story of Christ in the way he lovingly cares for his churches, especially in renouncing his right to compensation, working with his hands so as not to burden them (1 Thess. 2; 1 Cor. 9).

As we have just seen and will see again below, all of this means being narrated into the story of the crucified Messiah. Paul’s spirituality of the cross is a *narrative* spirituality. It incarnates the story of Christ—which means the story of God.

24. See my “Justification and Justice in Paul”; also my *Becoming the Gospel*, 212–96.

25. Note the reference to Christ the sacrificed paschal lamb in the immediately preceding passage (1 Cor. 5:7).

26. Which can also be construed, in light of proposition 2 above, as “because [x] not [y] but [z].” We will return to this pattern in more detail in the next chapter. For the basic pattern, see esp. Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 90–91, 164–77, 186–88, 192, 197, 230–38, 243, 252, 261, 330; Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, 80–81, 125–26, 310, 507–9.

27. On the role of the Spirit, see my “Holy Spirit and Cruciformity.”