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David E. Fredrickson
Luther Seminary, dfredric@luthersem.edu

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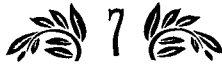
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Pauline Ethics

Congregations as Communities of Moral Deliberation

David Fredrickson

Introduction

A founder and nurturer of congregations, St. Paul thought and wrote about moral matters for these same congregations. Recent interpreters have shown that the apostle's ethical statements were shaped to fit the needs and circumstances of the particular group of believers to whom he was writing. This chapter does not seek coherence in various moral topics in Paul's letters and then apply his views as guidelines for individuals.¹ Nor does it focus on the specific cultural and historical identities of the congregations he was addressing. Instead I will draw out ethical significance from the fact that Paul placed congregations at the very center of his thought. In this approach congregations are neither obstacles to the reconstruction of coherent moral opinions nor the passive recipients of already worked out answers. Rather they are places where moral reflection, formulation, and action occur. Pauline ethics grow out of the apostle's vision of the church as persons gathered and empowered for moral deliberation by the Spirit in the name of Jesus.

Why is Paul's ethical thought a pertinent topic in a book on Lutheran ethics? One reason is that many Lutheran ethicists have appealed to Paul's writings as an authoritative source for such key teachings as Christian freedom, justification by grace through faith, and vocation. Ethics is Lutheran, it is claimed, if the individual believer is motivated for good works through the forgiveness of sin. Ethics speaks first about the individual before God and the conscience that has been freed from guilt. It has also been a Lutheran belief that God has structured the world and called individuals into roles, relationships, or as Robert Benne has aptly put it, "places of responsibility." Paul's writ-

ings have served as a biblical basis for this dual focus on individual motivation and the role of the individual in the orders of creation.² Most Lutheran interpreters of Paul have appropriated him to legitimate this scheme of ethics.

Another reason to turn to Paul, and the one behind this essay, is the belief that Paul provides an alternative to that kind of Lutheran ethics. While not ignoring the issue of individual motivation for good works, my approach makes thematic the power of persons in community to influence their corporate lives and the world for good or for ill. Instead of assuming stable and meaningful structures into which individuals are called, this ethic explores the way humans use power to create structures that are sometimes beneficial and sometimes oppressive and destructive. The moral task that lies before the church is the testing of all things by those who must bear the consequences of the decisions reached. Taking up this task in the power of the Spirit, the church aligns itself with the reforming work of Martin Luther.^{3*}

My approach requires me to give more attention than is usual in the Lutheran appropriation of Paul to the political dimension of his thought. By "political" I mean to evoke the Greek city-state and its democratic procedures for decisionmaking.⁴ I will pursue the thesis that an adequate account of Pauline ethics must begin with the instructive parallel that exists between Paul's conceptualization of the local church and the assembly (*ekklēsia*) of the Greek city. This parallel does not explain all of Paul's thinking about the church, but it does underscore that for Paul the chief ethical problem has to do with the kind of politics the church practices internally.

The three passages I examine (2 Cor. 3; Phil. 1:27—2:18; and Rom. 12—15) are rich in political imagery for the internal actions of the congregation. 2 Cor. 3 and Rom. 12—15 also have theoretical treatments of the use of Scripture in the church, while Phil. 1:27—2:18 helps us understand Paul's appropriation of the theory of example in Greco-Roman moral philosophy. His commitment to the theory of example influences the way he uses Scripture. Furthermore his use of Scripture coordinates well with his understanding of the congregation as a democratic community.

Free Speech and the Letter/Spirit Distinction in 2 Corinthians 3

The political metaphor of the congregation as assembly shapes Paul's ecclesiology.⁵ This is most easily demonstrated in 2 Cor. 3, where we also encounter Paul's theory about the proper use of Scripture.

It is somewhat artificial to think of 2 Corinthians as Paul's discussion of Christian community. Paul is engaged in self-defense in which he gives an account of his ministry. Yet there is a connection between Paul's ministry and

the community. Some within the Corinthian church have charged him with flattery and a lack of free speech (*parrësia*). To answer this charge, Paul views his possessing free speech as dependent not upon his own moral virtue, as the philosophers did, nor upon his social standing, as did political theorists. Rather he uses much free speech (*pollē, parrësiā, chrōmetha* 3:12) because of the Spirit. In 3:18 it is clear that the Spirit is the possession of all in the community. The source of Paul's free speech and the free speech of his audience is the Spirit. Thus Paul's apology helps us understand the political dimension of his ecclesiology.

The Christian Congregation as Open and Inclusive Political Community. Because of its associations with ancient democracy, the term "free speech" (*parrësia*) in 3:12 implies that Paul understands the congregation as analogous to the Greek assembly.^{6*} The community of believers is a speaking place, where the future of the community is determined through unhindered conversation that seeks to arrive at consensus through persuasion. As we will see when examining another political term (*politēuesibai*) in Phil. 1:27, modern translators are usually deaf to the political overtones in Paul's language. They turn *parrësia* into a subjective state, and the analogy between Pauline congregation and democratic assembly disappears. The Revised Standard Version, New Revised Standard Version, and a host of commentators have encouraged an existentialist reading of Paul by taking this term out of its political setting and making it merely a matter of confidence.⁷

Free speech was in fact the heart of ancient democracy. It was the right of all to whom Greek cities granted citizenship and was the most effective means of preserving the city's freedom and safety. After Alexander's conquest, as the centers of decision making shifted away from cities to regional capitals, philosophers imagined free speech independently of waning city life. The good conscience based upon the wise man's virtue gave him confidence to speak the truth no matter what the personal risk. Free speech also had an important role to play in friendship. Friends spoke the truth to one another to confront shortcomings and bring moral improvement. Frank speech was the language of friendship.⁸ At political, philosophical, and interpersonal levels, *parrësia* was always a matter of speaking and never simply confidence.

To grasp the radical openness of the Christian congregation as a political community, it is important to note who was not granted freedom of speech in ancient democracies: women, slaves, foreigners, and children. Because of its inclusiveness, Paul's vision of the church as a democratic community is an extreme form of democracy by the standards of the ancient world. He tore down the barriers to full participation through his conviction that the Spirit grants free speech to all who belong to Christ. For the church to be the church, the voices of all must be heard.^{9*} Even though Paul uses the

imagery of the Greek assembly in which those trained in rhetoric had an advantage in promoting their purposes, he does not grant this privilege. Paul takes from the assembly the ideal of free speech and leaves behind the social status and educational distinctions that favored the speech of some to the exclusion of others.

