

“In Christ” in Paul

Edited by

MICHAEL J. THATE

KEVIN J. VANHOOZER

CONSTANTINE R. CAMPBELL

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen

zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe

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Explorations in Paul’s Theology of Union
and Participation

edited by

Michael J. Thate, Kevin J. Vanhoozer
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Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

This volume is intended to offer a substantial new contribution to the burgeoning discussion of union with Christ in the theology and writings of the Apostle Paul. Several scholarly works related to the theme of union with Christ have recently appeared, such as those by Gorman, Campbell, and Macaskill, yet none of those authors would claim to have said all there is to say about the theme – in fact, their essays in this volume are testament to the fact. Rather than concluding the conversation with final solutions, recent contributions have provided a fertile basis on which more exploration is possible through a variety of trajectories.

Appropriately then, the subtitle of this volume reveals its general nature: it consists of a series of *explorations* in Paul's theology of union and participation. We do not claim that this contribution, therefore, is the one to conclude the conversation either. It is exploratory; it is multifaceted and multidisciplinary; and it is but one more conversation piece for consideration within the guild.

An excellent cast has been assembled for this production, with each participant offering distinct insights. It will become clear that there is no overarching unity to the essays in the sense that the authors all agree with each other on everything. That is certainly not the case. But for such an exploratory volume, we have not attempted to achieve a fully coherent presentation with all the kinks ironed out. Nevertheless, we trust the variety of voices, topics, and approaches will offer their own rewards to the audience. The editors offer thanks to each contributor for their investment of expertise, time, and energy.

We are indebted to our production crew, Kenny Clewett, Dan Cole, and Paul Maxwell, for their many hours of hard labour in helping to prepare the manuscript. Kevin and I particularly wish to thank our fellow editor, Mike Thate, for his tireless efforts in producing the volume. He dreamed up the project in the first place, recruited our contributors, and did a substantial amount of the editorial work. Finally, we thank Mohr Siebeck for their enthusiasm for the project. It is good to know there will always be a theatre for productions such as this.

CRC, KJV, MJT

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A Theological Introduction

From “Blessed in Christ” to “Being in Christ”

The State of Union and the Place of Participation in Paul’s Discourse, New Testament Exegesis, and Systematic Theology Today

KEVIN J. VANHOOZER

A. Introduction: the mystery of “in Christ”

...in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions. (Col. 1:24)

I want to know Christ ... and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death. (Phil. 3:10)

“In Christ” states the theme of the present collection of essays; “in Paul” delimits it – but not by much. For if Karl Barth was a “God-intoxicated” man, how much more can we call St. Paul a “God-in-Christ intoxicated” man. *To be or not to be in Christ* was, for Paul, the only question – new, urgent, and ever relevant. Paul considered himself “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ” (Rom. 6:11). Paul identified with Christ to the point of viewing his own story as overlapping with that of Jesus: “I have been crucified with Christ” (Gal 2:19). Indeed, Paul presses his identity thesis to the point of claiming “I carry the marks [τὰ στίγματα] of Jesus branded on my body” (Gal. 6:17). What did Paul mean by locating himself “in Christ”? To what reality does Paul’s signature phrase refer? We begin our search for an answer with the Italian Renaissance, and a pictorial interpretation of what Paul meant.

I. A man in Christ? Giotto’s “Stigmatization of St. Francis”

Giotto painted his famous “The Stigmatization of St. Francis” in 1300 for the church of San Francesco in Pisa, Italy (it now hangs in the Louvre). The altarpiece depicts an event in the life of Saint Francis in 1224 as recorded by Thomas of Celano, his first biographer, some years later. According to Celano, Francis had embarked on a forty day fast, during which he devoted himself to praying (for wisdom how best to please God) and to

studying the Gospels, where he thrice landed on accounts of Jesus' Passion. One morning, at sunrise, he had a vision of Christ as a six-winged Seraph in the sky whose body was fixed to a cross. Francis experienced both joy and compassion at this sight. As he contemplated the meaning of the vision, he came to understand, in the words of St. Bonaventure, that he would be like Christ "not by martyrdom of body, but by enkindling of heart."¹ However, after the vision Francis discovered that he had indeed come to share in Christ's sufferings: all five of Christ's wounds (hands, feet, side) had reappeared on Francis's thirteenth-century body.

St. Francis is the first recorded stigmatic in church history (unless one counts Paul on the basis of Gal 6:17).² Giotto depicts Francis as kneeling on the ground, with his hands raised in a gesture of adoration and/or surrender. Giotto's innovation was to depict light beams emanating from Christ's hands and feet and leading straight to the hands and feet of St. Francis.³ Giotto accomplishes visually, in oils and pigments, something that theologians have subsequently been trying for centuries to explain in words: the nature of a saint's participation in Christ's sufferings.⁴

Giotto's *Stigmatization* is the dominant image of his famous Pisa panel, towering over three smaller scenes from Francis's life.⁵ Paul says he bore in his body the marks of Jesus, and Bonaventure says that Francis bore in his body "the image of the Crucified not made by a craftsman in wood or stone, but fashioned in his members by the hand of the living God."⁶ Bonaventure suggests that just as the pope approved the rule of St. Francis, so

¹ Saint Bonaventura, *The Life of Saint Francis* (London: J. M. Dent, 1904), 139.

² See further, Edward Harrison, *Stigmata: A Medieval Phenomenon in a Modern Age* (New York: Penguin, 1994) for a critical examination of modern cases from a medical point of view. Harrison suggests that the phenomenon, though real, may be a psychosomatic manifestation of a person's identification with Christ. For another account, more indebted to Roman Catholic theology and tradition, see Michael Freze, *They Bore the Wounds of Christ: The Mystery of the Sacred Stigmata* (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1989).

³ I say "innovation" because there is no mention of light in Bonaventure's account of this event, in his *Legenda Maior*, which was completed in 1263.

⁴ For further discussion of Giotto and his paintings of St. Francis, see Joanna Cannon, "Giotto and Art for the Friars: Revolutions Spiritual and Artistic," and William R. Cook, "Giotto and the Figure of St. Francis," in *The Cambridge Companion to Giotto* (ed. Anne Derbes and Mark Sandona; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 103–34 and 135–56.

⁵ The three other scenes are of (1) Pope Innocent III's dream of Francis propping up a church on the verge of collapse (2) the pope approving the rule of the Franciscan order (3) Francis preaching to the birds. Giotto produced other paintings of Francis as well, including *Funeral of St. Francis and Verification of the Stigmata* in the chapel at Bardi dedicated to St. Francis.

⁶ From the *Legenda Minor of St. Bonaventura - de Stigmatibus sacris*, 1–4; ed. Quaracchi, 1941, 202–4.

God places his own "seal" on Francis's body (the wounds bear a physical resemblance to a wax seal), thus providing an even greater confirmation of the Franciscan order. The stigmata were included in other images of Francis and in time became one of his distinct identifying characteristics.

II. Modern New Testament studies: recontextualizing Paul's "in Christ"

Some seven hundred years later, in an academic galaxy far from Giotto's Pisa, the German New Testament scholar Adolf Deissmann argued that that union with Christ lies at the core of Paul's theological thinking. However, instead of seeing this union manifested in physical stigmata, Deissmann linked "in Christ" to Paul's Damascus road experience and believed it primarily to express Paul's sense of spiritual or mystical intimacy with Christ. Union is a matter of subjective perception rather than of an objective condition (i.e., the stigmata). Curiously, Deissmann nevertheless insisted on interpreting the phrase "in Christ" in consistently (and often stiltedly) locative terms: "Just as the air of life, which we breathe, is 'in' us and fills us, and yet we at the same time live in this air and breathe it, so it is also with the Christ-intimacy of the Apostle Paul: Christ in him, he in Christ."⁷

Albert Schweitzer contended that union with Christ is not only central to Paul's theology but the very core of Christianity. Since the Reformation, the doctrine of justification dominated the discussion about Paul's soteriology, but Schweitzer downsized justification to the status of a "subsidiary crater" on planet Paul, lying within the "main crater" of his understanding of union with Christ.⁸ Schweitzer described this union in mystical-eschatological terms whereby believers now experience Christ's death and resurrection: "We are always in the presence of mysticism when we find a human being ... feeling himself, while still externally amid the earthly and temporal, to belong to the super-earthly and eternal."⁹ Schweitzer makes two further points, each of which has launched conversations to which the present essays additionally contribute. First, Schweitzer insists that there are no Hellenistic parallels or precedents for Paul's mysticism, thus starting a race in New Testament studies to find a context that makes sense of it. Second, Schweitzer held that being in Christ incorporated believers into

⁷ Adolf Deissman, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912), 140. Cf. James S. Stewart, who says that to be in Christ is to be "transplanted into a new soil and a new climate, and both soil and climate are Christ." *A Man in Christ: The Vital Elements of St. Paul's Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1935), 157.

⁸ Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (London: A & C Black, 1931), 225.

⁹ Schweitzer, *Mysticism of Paul*, 1.

a new eschatological body, the church, a Christlike community. There is, then, a corporate dimension to being in Christ.

E. P. Sanders is another New Testament scholar who figures prominently in the background of the present collection inasmuch as he uses biblical exegesis to overturn what had become the received view among systematic theologians, namely, Luther's view that salvation hinges on justification by faith, understood forensically in terms of Christ's imputed righteousness. Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* put the apostle's teaching in historical context and argued that Paul was not reacting against legalism (i.e., "works righteousness") but commending Jesus, rather than the Torah, as the way of eschatological salvation. According to Sanders, saving faith and being in Christ coincide: "righteousness by faith and participation in Christ ultimately amount to the same thing."¹⁰ Salvation comes by participating in the age to come that has come in Jesus: "by *sharing* in Christ's death, one died to the *power* of sin or to the old aeon, with the result that one *belongs to God*."¹¹ Paul's basic insight, then, is that "the believer becomes one with Christ Jesus and that this effects a transfer of lordship and the beginning of a transformation which will be completed with the coming of the Lord. . . . one participates in salvation by becoming one person with Christ, dying with him to sin and sharing the promise of his resurrection. . . . It seems reasonable to call this way of thinking 'participationist eschatology.'"¹²

As to the all important question of the nature of one's participation in Christ, however, Sanders confesses himself flummoxed, even while insisting that the participatory union is "real": "But what does this mean? How are we to understand it? We seem to lack a category of 'reality' – real participation in Christ, real possession of the Spirit – which lies between naive cosmological speculation and belief in magical transference on the one hand and a revised self-understanding on the other. I must confess that I do not have a new category of perception to propose here."¹³ It is precisely this paradox – that the concept of participation is central to Paul's theology but largely inaccessible to us today – that the essays in the present volume set out to address by exploring notions of union and participation in Paul through exegesis, highlights in reception history, and theological reflection. Contra Sanders, we believe there may well be a possible language that would allow us to come closer to what Paul had in mind. We therefore seek to name and navigate the various ditches, some uglier than others, that

¹⁰ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977), 506.