Shame Brings Silence: The Spirit Brings Speech. Paul rejects the way his culture limited the power of free speech to upper class, free males. Although free speech as a rhetorical activity cannot be reduced to subjectivity, it nonetheless did rest upon a state of mind known as *pepoilbēsis* (confidence), which Paul mentions in 3:4.¹⁰ A fruitful way of interpreting 2 Corinthians 3 is to trace the way confidence for free speech is created. For Paul this is a theological question. Social standing and moral virtue were the two confidence-creating factors in Greek society. For Paul they play no role in making persons free and thus capable of using free speech. Instead the Spirit of the Lord creates this freedom (3:17) and does so by removing shame.

2 Cor. 3:4-18 traces how the written code, or letter (*gramma*), brings about shame and silence, the very opposite of free speech. The letter is the death of the church as a democratic community resting on free speech. The Spirit, on the other hand, is the source of its life: "The letter kills but the Spirit makes alive." The letter/Spirit distinction is not a hermeneutic distinction as many scholars have argued. Paul's point is not that persons who have the Spirit have access to the meaning of Old Testament texts by transcending the literal sense. Rather the letter/Spirit distinction should be understood in political terms.¹¹ Paul is asking what makes participation in the community possible for all its members. What is the source of the community's freedom and free speech?

To amplify his claim in 2 Cor. 3:6 that the letter kills while the Spirit gives life, Paul employs a common rhetorical device called comparison (*sugkrisis*). In 3:7-18 he freely adopts the story of Moses' veiled face in Exodus 34. If it is the case that code written on stone and resulting in death occurred in glory, how much more glorious is the ministry of the Spirit (3:7-8). In 3:9 letter is renamed the ministry of condemnation and contrasted with the Spirit's ministry of justification. In 3:10 the old covenant is being nullified. If glory attaches to it in spite of its temporal limitation, then how much more will glory attach to work of the Spirit that remains forever. Based upon the enduring work of the Spirit to create justice, Paul concludes the first comparison in 3:12: "Therefore having such hope, we use much free speech." It is not written code that creates the confidence or hope upon which free speech and democratic community are based. Only the Spirit with its promise of enduring transformation accomplishes this.^{12*}

In 3:13-18 the comparison turns from the two ministries to the two ministers, Moses and Paul. In 3:13-15 Moses begins as a negative example but in 3:16 emerges as a positive example.¹³ In 3:13 Paul tells his hearers that he is not like Moses insofar as Moses veiled his face so that the sons of Israel might not stare at the result of the old covenant. This self-veiling suggests that Moses hid himself from a sense of shame, since in ancient philosophy and literature there was a frequent connection between shame and concealment of the face.¹⁴ In Paul's retelling of the story, Moses does not want the people of Israel to see the result (*telos*) of the old covenant—shame. Nevertheless the fact that Moses' veil is removed in 3:16 signifies an end to his shame, and he exemplifies its very opposite—freedom. The connection between Moses' unveiled face and freedom reflects a popular notion that freedom was dependent on a good conscience. Free speech in turn finds its legitimate basis in the freedom granted by a good conscience. The person having no cause to be ashamed is empowered to use free speech.¹⁵

Scripture Samples the Spirit's Work. The unveiled Moses and the unveiled Paul, both made free by the Spirit, are models of the church. Not that they are patterns for imitation. Rather they are samples of the reality that the Spirit is creating in the church. Thus Paul can begin 3:18 with the inclusive and emphatic "we *all* with uncovered face . . ." Freedom and free speech are the possessions of all in the congregation. The remainder of 3:18 depicts what happens when this freedom is allowed to run unhindered. The main event is ongoing transformation. The one image into which all members of the community are being shaped is Christ, who is himself the image of God (4:4). This transformation does not, however, happen behind the backs of the members of the congregation. It happens in, with, and under the exercise of freedom. It is accomplished as they gaze without shame into each other's faces as if into a mirror, simultaneously seeing themselves and the glory of the Lord. They become the face they see.^{16*}

2 Cor. 3 teaches us that for Paul each member of the congregation is empowered by the Spirit to use free speech. The shame that in the Greco-Roman world was attached to being poor, female, and slave is removed by the Spirit. The Spirit makes it possible for each in the church to look directly at the other, to speak, and to be transformed into the image of Christ. Furthermore the use of Scripture must harmonize with this experience of liberation. Transformation to an image rather than obedience to an authority is the key to Paul's use of Scripture. To the extent that Scripture is used as written code and precludes the shaping of the community's will through free speech, it functions as the letter that kills. Yet when Scripture is read for examples of shame being removed, it offers samples of the reality of the Spirit's work in the church.

Moral Action Means Extending Freedom: Philippians 1:27—2:18

So far we have seen that for Paul the congregation is a community of persons empowered by the Spirit to speak freely. The use of Scripture must conform to the community's experience of all being freed for speech by the Spirit. As important as the inclusion of all voices is, there is more that needs to be said about the concrete good of the community. What is worthy action in a community whose future is determined by the inclusion of all voices in conversation? How does Scripture help to bring about this moral action? How is this moral action shaped by God's action in Christ?

The Moral Good of a Testing Community. In Phil. 1:27 Paul encourages the community of believers in Philippi to "engage politically in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." The reference to worthy action establishes the moral good in relation to a political process. Unfortunately modern translations of *politeuesthe* as "behave yourselves" or "conduct yourselves" do not help us understand that Paul portrays his audience's action in political terminology. The term carries the notion of initiation of policy in matters of the city's welfare.¹⁷ The King James translation is revealing: "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ." The background for this term is democracy. It refers to citizen action within the assembly, the deliberating and legislative body of ancient democracies. What goes on in the community of those belonging to Christ is analogous to the popular assemblies of democratic governments.¹⁸ Paul exhorts his readers to engage actively through speech in the affairs of their own assembly, the local church. The nature of moral goodness rests on this political understanding of the community.

Phil. 1:9-11 deserves our attention since it also speaks of communal interaction and the moral good. In 1:10 the community's central activity is called "testing (*dokimazein*) the things that really matter."¹⁹ The things that really matter carry conviction only through a procedure in which all participants are free to raise questions, offer objections, and make alternative recommendations that are themselves subject to the testing of the other members. The significance of Paul's emphasis on testing cannot be overestimated, especially when compared with the other ethical paradigms of the ancient world. Paul is not asserting that the moral life is an imitation of universal order; nor is it conformity to a particular historical tradition. Neither is it obedience to divine command. Instead persons in community pursue consensus through testing.^{20*} Paul understands the moral good as what enhances the whole community taking up the task of testing. Accordingly he prays for the community to abound in love, knowledge, and perception in order that testing might go forward. Most

importantly testing is a privilege and responsibility of all members of the community rather than the possession of an elite group.