¹¹ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 467 (italics his).

¹² Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 549.

¹³ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 522–23.

have created divides and led to misunderstandings between biblical studies, historical theology, and systematic theology.

Richard Hays anticipates the strategy of the present volume in his "What is 'Real Participation in Christ'? A Dialogue with E. P. Sanders on Pauline Soteriology."¹⁴ Hays identifies four complementary candidates for explaining the background behind Paul's notion of participation in Christ: belonging to a family; political or military solidarity; the *ekklesia*; "living with the Christ story." Of special importance to Hays is the last model – narrative participation – though he too is reticent when it comes to spelling out the mechanism of participation: how exactly do *I* participate in *his* story? Elsewhere Hays hints at a response, gesturing towards the East: "My own guess is that Sanders's insights would be supported and clarified by careful study of participation motifs in patristic theology, particular the thought of the Eastern fathers."¹⁵ This is precisely the wager that Michael Gorman makes in reclaiming the notion of *theosis*: "for Paul cruciformity – conformity to the crucified Christ – is really theoformity, or theosis."¹⁶ With this thought we have come full circle from Luther: "in Christ" no longer names a legal status (i.e., being declared righteous) but an ontological transformation (i.e., a becoming righteous).¹⁷

III. Systematic theology: "in Christ" in Reformation soteriology

The study of "in Christ" in Paul does not belong to New Testament scholars only. One of the surprising developments in recent years is the renewed interest in union with Christ among exegetes and theologians alike. While some of the theological interest stems from the afore-mentioned connection with *theosis* characteristic of patristic theology, many historical and systematic theologians trace their interest to the place of union with Christ in Reformation theology, and John Calvin in particular, as well as subse-

¹⁴ In Fabian E. Udoh et. al., eds., *Redefining First-Century Jewish and Christian Identities: Essays in Honor of Ed Parish Sanders* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 336–51.

¹⁵ Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:11-4:11* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), xxxii.

¹⁶ Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 4.

¹⁷ For a more complete overview of participation in Christ in modern New Testament studies, see Mark Seifrid, "In Christ," in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 433–36, Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 31–58 and Grant Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 17–41.

quent Reformed soteriology.¹⁸ To put it in Gadamerian terms: Paul's phrase "in Christ" has generated, especially through the prism of Calvin's interpretation, not only a history of reception but a history of effects (i.e., Reformed soteriology).¹⁹

Calvin's basic insight into union with Christ – the grace that launched a thousand soteriological ships – comes at the beginning of book III of his *Institutes* on "The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ": "as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us."²⁰ According to Calvin, it is the Holy Spirit who links us to Christ, through faith, itself a work of the Spirit.²¹ Indeed, instead of standing afar off, Christ engrafts believers into his body, making them "participants not only in all his benefits but also in himself."²² Calvin had to clarify his understanding of participation in Christ to distinguish his own position from that of Osiander, who maintained that those in Christ receive a "transfusion" as it were of divine nature into their human nature.²³ For Calvin, believers participate not in Christ's nature but rather his personal history: Christ deigns to make us one with him, organically incorporating us into his life (and hence sonship) in what Calvin terms a "mystical union" (*mystica unio*). There is in this notion no mixture of natures, only a personal union, like that of husband and wife (cf. Eph. 5:31-32).

The focus of the present book is "in Christ" *in Paul*, not Calvin. We nevertheless do well to consider the conversation in Reformed soteriology, for it is at least possible that theological reflection affords as important a clue as to the meaning of "in Christ" as historical reconstruction, to the extent that the former yields the deeper ontological and soteriological implications that are ingredient to a fuller understanding.²⁴ It takes more than

¹⁸ Five of the essays in Parts Two and Three of the present book arguably treat either Calvin himself (Canlis), a theologian in the Reformed tradition (Baylor, Johnson) or the way in which Calvin handled a particular doctrinal issue (Varma, Baker).

¹⁹ As with Paul, so with Calvin: each has his own scholarly champions who place union with Christ at the center of his theology.

²⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (LCC 20–21; 2 vols.; ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), III.1.1.

²¹ *Inst.*, III.1.4.

²² *Inst.* III.2.24.

²³ The context was Osiander's conviction that justification requires an actual sharing in Christ's essential righteousness (see *Inst.* III.11.5–12).