Paul's ethics is concerned with the way communities arrive at moral decisions through the full and free participation of individuals. Placing *dokimazein* and *politeuesthai* in their ancient political context liberates us from the modern preoccupation with the moral formation of the solitary self and its accompanying distortion of Pauline ethical thought. Furthermore exhortation in Phil. 1:27 has to do with how individuals engage politically within the community that is constituted by the narrative of Christ. Paul directs his hearers to evaluate their participation from a perspective that is established by the narrative of Christ Jesus in 2:5-11.

Christ Creates Our Freedom. Paul introduces the Christ hymn in Philippians 2 by exhorting the community to adopt the same mind as exists in Christ Jesus. The narrative begins in 2:6 with a political community composed of God and Christ Jesus. We are justified in speaking of the relationship between God and Christ Jesus as a political community if we interpret the concept of equality in the phrase "to be equal with God" in an adverbial sense rather than adjectival. Equality refers to the way God and Christ Jesus exist with one another rather than the identity of some quality, often described by commentators as "divinity." Paul is speaking of equality as equal participation in the governance of the community, or as Aristotle called it, "reciprocal equality."²¹

We need to re-conceptualize the Christ hymn from the perspective of equality employed in the discourse of democracy. Phil. 2:6b-8 narrates Christ Jesus' decision not to keep his equality with God to himself but as something that must be extended to others. Christ Jesus opens the limits on equality with God. Notice what is not said. The pattern of the Father sending the Son, which plays an important a role in Paul's other letters (for example, Rom. 8:3), is not the hymn's underlying narrative. Rather the emphasis falls on Christ's refusal to limit the political community to himself and God. The story is not of Jesus' conformity to God's will but of his own initiative to extend equality with God to others.

To extend equality with God, Christ Jesus takes on the form of a slave. How is his slavery able to communicate equality in participation with God? This is impossible to grasp if it is assumed, as in the case of many interpreters, that Christ's slavery is to God as master.²² There is, however, another interpretation of 2:7-8 that makes better sense of the narrative. Christ's obedience is given to humans not to God. Similarly his voluntary slavery is directed to humanity.²³ To understand the significance of Christ's voluntary slavery, we need to recall the origin of freedom according to ancient political philosophy.

Freedom has a material foundation. Civic freedom depended on freedom from daily tasks. Aristotle emphasizes the dependence of the master's freedom

upon the slave's labor: "Therefore all people rich enough to be able to avoid personal trouble have a steward who takes this office, while they themselves engage in politics (*politeuovrai*) or philosophy."²⁴ In the narrative Christ Jesus becomes humanity's obedient slave and thus creates freedom for his masters at the expense of his own body. He empties himself to create freedom for others.

The Moral Life as a Shared Paradox of Power. The first half of the Christ hymn helps us understand what it means for the church to "engage politically in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil. 1:27). Christ extends to others democratic participation in the divine community. The means to this end is his voluntary enslavement to those he wishes to free.²⁵ Thus to engage in the affairs of the community worthily of the gospel of Christ, each member, conscious of freedom, must take up the same goal: to extend participation to the other. Each will employ the same means to this end: voluntary slavery to the other.

What significance might this notion of mutual slavery have had for Paul's hearers? The answer is in the paradoxical character of the communal relations implied by mutual obedience. Each person in the community is simultaneously master and slave, ruler and ruled. This paradox has an antecedent in the understanding of sharing power in ancient democracies. Aristotle pointed out that the distinguishing mark of political rule (as opposed to the rule of master over slave or male over household) was an exchange of ruling and being ruled. Citizens must learn both to exercise authority over others and to obey the authority of those whom they once ruled or would rule.²⁶ In democratic arrangements of power a citizen could expect over time to be both ruler and ruled. Paul introduces a new factor by removing the temporal succession, but there is enough similarity between his understanding of the Christian community and power sharing in Greek democracies to make a meaningful comparison. By removing temporal succession, Paul makes more complex the relationships between the members of the community. While each is a master—a full participant in the divine community—each is also a slave to the others. Yet since this slavery is mutual within the congregation, the slave is again made a master.²⁷

We are now able to state the relation between ethics and politics in Paul based upon the exhortation to "engage politically in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." If we focus on the verb, each member of the community is exhorted to play an active role in the formation of the group's plans, policies, and objectives. What is remarkable about this exhortation is the predominance of a process of participation to work out a mutually acceptable form of life over assimilation to an already determined form of life or obedience to divine command. There is an openness that is to be limited by the participants themselves through speech and persuasion.

Nevertheless modifying (but not retracting!) the high degree of individual participation and initiative is the adverbial phrase "worthily of the gospel of Christ." In, with, and under the moral claims and testing initiated by community members, another activity goes on in which each individual extends freedom for equal participation in the community of God and Christ Jesus to the other. It must be acknowledged that this activity, initiated by and modeled on the voluntary slavery of Christ to humanity and his self-lowering in obscurity, is in tension with the verb *politeuesthai*. How can I assert my freedom by proposing and defending controversial moral claims and simultaneously empty myself for the other in slavelike obedience? One might reject this tension as a Pauline blunder or mystification through paradox, but taking it seriously could be the beginning of fruitful reflection on the character of the moral good in Christian congregations. What concretely does it mean to extend freedom to the other? What kind of community is this that presumes both individual initiative and mutual obedience?

The Christ Hymn and Paul's Use of Scripture. Before leaving Philippians we note the absence in 1:27—2:18 of Scripture as a norm for moral action.²⁸ Paul does not show the slightest interest in applying an already established moral code to the life of the Philippian congregation. This we should expect in light of his critique of written code in 2 Cor. 3. It is also consistent with his vision of all the members of the community engaging in political action through speech and the testing of things that matter. We must not, however, make the mistake of equating Scripture with written code and think that Paul throws the former out with the latter. As we saw in the story of Moses' veil, Scripture is full of both positive and negative examples that embody the attitudes and behavior appropriate to a community whose members are simultaneously free and slave to one another.