²⁴ Though I here focus on debates about union with Christ in recent Reformed soteriology, mention should also be made of Tuomo Mannermaa and the new Finnish interpretation of Luther, which also attempts to revise the traditional interpretation of Reformation soteriology by taking justification beyond a strict juridical understanding and moving in more mystical and ontological directions towards theosis. See further Carl E.

lexical study to grasp the reality of being in Christ. In other words, if it is true that "[t]he heart of Paul's religion is union with Christ,"²⁵ then it behooves us to explore this religion not only grammatically but also canonically and systematically (i.e., doctrinally); that is, in relation to the broader history of salvation. This is precisely what the succeeding generations after Calvin have done in their attempts to clarify the *ordo salutis*.

Calvin states clearly that oneness with Christ ("partaking of him") yields a double grace (*duplex gratia*): justification and sanctification.²⁶ These twin benefits of salvation – objective (i.e., forensic) righteousness; subjective (i.e., renovative) holiness – stem from the more basic reality of the believer's receiving Christ's very person through Spirit-effected faith.²⁷ Justification for Calvin is not simply a forensic fiction: rather, believers really receive Christ's righteousness (together with its status) when they receive Christ by faith. This is Calvin's basic premise, namely, that we receive the benefits of Christ's work only when we receive the person of Christ himself, through Spirit (once for all) and sacrament (repeatedly).

Those who narrate the history of subsequent Reformed theology under the rubric "Calvin vs. the Calvinists" contend that Reformed scholastics lost sight of union with Christ in their zeal for seeing justification as a benefit conferred apart from Christ himself, a result of faith's satisfaction of a covenantal (i.e., contractual) condition.²⁸ In this ("Calvinist") way lies forensic rather than participationist soteriology. Recent scholarship has challenged this way of telling the story, insisting that a Reformed remnant had always preserved the importance of receiving Christ himself, not simply his *presents* but his personal *presence*.²⁹ In any case, what is incontrovertible is the recent renaissance of scholarly interest in Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ,³⁰ an intriguing parallel with the current renewed interest in the same theme in Paul.

Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

²⁵ James Stewart, *A Man in Christ*, 147.

²⁶ *Inst.* III.11.1.

²⁷ Mark A. Garcia refers to this model as Calvin's *unio Christi-duplex gratia* soteriology. *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin's Theology* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008), 3.

²⁸ See esp. James B. Torrance, "Covenant or Contract? A Study of the Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth-Century Scotland," *SJT* 23 (1970): 51–76.

²⁹ See Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 63–80 and Macaskill, *Union with Christ*, 88–92, 98.

³⁰ In addition to Garcia, *Life in Christ*, see *inter alia* J. Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); William B. Evans, *Imputation and Impartation: Union with Christ in American Reformed Theology* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2009); John V. Fesko,

Whereas Pauline scholars are primarily interested in the coherence of Paul's theology and the sources behind it, Reformed theologians are primarily interested in the place of union with Christ in soteriology. Believers are not only justified in Christ but, as we shall see, elected, called, adopted, made alive, sanctified, and glorified "in Christ" as well. Where, then, might one locate "in Christ" in relation to the so-called "golden chain of salvation" – the various benefits that accrue to being in Christ – that Paul lists in Rom 8:29–30 and which has come to be known as the *ordo salutis*? Proponents of the "New Perspective on Calvin" have recently called attention to the centrality of union with Christ in Calvin,³¹ but Reformed theologians like John Murray had been there, done that fifty years earlier. Murray insists that union with Christ is not merely one step in the application of redemption. Rather, "[u]nion with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation."³² Anthony Hoekema provides further specification – if something that extends "from eternity to eternity" can be said to have focus! According to Hoekema, union has its roots in eternity (divine election), its objective basis in the historical death and resurrection of Christ, and its subjective realization in believers in the present temporal flow.³³

There is now a conflict of interpretations of what Calvin meant by union as there is with the apostle Paul. We cannot enter those debates here. What I do want to take from this conversation in Reformed soteriology is what I shall call the *simplicity* of union. In brief: union is to soteriology what the doctrine of divine simplicity is to theology proper. The doctrine of divine simplicity states that God is not a composite of his parts; rather, his being is coextensive with his attributes. For example, God does not "have" love; God is love. And now to the analogy: just as God is one, so salvation is simple. In the words of Richard Gaffin: "There is but one union, with dis-

Beyond Calvin: Union with Christ and Justification in Early Modern Reformed Theology (1517-1700) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012); Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *By Faith, Not By Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (2d ed.; Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2013); Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2007), esp. chap. 7; Marcus Peter Johnson, *One with Christ: An Evangelical Theology of Salvation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013); Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2011).

³¹ See the exchange between Thomas Wenger, "The New Perspective on Calvin: Responding to Recent Calvin Interpretation," *JETS* 50 (2007): 311–28; Marcus Johnson, "New or Nuanced Perspective on Calvin? A Reply to Thomas Wenger," *JETS* 51 (2008): 545–48.

³² John Murray, *Redemption, Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 161.

³³ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 54–55.

tinguishable but inseparable, coexisting legal and renovative aspects.”³⁴ Just as each divine attributes gives us a perspective on God’s being, so each element in the order of salvation – not only justification and sanctification but election, and glorification as well – shines a light on another aspect of our union with Christ: “Every element in the classical *ordo salutis* is thus a further perspective on the one reality of the believer’s union with Christ.”³⁵

IV. Mapping the mystery

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17)

Our brief survey has staked the claim that union with Christ is a pervasive theme in Paul’s letters and Christian tradition in general.³⁶ While the reality of union with Christ may be simple, attempts to describe this reality are anything but. The present volume contains interdisciplinary explorations of the fundamental mystery of salvation, namely, the nature of the believer’s union with and participation in Christ. How can those who are not Jesus Christ – Paul, St. Francis, Calvin, etc. – have a share in Christ’s life, death, and resurrection? The premise of the present volume is that we have a better chance of responding to this question by taking into account exegetical, historical and systematic theological perspectives.

Part One consists of contributions from biblical scholars who wrestle to understand, clarify, and explore Paul’s own language and concepts in textual and historical context. A number of these essays explore particular issues in relation to particular texts (e.g., *theosis* in 2 Corinthians, Christ’s kingship in Ephesians, the Spirit’s mediation of Christ in Romans 8, *phronēsis* in Philippians). The intent is not to give encyclopedic coverage but to broaden the discussion by exploring passages and themes that are not always treated in works on Paul’s thought about union and participation. What comes to the fore in this section is the richness and diversity of Paul’s thinking about union and participation in Christ.

The essays in Part Two provide snapshots from a larger album, highlights in the history of the reception of Paul’s vision. While it is true that we are presently witnessing the “second coming” of interest in union with Christ (Calvin’s being the prior coming), it is also true that union and participation have been themes of perennial interest. Each of the essays

³⁴ Gaffin, *By Faith, Not By Sight*, 43.

³⁵ Sinclair Ferguson, *Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 106.

³⁶ The Johannine literature is similarly replete with images of the believer’s union with Christ (the theme of reciprocal abiding is especially prominent) but beyond the scope of the present project. For an overview, see Hans Burger, *Being in Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Investigation in a Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2009), chap. 6.

demonstrates that Paul's notions of union and participation in Christ have played a key role in a number of seminal theologians from the past, from Irenaeus to Karl Barth. As I suggested earlier in connection with Reformed soteriology, reading Paul through the eyes of Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and John Owen can itself be a significant means of coming to a deeper understanding not only of these theologians, but also of the apostle Paul.

The three essays in Part Three employ the resources of systematic theology, taking soil samples of being in Christ. Each thinks through participation in Christ in light of a particular doctrine (sanctification, the Lord's Supper, ecclesiology) and vice versa. This section is in many respects the place where we confront the theological and pastoral "so what" question: if union and participation are as important as we think they are, what are the practical implications of this claim for individuals, denominations, and the church? We are happy to confront this question, especially in light of Marcus Johnson's claim that large swaths of the church (he is thinking primarily of evangelical theology) are unfamiliar with the idea of union with Christ.³⁷ The short answer is that these admittedly technical essays treat what is nevertheless a vitally important topic: salvation in Christ. Indeed, if we are to take Paul at his word, no subject is more important. For the apostle declares, with no hint of exaggeration, that he regards everything else as mere feces³⁸ in comparison to knowing Christ and being found "in him" (Phil. 3:8–9). Why that is so these essays will show.

Let me now chart the course of the rest of the present introduction. The next section briefly examines some of the issues exegetes confront in dealing with the various prepositions Paul uses for conveying the ideas of participation in Christ. I then move up a rung in the ladder of Paul's discourse from prepositions to metaphors and inquire into the meaning of some of Paul's most characteristic ways for speaking of union and participation, many of which are also stages in the history of redemption (e.g., election, adoption, baptism, etc.). Next I examine the way in which interpreters past and present move from Paul's prepositions, metaphors, and historical categories (e.g., "blessed in Christ") to their own concepts, judgments, and ontological categories (e.g., "being-in-Christ"). Where Paul sought the mind of Christ, his interpreters seek the mind of Paul. Can any scholar lay claim to recovering not only *Paulus dixit* but also *Paulus cogitatus*? Have systematic theologians found what Sanders, a New Testament scholar, could

³⁷ Johnson suggests four reasons for this contemporary neglect. *One with Christ*, 24–28).

³⁸ I am here following Robert Gundry's literal translation of σκόβαλα in his *Commentary on the New Testament: Verse-by-Verse Explanations with a Literal Translation* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2010), 791.

not, namely, categories with which to understand the nature of the reality of union with Christ?

Having raised the question, I shall then survey two recent suggestions, each involving a fourfold conceptual scheme, and make bold to suggest two more concepts that provide a potentially synthetic punch: communication and communion. I conclude by gesturing towards yet another constructive possibility for grasping the reality of union with Christ, as much theatrical metaphor as theoretical model: theodramatic participation.³⁹

B. "In Christ": prepositions, history, and biblical exegesis

Luther thought that the heart of religion lies in the pronouns: "The Son of God gave himself for *me*." By way of contrast, modern evangelical theologians often give pride of place to propositions: "God is immutable." The theme of the present volume focuses attention on yet another part of speech – the preposition: "*in, into, with, and through* Christ." There is ancient precedent for such "prepositional" theology. Basil of Caesarea, the Great (ca.330–79) wrote an influential treatise, *On the Holy Spirit*, which refuted heretical views of the Holy Spirit largely by examining their misinterpretation of biblical prepositions. Indeed, Basil opens his treatise (written in reply to Amphilochius, a fellow bishop) by affirming the principle "that not one of the words that are applied to God in every use of speech should be left uninvestigated."⁴⁰ The heretics claimed there were three Gods on the grounds that the three divine persons were assigned different prepositions (e.g., Paul in 1 Cor 8:6 says that all things are "from" the Father but "through" the Son). Basil rebuts this claim by carefully examining biblical usage, effectively demonstrating that there is no such strict division of prepositional labor.