Even though there is no explicit use of Scripture for exhortation purposes in Phil. 1:27—2:18, the theory lying behind the way Paul employs Scripture in other letters is present. In other words, the way he uses the narrative of Christ in 2:5-11 is the way he uses Scripture in general. Certain terms in 1:27—2:18 are drawn from the theory of example in Greco-Roman moral exhortation.²⁹ Rather than code, Scripture provides examples of character. Paul offers the examples to the church for imitation and thus for the formation of the character that is the source of appropriate action in the community established by Christ's extension of freedom through his own slavery. In Philippians Paul surrounds the Christ hymn with two of the main technical terms for moral exhortation employed by the philosophers of his day: *paraklēsis* and *paramythion*.³⁰ Also borrowing from the ancient conventions of moral exhortation, he offers himself to the congregation as an example in 1:30.

The significance of Paul relying on example rather than code cannot be overestimated. Paul does not demand obedience to an authoritative set of rules, to his own apostolic authority, or even to Christ as the teacher who knows God's will. Instead he exhorts his hearers to be transformed into the pattern of Christ's liberating action narrated in the hymn.³¹ This transformation begins by the Spirit's free gift of the mind of Christ to the community.^{32*} As we will see in Rom. 15:1-6, Paul regards Scripture as a repository of this transformed mind, a collection of stories displaying Christ's mind. Christ's mind, of course, is not only or even primarily example.³³ It is not simply a goal to be striven toward. Christ's mind already exists in his hearers by virtue of their participation in the Spirit (2:1), or as we read in 2:5: "Have this mind among you which is yours in Christ Jesus."

Bearing Difference to the World: Romans 12–15

Connecting morality so closely with Christian congregations may lead some to suspect that such an ethic is naïve in two ways. First, does the church have the capacity to test all things when there is radical difference among the members? What happens when Paul's exhortation to test all things comes to members who regard some moral matters so firmly established as to be exempt from testing? What if speaking about them is unnecessary, if not itself immoral? Second is the suspicion of a kind of churchly isolationism. Does Paul's political church have the resources to create public significance out of an ethic that concerns itself primarily with the internal interactions of the members of the body of Christ?

Difference Does Not Put an End to Testing. In Romans 12–15 Paul responds to these challenges. He does so first by the test case of an audience composed of two groups: the weak in faith (14:1) and the powerful (15:1). Paul identifies himself with the latter group, for whom the distinction of clean and unclean is meaningless. They are convinced that nothing in itself is unclean (14:14). The weak in faith, however, hold that certain foods are polluting (14:2) and certain times are sacred (14:5). The clash of worldviews could hardly be more striking. The weak judge the strong, and the strong count the weak as nobodies, attitudes that reveal the additional dynamic of social class. It should be underscored that the Pauline exhortation to test all things is inherently biased toward the strong. They possess a knowledge of things in which no division of space and time into sacred and profane stands in the way of questioning and searching out God's will. The weak, on the other hand, cannot place all matters on the table without first giving up the way they believe the world to be in relation to God. The openness toward

change that is assumed in the Pauline vision of the church as the location of the Spirit's liberating presence (2 Cor. 3:17-18) is at odds with the perception of the world in categories of clean and unclean.

Yet Paul does not ask the strong to back away from the centrality of testing in the community's life. In fact in 12:1-2 Paul lets it be known that the church's chief activity is to "test (*dokimazein*) what is the will of God, the good and pleasing and perfect."³⁴ Notice, however, that the capacity for testing is not given with the knowledge or social structures of "this age." Testing the will of God depends upon a prior transformation that in turn depends upon a renewing of the mind. Here we see how Paul addresses the question of what becomes of testing in a community in which some are not committed to the testability of all things while others already engage in critical reflection. One of the tasks Paul takes up in Romans 12-15 is to delineate the character of mind that responds in love to those who must restrict the scope of matters in which God's will is to be tested. Paul thus maintains the pattern he established in Phil. 1:27. Free participation in the community's life is both asserted and modified by practical reasoning not given in the natural course of things but only in the narrative of Christ and through the Spirit.

The other challenge to Paul's political conception of the church is the apparent isolation of the congregation's ethics from the broader society. If what counts in Christian morality is the process through which decisions are reached and the insistence that all voices are to be heard, then it becomes a real problem to conceive how the church as the body of Christ acts in the world at all. Romans 13 provides a link between the inner working of congregational life and society.

Public Sphere and the Metaphor of Debt. Paul's most original contribution to Christian ethics is the way he weaves together testing in a heterogeneous community with the community's relationship with the world. He is forced to deal with the complexity of the church's relation to society because he does not have the simple solution provided by a church speaking with one voice to the world about moral matters, as if all its members (or at least the ones who count) had privileged access to truth. This notion of a single voice on moral matters would violate his notion that the church is a place of ongoing moral conversation in which no voice may be shamed into silence. It also minimizes his belief that the law is written on the hearts of all people (Rom. 2:12-16). Most of all, to conceptualize the church as a monolithic source of moral facts prevents it from making its unique contribution to civil society. Paul argues in Romans 13-15 that the church models for the world a way of carrying forth in unity in the presence of conflicting moral claims.

Romans 13 has been interpreted to speak of two separate matters.³⁵ Supposedly in verses 1-7 Paul deals with the believer's responsibility to obey

civil government and in verses 8-14 with the individual's moral life in general. In this interpretation Paul advocates a quietist ethic with respect to Christian involvement in society. One obeys the civil authorities to avoid drawing attention to the small band of believers. What is missing in this interpretation is careful attention to God's creation and preservation of the public sphere. The issue in Rom. 13:1-7 is not whether one should obey the government but how one conceives of the public sphere in the first place. 13:8-14 goes on to speak of the way the congregation contributes to and transforms the public sphere.

God creates and preserves public life. We should note that Paul does not describe his readers' actual experience of political rule in first-century Rome. Rather he builds upon the ideology of kingship originating in the philosophic response to the rule exercised by Alexander the Great and his successors. After Alexander's conquest, public spheres were created and preserved less frequently through democratic means and more often by monarchical rule. Before Paul can conceptualize how the church's inner life contributes to and transforms society (13:8-15:13), he has to provide his readers with a theory of the public sphere that is intelligible and poses no insurmountable obstacles to the church's influence. The Hellenistic ideology of kingship with its subordination of power to justice provides such a theoretical beginning.

When Paul says in Rom. 13:4 that the ruler is "God's servant for you for the good," he has captured the basic insight of Hellenistic theorists of monarchical rule who sought to place limits on the king's power. Ruling authority exists for the sake of the public good not for the ambitions of those who occupy the office. As God orders and creates harmony in the heavens, so the good king brings about peace and friendship among persons on earth by executing justice, honoring those who contribute to the common good, and conducting his affairs in an exemplary manner. The good king's rule mirrors divine rule.³⁶ The coercive dimension of rule, to which Paul alludes with such terms as judgment, fear, and sword, exists to suppress evil. Paul also emphasizes in 13:3 that the role of the ruler is to honor those who make a positive contribution to the community's life. Finally in 13:6 Paul mentions that the rule is undertaken at great expense and personal trouble to the ruler.

Paul also makes a connection between the account of the public sphere offered in 13:1-7 to the inner life of the church in 13:8. The glue that binds the ruled to the ruler is the obligation to repay debt. In 13:5 subordination to civil authority is necessary not merely out of fear of punishment but more importantly from a sense of fairness. The reason that taxes are paid and respect given (13:6-7) is that the rulers have put forth great personal effort on behalf of the ruled. Justice therefore demands that something is owed them. From this reasoning comes the Pauline exhortation: "Repay the debts to all (*apodote pasin tas opheilias*)."

Paul's exhortation in Rom. 13:8 must be interpreted in the context of obligation within the public sphere discussed in 13:5-7. Although debts generated by the civil authority's effort to bring about justice must be repaid, one obligation toward the ruling authority can never be fully discharged. Members of the community of believers are in a perpetual state of obligation to the broader human community to love one another: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another." Paul does not exhort his hearers to love persons outside of the community of believers, although the notion of doing good to outsiders is certainly not an idea foreign to his thought (Gal. 6:10). The point is that the congregation is a debtor to civil authority. The way it attempts to repay—but never thinking it has fully discharged its obligation—is through mutual loving relations within the congregation itself (which I will examine shortly). Note the unique way Paul is conceptualizing the relation between church and civil society. The metaphor of debt presents a complex interplay between the church's inner life and its relationship to the public sphere.³⁷ It is the medium through which the church's ethic, built up around its politics, can have an effect on the greater society.

Christ, Scripture, and the Meaning of Love. In Rom. 15:1 we read, "We who are powerful ought to carry the weaknesses of those who are not powerful and not please ourselves." Standing behind the word "ought" is the Greek word *opheilō*. With a word play, Paul connects the obligation described in 15:1 to his earlier discussion of the public sphere in 13:7-8 where debt (*opheilē*) is repaid and his hearers are to owe (*opheilete*) nothing to anyone except to love one another. The terms "good" and "neighbor" in 15:2 also remind the reader of the transition between the public and the church in 13:7-10. Love within the community, the perpetual debt to the wider society, is made concrete in the phrase "to carry (*bastazein*)" weaknesses.³⁸ But what does this mean?

In a negative sense it means that the powerful are not to cause the weak to violate their own conscience. Paul alludes to this principle in 14:5: "Let each be fully convinced in their own mind." The worst thing that can happen is for the powerful to cause the weak to be grieved (14:15) or to stumble (14:20). This amounts to the destruction of the ones for whom Christ died (14:15), who are the creation of God (14:19). To love is not to bring the other into self-judgment and self-condemnation in the matter that is being tested (14:22-23). Paul offers a theory about the use of Scripture in 13:8-10 that correlates with his idea about what love does not do. Love fulfills the law because it "does not work evil toward the neighbor" (13:10). Love summarizes the prohibitions of the law (13:9). But the logic of summary and fulfillment leads the congregation away from actually reading Scripture since the prohibitions are already contained in the command to love.

Paul develops the positive sense of "carry" in Rom. 15:3-6. In doing so he comes up with a fuller theory of the use of Scripture.³⁹ As in 2 Cor. 3 and Phil. 1:27—2:18, the theory prefers example/transformation to command/obedience. Christ's example of not pleasing himself is cited in 15:3, and this is expanded by discovering in Scripture (Ps. 69:9) the mind of Christ. With this turn to Scripture as the repository of Christ's mind, "bearing" another person comes into clearer focus: "The reproaches of those reproaching you fell upon me." This is not sympathy or toleration but the actual feeling, thinking, and living in the world of the other as experienced in shame, which was the result of a rebuke as severe as a reproach (*oneidismos*). Reminiscent of mutual slavery as the mark of the entire community in Philippians 2, the prayer in Rom. 15:5 makes clear that the gift of Christ's mind is finally for all the members. Thus the congregation's unity does not rest in its agreement about moral topics, although each member has the right to initiate testing with the hope of consensus. Rather the church's unity resides in the gift of God, in each member sharing the mind of Christ, in each bearing in himself or herself the reproach that falls upon the other. This unity brings glory to God (15:6). When perceived by the world, the church's obligation to society is perpetually discharged (15:7-13).

Paul and Lutheran Ethics

I have made a case for understanding Pauline ethics in terms of two distinct but related activities. Both are carried out in the church by means of the Spirit.

The first activity is political. It is the church's testing of values received from tradition or culture. Paul takes from the history of Greek democracy the vision of a community whose members are free to initiate discussion about any matter yet also responsible to give reasons for any claim made. Paul radicalizes this vision in two ways. First he is convinced that the Spirit gives the right of testing to all for whom Christ died regardless of the status markers that they bear in the world. Second, testing goes on in a community that is composed of God, Christ, and the church. Testing then is not just a good idea or an effective means to build community (it may sometimes seem otherwise!); it is a theological activity. God's life can no longer be understood apart from the life of the community that lives in the freedom for testing extended to it by Christ's death.

The second activity is ethical. The moral good is the mutual extension of freedom within the community. Paul uses the images of slavery and burden bearing to depict the freedom creating action of Christ for us. Living out of this narrative, the church is a place where persons are mutually and voluntarily enslaved to one another, dedicated to the other's freedom. It is also the

place where real differences are present and the other's shame carried. The world sees this ethos and glorifies God.

Paul's chief contribution to Lutheran ethics is his vision of the church as a community of moral deliberation in which the political and the ethical exist simultaneously and energize each other. It is crucial not to break them apart. Any approach to Lutheran ethics that emphasizes simply the process of coming to moral decisions and ignores the ethos of the community—its living out of the story of Christ—will not reflect the Pauline vision since it will have lost sight of the moral task of extending freedom to the other and bearing the other's difference. Conversely any proposal that thinks only in terms of the community's identity and the ethos it has received from the tradition will abandon the critical principle within Paul's ethics and fail to do justice to the freedom granted by the Spirit through the death of Christ for us. Lutherans must discover from Paul what they already know—to live simultaneously free and bound.