What Basil says of the prepositions that affect the doctrine of the Holy Spirit applies to union with and participation in Christ as well: "What you want us to examine is both little and great, little in the brevity of its utterance ... and great in the power of its meaning."⁴¹ Indeed. Paul uses the phrase "in Christ" (ἐν Χριστῷ) seventy-three times. When we add other ways of expressing union with or participation in Christ (e.g., "in him,"

³⁹ For a helpful collection of resources on union with Christ, arranged in eleven sections, see <http://philgons.com/resources/bible/bibliographies/union-with-christ/>.

⁴⁰ Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit* tr. Stephen Hildebrand (Yonkers, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 1.1.

⁴¹ Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, 1.2. Interestingly enough, Basil devotes chapter 26 to an examination of the preposition "in": "That 'in' is spoken of the Spirit in as many ways as 'and' is found" (26, 61).

“with Christ,” “through Christ”) the number of Pauline instances more than doubles, to 164 instances. The statistics are clear, their meaning less so, in large part because biblical prepositions alone are insufficient to determine meaning.⁴²

A number of detailed exegetical studies of Paul’s use of “in Christ” and other related phrases (e.g. “with Christ,” “through Christ”), culminating with Campbell’s magisterial study *Paul and Union with Christ*⁴³ have appeared in the past fifty years. We have time here only for a peek into these discussions.

The most obvious issue concerns the meaning and translation of ἐν. Commentators have proposed a variety of possible senses (Markus Barth mentions nine⁴⁴), but for convenience sake we can limit the present discussion to two basic types, emphasizing either locality (*where* something is or is being done, e.g., “A is in Christ”) or instrumentality (*what* is being done, e.g., “A does x through Christ”) respectively.⁴⁵ As to the instrumental sense, Barth notes that in about one-half of the occurrences of “in Christ” in the book of Ephesians, “God is the subject of the decision or action made ‘in Christ.’”⁴⁶ More generally, the phrase always seems to concern the relationship formed in/by/through Jesus Christ between God and God’s people. However, at the end of the day Barth acknowledges the problem with trying to fix the meaning with a single definition: “Paul used the formula in more than one sense.”⁴⁷ On *this* point there now seems to be a general consensus.⁴⁸ There is also broad agreement that Paul, unlike John, does not treat “in Christ” as a two-way street: that Christ dwells in believers is something that Paul affirms, but not usually in terms of ἐν Χριστῷ.

The instrumental meaning of ἐν Χριστῷ, at least, is clear. God forgives us “in Christ” by making Christ and his cross the instrument of the action by which God deals with sin. The force of the locative sense of “in Christ” is less obvious. Can we plot the coordinates of the space designated by “in

⁴² This is perhaps the exegetical equivalent to the problem of evidential underdetermination in the philosophy of science.

⁴³ Other important works include Fritz Neugebauer, *In Christus: Eine Untersuchung zum paulinischen laubensverständnis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961); Michel Bouttier, *En Christ: Étude d'exégèse et de théologie Pauliniennes* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962).

⁴⁴ Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1-3* (AB 34A; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974), 69.

⁴⁵ Seifrid adds a third category, modality, which emphasizes the manner in which an action occurs (“In Christ,” 433).

⁴⁶ Barth, *Ephesians*, 69.

⁴⁷ Barth, *Ephesians*, 69.

⁴⁸ See also Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 199 and Ernest Best, *One Body in Christ: A Study of the Relationship of the Church to Christ in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul* (London: SPCK, 1955), 1-7.

Christ"? Where exactly is this? One suggestion is "in his body," though whether this refers to his exalted state, his earthly church, or a new humanity of which he is the head (or all of the above) is another open question. One potentially helpful way forward is to view the locative "in" not as spatial but spherical, that is, as pertaining to the sphere or domain of Christ's lordly influence, itself coextensive with being "in the Spirit."⁴⁹ In this way, the spiritual sense (so to speak) of ἐν corresponds to its original literal/locative sense. In the words of Murray Harris: "It is used to denote the sphere within which some action occurs or the element or reality in which something is contained or consists."⁵⁰

Harris also allows for other uses/meanings of ἐν Χριστῷ, including "incorporative union."⁵¹ As with all difficult exegetical decisions, historical context looms large. Which context did Paul likely have in mind in speaking of what God is doing to believers in Christ? One intriguing possibility is that Paul used ἐν to signal a distinctly Hebrew conception of social solidarity according to which the "many" were viewed as incorporated into a representative "one."⁵² This way of relating the one and the many is no abstract principle but is rather woven into Israel's concrete history, where individuals (e.g., Abraham, Moses, David) represent the people before God. The covenant blessing of God's presence eventually comes to focus on David's house in the figure of a future Davidic king (2 Sam. 7:14-16).⁵³

Prepositions can, of course, take us only so far. N. T. Wright builds on the notion of incorporative union by arguing that we understand Paul rightly not simply by parsing his parts of speech but by relating his thought to its Old Testament background and, in particular, to the notion that *Christos* is not Jesus' last name but the title of his office: *Messiah*.⁵⁴ Wright insists that Jesus, as Messiah, "*has drawn together the identity and vocation of*

⁴⁹ So Stanley E. Porter, who describes Paul's use of the phrase "in Christ" as "spherical," in the sense of one being "in the sphere of Christ's control." *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (2d ed.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 159.

⁵⁰ Murray J. Harris, "Appendix: Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (ed. Colin Brown; vol. 3; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1976), 1191. See also Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament: An Essential Reference Resource for Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 122–26.

⁵¹ Harris, "Prepositions and Theology," 1192.

⁵² One must not confuse this more recent suggestion, which appeals to the nature of the covenant, with earlier theories of "corporate personality" such as that found in H. Wheeler Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964).

⁵³ See Macaskill, *Union with Christ*, 103–10.

⁵⁴ See the recent study by Matthew V. Novenson, *Christ among the Messiahs: Christ Language in Paul and Messiah Language in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

*Israel upon himself.*⁵⁵ It is not necessarily that the idea of messianic incorporation was in the first-century Palestinian air (it may not have been), but rather that Paul was led to revise his understanding of the Messiah in light of Jesus' resurrection, for in raising Jesus from the dead, God had done for him what he was supposed to have done for Israel: "He was, in effect, Israel in person."⁵⁶ To be "in the Messiah" – the son of David; the "true Jew" – is to be part of the people defined and ruled by him: "*Christos* denotes ... 'the Messiah as the representative of his people,' the one *in whom* that people are summed up and drawn together."⁵⁷ In short: the Messiah does what Israel (and Adam) failed to do, and thereby receives the inheritance promised to Adam, Abraham, and David, as does anyone else who is "in" (i.e., represented by and incorporated into) the Messiah. Macaskill comes to a similar conclusion after examining the Isaianic servant songs (especially Isa 53): the servant represents Israel, fulfilling her vocation, "and through him they participate in the narrative of salvation."⁵⁸ It is to this narrative, a level of discourse beyond prepositions, that we now turn.

C. "Blessed in Christ": metaphor, redemptive history, and biblical theology

I. Redemptive history and biblical theology

After a brief opening address, Paul begins the book of Ephesians with a long, cumbersome sentence, praising God the Father "who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3).⁵⁹ Just as Rom 8:28–29 represents the Golden Chain of salvation, so here in Eph 1:3–14 Paul gives us what we could call the Golden Chain of participation in Christ. Karl Barth, in his lectures on Ephesians in Göttingen in 1921–22, divided Paul's long opening sentence into four sections, each beginning with "in Christ":

- in Christ, we have election (vv. 4–6)
- in Christ, we have liberation and forgiveness (vv. 7–10)
- in Christ, we have an inheritance and therefore hope (vv. 11–12)

⁵⁵ N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 825 (emphasis original).

⁵⁶ N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 828.

⁵⁷ N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 834 (emphasis original).

⁵⁸ Macaskill, *Union with Christ*, 126.

⁵⁹ On Pauline authorship of Ephesians, see the essay by Joshua Jipp in the present volume.

– in Christ, we have the sealing of the Spirit, the pledge of our inheritance (vv. 13–14)

These blessings constitute one reality – all that we have “in Christ” – expressed in three tenses: past (election), present (forgiveness and the Spirit), and future (the hope of our inheritance).⁶⁰ Stated differently: “in Christ” is shorthand for the whole doctrine of salvation, and thus the whole of redemptive history. What might otherwise have been unrelated discrete events (e.g., election, atonement, sanctification) become, on this view, a single christological coat of many canonical colors. To seek to understand union with Christ in relation to redemptive history is to examine “in Christ” in the framework not of exegesis but biblical theology.⁶¹ The key question here is not merely *what* is union with Christ (as we have seen, a preliminary answer is “incorporation into Messiah”) but also *when* is union with Christ? *When* were we incorporated into the Messiah and “blessed in Christ” with every spiritual blessing?

1. Election

That Yahweh chose Abraham and his offspring, Israel, out of all the nations of the earth (Isa. 41:8) was the *cantus firmus* of the Old Testament. The Lord chose Israel to be his treasured possession (Deut 14:2) and the means by all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 26:4).⁶² Paul, however, writes to the Ephesians that they were chosen in Christ “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). On this view, God’s pretemporal sovereign determination precedes an individual’s temporal coming to faith and is thus the ultimate cause of the believer’s incorporation into the Messiah. In the words of Richard Gaffin: “For those who are ‘in Christ,’ this union or solidarity is all-encompassing, extending in fact from eternity to eternity, from what is true of them ‘before the foundation of the world’ (Eph. 1:4, 9) to their still future glorification (Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 15:22).”⁶³

2. Incarnation

Some theologians suggest that union with or incorporation into Christ happens when the Word who was God “became flesh” (John 1:14).⁶⁴ Accord-

⁶⁰ See Ross McGowan Wright, *Karl Barth’s Academic Lectures on Ephesians (Göttingen, 1921-22): An original translation, annotation, and analysis* (Ph.D. diss., The University of St Andrews, 2007).