52. Ronald F. Thiemann, *Religion in Public Life* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996).

Chapter 7: Pauline Ethics

1. If one undertakes this task expecting to find specific teachings normative for individuals, then one must be prepared for surprises. Conservatives and liberals alike will be dismayed to find Paul advocating ethical positions that are unsuited to their own causes. A good example of this is Paul's view of the human body, which informs the statements he makes about sexual practice. Dale Martin in *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) demonstrates that only with the blinders of anachronism can Paul's asceticism be ignored and the apostle be regarded as the champion of heterosexuality. Yet who in current sexuality debates advocates Paul's position: ascetic control of the body and marriage as preventative measure against desire?

2.* For the challenges to this approach in Lutheran ethics and an outline for moving forward, see Robert Benne's concluding remarks in his chapter.

3.* This approach to Lutheran ethics is illustrated by Larry Rasmussen and Cynthia Moe-Lobeda's chapter.

4. Today the term "political" is often used derisively as a synonym for deceitful and secretive power plays. I emphasize just the opposite. To be political means to conduct oneself publicly and to put power in the context of persuasion with a strict avoidance of force. "Democracy" has suffered almost as much as "political" in the common notion that it simply means voting on already established options. I use the term "democratic" in line with the classical sense of power in the hands of the people. This means that "democratic" includes raising issues and public argument aiming toward consensus.

5. For a previous attempt to interpret Paul's thought in political categories, see D. Fredrickson, "Free Speech in Pauline Political Theology," *Word & World* 12 (1992): 345–51.

6.* Free speech in the modern period tends to lose its political mooring and drift into the right of individual "self-expression." Reinhard Hütter in this book sees something like this turn as the core fallacy of Protestant ethics. His masterful detection of self-legislation under the cover of traditional Lutheran themes is an appropriate warning against individualism in my attempt to think about Lutheran ethics in terms of Pauline free speech. Yet his constructive proposal for a decentered self does not fit with Paul, who was concerned that persons not considered selves in the ancient world be empowered to speak, in fact to become selves. Today this is as pressing an issue as dethroning the autonomous self. Since for Paul the self's becoming always takes place in the context of other voices, he is not defending autonomy by promoting free speech. Furthermore as we will see below, he emphasizes the right of all believers to initiate moral discussion in all matters. Decentering the self goes too far if it discourages such initiation.

7. See R. Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 85. Luther favored free speech, but beginning in the last part of the nineteenth century, interest in subjectivity took over, and the ancient definition as "boldness in words" was dropped. See D. Fredrickson, "Parrhesia in the Pauline Epistles," in *Friendship, Flattery, and Frankness of Speech: Studies on Friendship in the New Testament World*, ed. J. Fitzgerald (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 163–65.

8. Plutarch, *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend* 51 C; Philo, *Who Is the Heir?* 21. Unless otherwise indicated, references to ancient literature are to the Loeb Classical Library.

9.* Richard Perry's chapter traces the abolitionist argument in Lutheran synods prior to the Civil War. He tells of the power of African American Lutherans to change minds through argument; he also narrates the exclusion of their voices and resistance even to their claims being made public. Both stories are necessary memories for Lutherans. His essay raises the critical question of how Paul's vision of the church can be realized when groups of persons are excluded from speech or intimidated into silence. Can others speak for them until they are permitted to speak openly? Can their suffering itself be presented to the church as an argument? In Pauline terms, can their groaning become the church's prayer in the presence of God (Rom. 8:18–27)?

10. For *pepoithēsis* as the psychological basis for free speech, see Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 19.317–18; 1 Clement 35.2; Phil. 1:14; Eph. 3:12.

11. Against E. Käsemann, *Perspectives on Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971): 138–66. For a critique of Käsemann and an alternative proposal stressing moral formation as the key to the letter/Spirit distinction, see S. Westerholm, "Letter and Spirit: The Foundation of Pauline Ethics,"

New Testament Studies 30 (1984): 229–48. Something like Paul's letter/Spirit distinction existed in the philosophic critique of the written code's coercion and inability to bring about justice in the city. For remarkable parallels to 2 Cor. 3 on this point, see Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 76.1–4.

12.* James M. Childs in this book documents the rediscovery of God's future (what Paul points to by "Spirit") as a critical component in Christian ethics, especially as it overcomes the dichotomy of personal faith and social action often associated with the Lutheran doctrine of two kingdoms. Childs's emphasis on God's promise energizing persons for witness captures the Pauline move to ground confidence in the work of the Spirit and to place it in the context of the church as assembly rather than in the individual's consciousness of God.

13. "Example" here is not for imitation but for proof. For this use of example in rhetoric, see B. Fiore, *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1986), 26–33.

14. See Fredrickson, "Parēsia in the Pauline Epistles," 177–78. See Plato, *Phaedrus* 243B; Epictetus, *Discourse* 3.22.15–16. By the face the person can be known. According to ancient physiognomists, there was no better part of the human body for detecting character traits and temperament.

15. Epictetus, *Discourse* 3.22.18–19, 93–95; Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 32.11.

16.* The mirror played an important role in the theory of example in Greco-Roman moral exhortation. The person progressing in virtue was to look at a worthy person from the past as if looking in a mirror. The image was simultaneously the goal to be striven toward and the face of the one looking. Such gazing worked transformation. Paul's reference to the mirror reinforces his rejection of Scripture as written code and underscores his reliance both upon face to face relations in the church and upon a theory of example in his appropriation of Scripture as witness of the Spirit's work. For Luther's similar emphasis on transformation within a communal setting as progress into the image of Christ, see Martha Stortz's chapter.

17. Aside from some Cynics and Clement of Alexandria, ancient authors used this term for linguistic interaction between persons rather than the conformity of the individual to an ethical ideal. For the term in democratic Athens, see N. Loraux, "Reflections of the Greek City on Unity and Division," in *City States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy*, eds. A. Molho, K. Raflaub, and J. Emlen (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1991), 35. For later developments, see E. Gruen, "The Polis in the Hellenistic World," in *Nomodeiktēs: Greek Studies in Honor of Martin Ostwald*, eds. R. Rosen and J. Farrell (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1993): 339–54. The sense of initiation and even innovation is underscored by the fact that by the fourth century B.C.E. the term was defined in opposition to *idiōtēs*: a citizen present at the assembly who participated by voting only, not by speeches and other forms of influence. See J. Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1989), 106–9.