⁶¹ For more on this approach, see Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 6–10.

⁶² See further Joel S. Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007).

⁶³ Gaffin, *By Faith, not by Sight*, 41–42.

⁶⁴ Karl Barth, for example, sees the Son’s incarnation as eternal election in its temporal display (i.e., *Christ is the decree*).

ing to this view, the incarnation is not simply Jesus' assumption of human nature but humanity as such. All human beings therefore participate in the Son simply by virtue of being human – call it *physical* union with Christ. There is a good deal of debate among theologians (many of them Reformed) as to whether this physical participation in Christ's humanity is intrinsically redemptive. Some view the Incarnation as a necessary (preliminary) condition of Jesus' acting on behalf of humanity. Others view the Incarnation as itself the key soteriological event (i.e., incorporation into Christ).⁶⁵ Here is the key question: is soteriology (i.e., participation in Christ) simply ontology writ large (i.e., a matter of partaking in human nature), as if being human were itself a sufficient condition for being "in Christ"?⁶⁶

3. *Death and resurrection*

Most Christian theologians distinguish the (physical) union with Christ established at his incarnation from what Paul seems to highlight, namely, our participation in Jesus' death and resurrection, that is, his redemptive work: "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20). For Paul, the work of Christ does not establish a union with humanity in general but rather for a distinct group: "Christ loved *the church* and gave himself up *for her*" (Eph. 5:25, my emphasis). Those who place their faith in Christ share in Christ's resurrection, the "first fruits" of a great end-time resurrection harvest (1 Cor. 15:20). The "already" of believers' being raised with Christ (Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:12–13; 3:1), and the bodily resurrection yet to come, and are but two episodes of one and the same event: Christ's resurrection.⁶⁷ Incorporation into Christ's death and resurrection happens not at the believer's birth

⁶⁵ Robert Letham does not go as far as Torrance in stressing the universal scope of incarnational union, but he agrees that the Son's assuming human flesh has soteriological significance: "Because Christ's humanity has divine life hypostatically, we can – in union with Christ – receive divine life by grace and participation." *Union with Christ*, 32).

⁶⁶ T. F. Torrance here builds on the patristic maxim "the unassumed is the unhealed" and concludes that "incarnational union" is inherently redemptive (though he also insists that the Spirit realizes the "subjective" aspect of this union). By way of contrast, Calvin calls this incarnational union a "natural" union, distinguishing it from the "mystical" union that characterizes his soteriology. It is also significant that Paul says we are united to Christ by the Spirit who raised him a spiritual (*pneumatikon*) rather than physical (*psuchichon*) body (1 Cor 15:44; cf. Rom 8:11). See further my "The Origin of Paul's Soteriology: Election, Incarnation, and Union with Christ in Ephesians 1:4 (with special reference to Evangelical Calvinism)," in *Reconsidering the Relationship between Biblical and Systematic Theology in the New Testament: Essays by Theologians and New Testament Scholars* (ed. Benjamin Reynolds, Brian Lugioyo, and Kevin J. Vanhoozer; WUNT 2/369; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 177–211.

⁶⁷ See Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 67–77.

(i.e., by virtue of being born human) but baptism (i.e., by virtue of saving faith): "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized in Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 6:3; cf. 6:4–5). To be blessed in Christ in this context is to be incorporated not into his nature but into his history, and baptism is the graphic public exhibit of the actualization of such incorporation. Baptism marks the moment in *our* history when we are incorporated into *Jesus*' history.⁶⁸

4. *Ascension and session*

Paul says we were blessed in Christ "in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3) and that God has "seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6). These phrases recall the ascension and heavenly session of Christ, as well as the line from the Apostles' Creed indicating the climax, and goal, of everything else in Jesus' story: "and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty."⁶⁹ Unlike all the other things the Creed mentions (e.g., born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate), the "and sits" is in the present tense and designates a *now* time that is also a *new* time: the end-time inaugurated by Jesus' death and resurrection. It is in the Lord's Supper above all that the Holy Spirit lifts our spirits up to the ascended Christ, the one who has entered the heavenly sanctuary from which he rules all as the one in whom all things are "gathered up" (Eph. 1:10). Believers have even now been incorporated into the consummation of their union with Christ in the eschaton: "future glory . . . will be nothing other than the continued unfolding of the riches of our union with Christ."⁷⁰ Union with Christ arguably spans the whole of redemptive history, from eternal election to heavenly session.

II. *Metaphor and biblical theology*

There is in Paul's discourse another way of speaking of union with Christ in addition to prepositions or connecting it to messianic moments in salvation history. We therefore turn from a consideration of the history of redemption (the moment of incorporation) to certain metaphors of redemption (images of incorporation).⁷¹ Like prepositions, metaphors too call for

⁶⁸ See further the essay by Isaac Morales, "Baptism and Union with Christ" in the present volume.

⁶⁹ See also Joshua Jipp's essay "Sharing in the Heavenly Rule of Christ the King" in the present volume.

⁷⁰ Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 64.

⁷¹ See further the discussion by Constantine Campbell, "Metaphor, Reality, and Union with Christ" in the present volume.