18. Wayne Meeks appropriately draws attention to the boldness of early Christians naming themselves *ekklesia* in light of this term's association with democracy. See *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 108. He does not, however, develop this insight into a principle of Paul's ecclesiology as I am proposing here. At times Luther's ecclesiology is expressed with the help of political imagery; see "On the Papacy in Rome" (1520), *LW* 39, 65; "On the Councils and the Church" (1539), *LW* 41, 143–45. This is especially the case when the Lord's Supper as the foundation of Christian community is stressed; see "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods" (1519), *LW* 35, 51: "Hence it is that Christ and all saints are one spiritual body, just as the inhabitants of a city are one community and body, each citizen being a member of the other and of the entire city. All the saints, therefore, are members of Christ and of the church, which is a spiritual and eternal city of God. . . . To receive this sacrament in bread and wine, then, is nothing else than to receive a sure sign of this fellowship and incorporation with Christ and all the saints. It is as if a citizen were given a sign, a document, or some other token to assure him that he is a citizen of the city, a member of that particular community." For the church as a freedom bestowing community in analogy to the city, see *LW* 35, 57, 60.

19. The occurrence of *dokimazein* in 1 Thess. 5:21 deserves a brief comment. Although there is some support for thinking of "testing all things" as a precaution against an overzealous attitude toward the work of the Spirit, it makes better sense here to interpret testing itself as spiritual on the same order as not despising prophecy and not quenching the Spirit. As such it is the neces-

sary precondition to the moral life defined by Paul in terms found also in Greco-Roman moral philosophy: "Hold fast to the good and abstain from every form of evil."

20.* My debt to the moral theory of Jürgen Habermas for interpreting *dokimazain* needs to be recognized. For testing in Habermas, see W. Rehg, *Insight and Solidarity: A Study in the Discourse Ethics of Jürgen Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 56–83. It is an intriguing question whether communicative ethics has Luther as one of its ancestors. The connection is the reformer's insistence that the local congregation has the right and responsibility to test all things. Luther regarded the congregation's office of judging doctrine as the foundation of the other offices of ministry that the baptized share; see "Concerning the Ministry" (1523), *LW* 40, 31–34, and "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed" (1523), *LW* 45, 117. The reform of the church depends upon this freedom to test; see "Against the Roman Papacy, An Institution of the Devil" (1545), *LW* 41, 269. For testing in congregations, see Gert Haendler, *Luther on Ministerial Office and Congregational Function* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 55–66. I thank my colleague Gary Simpson for pointing out the similarity between this aspect of Luther's ecclesiology and communicative ethics. Childs's call in this book for "dialogue among the people of God and with the world" implements the Pauline notion of testing.

21. Aristotle, *Politics* 2.1.5.

22. See, for example, S. Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 58–59. The danger of this reading is that it can and indeed has been taken to grant theological legitimacy to domination among humans: Persons of little social power must be submissive to those of higher status just as Christ was obedient to the Father. This danger is usually ignored by white, male commentators who do not seem to be aware of the way their praise of Christ's obedience to the higher power is heard by groups traditionally excluded from power. Sheila Briggs in "Can an Enslaved God Liberate?" *Semeia* 47 (1989): 142–51, unmasks this idealization of slavery and hierarchical roles in the prevailing interpretation of the Christ hymn. I hope to preserve Paul from her valid critique of his interpreters by stressing that Christ's slavery is voluntary, given to humans, and is the model for mutual slavery within the church. The latter notion, seldom stressed, most powerfully removes the Christ hymn from the arsenal of oppression.

23. Luther's interpretation of the Christ hymn generally favors the notion that Christ became our slave and not that he gave obedience to the Father. His opinion on this is not uniform, however; see "Sermon on the Man Born Blind, John 9:1–38" (1518), *LW* 51, 38. Moreover, he does not develop this idea in conversation with the political theory with which Paul seems to have been familiar. Rather the *communicatio idiomatum* is at stake. Nevertheless there is compatibility between Luther and Paul on this point. Through his voluntary slavery to us, Christ wanted to be seen "living as if all the evils which were ours were actually his own." "Two Kinds of Righteousness" (1519), *LW* 31, 301–2. Luther comes closest to Paul's notion of Christ's slavery creating our freedom when he emphasizes the "from Christ to us" direction in the exchange of properties; see *Lectures on Galatians* (1535) *LW* 26, 288; "The Freedom of a Christian" (1520), *LW* 31, 349, 351–55, 366. Luther holds to the idea of Christ's slavery to us outside of commenting on the Christ hymn; see *First Lectures on the Psalms* (1513–15), *LW* 10, 324. The resurrected and ascended Jesus still serves us; see *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John* (1537), *LW* 24, 190.

24. Aristotle, *Politics* 1.2.23. Cf. *ibid.*, 2.6.2; 2.8.5–6; 4.5.2–6; 6.2.1; 7.8.2–3; Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 24.2; *idem*, *Comparison of Aristide and Cato* 3–4; Philo, *Special Laws* 2.123.

25. Readers may have difficulty accepting the notion that Christ's slavery grants us freedom in the divine community. Indeed the equality with God that Christ communicates to us is ludicrous if one adheres to the substance theory of equality. If, however, equality is viewed in terms of access to conversation as I have argued above, then there is no necessity for us to become omniscient, omnipresent, and so on. We remain creatures even as we are taken into God's life and join with God in the creation of the future through speech. Luther does not hesitate to follow Paul in this regard. The Christian through faith has obtained the form of God; see "The Freedom of the Christian" (1520), *LW* 31, 366. See further *Sermons on the First Epistle of St. Peter* (1522), *LW* 30, 67; *Sermons on the Second Epistle of St. Peter* (1523), *LW* 30, 155. Most striking is "The Magnificat" (1521), *LW* 21, 351: "Through Christ she [Christendom] is joined to God as a bride to her bridegroom, so that the bride has a right to, and power over, her Bridegroom's body and all His possessions, all of this happens through faith. By faith man does what God wills, God in turn does what man wills."

26. Aristotle, *Politics* 1.5.1–2; 2.1.5; 3.2.7; 3.2.11. Cf. Plutarch, *Agesilaus* 1.1–3; 2.1; idem, *To an Uneducated Ruler* 780B; idem, *Old Men in Public Affairs* 783D.

27. The Christian as simultaneously free and slave is at the heart of Luther's ethical thought, and for this paradox he looks frequently to the Christ hymn, often in conjunction with 1 Cor. 9:19. The critical question is whether Luther understood slavery in the same way Paul did, as the basis of the other's freedom. For Luther the slavery motif sometimes pertains to the consciousness in which a good work is done, pointing to the removal of arrogance when the powerful help the weak and in its place the joy of giving and the absence of obligation generated by the gift; see "Two Kinds of Righteousness" (1519), *LW* 31, 302–3; "The Freedom of a Christian" (1520), *LW* 31, 356–57. In these instances Luther does not reflect Paul's notion of the mutual slavery of all in the congregation. Yet in other passages when Luther discusses the relationship between sacraments and the life of the church, he sounds more Pauline by moving beyond attitude, employing the notion of the communication of properties and assuming that the context is the congregation in which all are free and slave; see "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods" (1519), *LW* 35, 58–59, 67; "The Adoration of the Sacrament" (1523), *LW* 36, 286–87.

28. In 2:7 "slave" is not a reference to Isa. 53. While Phil. 2:10–11 is clearly an allusion to Isa. 45:23, it does not function to shape the moral life of the community.

29. See A. Malherbe, "Exhortation in First Thessalonians," *Novum Testamentum* 25 (1983): 238–56.

30. To understand these terms in their proper context of the ancient care of souls, see I. Hadot, *Seneca und die griechisch-römische Tradition der Seelenleitung* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969). For the many terms Paul borrows from the Greco-Roman hortatory tradition, see Fiore, *The Function*, 165–90.

31. For a critique of the view that example implies obedience to an authority, see Fiore, *The Function*, 45–100, 164–90.

32.* Stortz in her chapter helpfully draws attention to the foundation of ethics in perception: Action proceeds from the way one imagines the world to be. This insight helps interpret Paul's use of the Christ hymn. Paul exhorts his hearers to imagine the world to be as Christ has imagined it—as a place where it is fitting to extend freedom in the divine life to others.

33. Luther's distinction, borrowed from Augustine, between Christ as sacrament and example is pertinent here; see *Lectures on Hebrews* (1518), *LW* 29, 123–24; *Lectures on Romans* (1516–1517), *LW* 25, 309–11; "A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels" (1521), *LW* 35, 119–220. His insistence that the order be first sacrament and only then example captures the Pauline grounding of exhortation in narrative.

34. The terms "good," "pleasing," and "perfect" have a long history in Greek philosophy as the context of what human rationality seeks to discover and live by. We will see that these terms, the first two of which are mentioned again in the following chapters, point to the public significance of the church's process of coming to moral decisions.

35. See, for example, J. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (Anchor Bible 33; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 662–64, 677–78.

36. For Stoic interest in kingship after Alexander, see B. D. Shaw, "The Divine Economy: Stoicism as Ideology," *Latomus* 44 (1985): 16–54. Dio Chrysostom's four orations on kingship (*Orations* 1–4) are evidence of ideas about rule worked out in the Hellenistic period lasting at least through the beginning of the second century of the common era.

37. Paul does not specify how the inner life of the church becomes visible to those on the outside. He simply assumes that it does. In 14:16 he imagines the criticism by an outsider rightly aimed at some member's failure to love. In 14:18 Paul is confident the one who serves Christ by loving the other is acceptable to the testing of human beings in general. Finally in 15:7–13 there is at least the implication that the gentiles' glorification of God flows out of members of the believing community welcoming one another.

38. The New Revised Standard Version is very misleading when it translates *bastazein* with "tolerate." Such a condescending attitude is not present in this verb, which has the sense of "bear" or "carry."

39. Rom. 15:4 is yet another instance of Paul conceptualizing the use of Scripture in terms of Greco-Roman moral exhortation. Note especially the phrase "through the exhortation of the

Scriptures." The term teaching (*didaskalia*) should be understood in terms of the power of examples to shape character. This is similar to Paul's other explicit grounding of the congregations' use of Scripture in the theoretical structure of moral exhortation in 1 Cor. 10:6,11 where the usual connection between type (*typos*) and "instilling mind" (*nouthesia*) is made. Most interesting in the Romans passage is the result Paul envisions when Scripture is used by the congregation: hope. Here he departs radically from the philosophers who saw the goal of moral exhortation to be the rational, stable mind. For him the goal is opening the congregation to the future in which the mind of Christ unites the church.

Chapter 8: The Reform Dynamic

1.* We share with Reinhard Hütter the problematizing of modernity. We do so on the basis of the unsustainability of the modern world; he questions modernity's notion of "individual freedom . . . understood as the fulfillment of whatever personal desires we might have" and modernity's placement of the autonomous human agent—rather than God with and for us—at the center of the moral universe. We agree with Hütter and understand the two critiques of modernity as complementary.

2. Lester Brown, "The Acceleration of History," *State of the World 1996* (New York & London: W. W. Norton), 3–20.

3. Robin Wright, cited by Hal Kane in "Gap in Income Distribution Widening," *Vital Signs 1997: The Environmental Trends That Are Shaping Our Future* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1997), 116. The statistical data are from this page as well.

4.* The implication that the subject of Lutheran ethics is a set of "Christian practices" and a "way of living faith" is paralleled in Hütter's contention that the Christian moral life is essentially "the concrete social practices which allow us as believers to embody . . . our communion with God" in a "way of life." We differ with Hütter, or complement him, in perceiving a reform dynamic at the center of a way of living the Lutheran tradition. Martha Stortz also addresses the link between faith and practice(s). She too sees Christian faith as a "way of life" shaped by and shaping "practices embedded in a particular community of faith" as well as doctrine (Lutheran doctrine and community, in this case). Yet the "contours of the Christian life . . . (and) the characteristics of Lutheran ethics" that she suggests emerge from the "practice" of prayer do not seem to be "oppositional and reconstructive," as we suggest.

5.* The chapter by James Childs demonstrates an instance of rereading the tradition. While emphasizing continuity, he tracks how Luther's formula regarding two realms has developed in modern times from dualistic thinking to a more united vision of the relationship of love and justice. He has also reoriented the spatial image to accommodate an emphasis on eschatology and its time-orientation. A more dramatic instance of returning to the sources with new eyes is David Frederickson's treatment of Paul, who has been the biblical theologian for the Lutheran Confessions, theology, and preaching. In his chapter Frederickson presents Paul as the facilitator of congregations as proto-democratic moral communities that, in effect, constitute counter-cultural societies in miniature. Though Frederickson does not raise it, a question emerges here. Since Pauline scholarship now presents a very different Paul from the source used in the Lutheran Confessions and basic categories of Lutheran thought, how do we now treat those presentations, the Confessions, and that thought? If the Confessions themselves declare, as they do, that their own norms are normed by the Scriptures, what do we do when either (a) biblical scholarship presents very different norms from the ones the tradition used, or (b) biblical scholarship itself offers no consensus about those norms?

6. Cornel West, "Martin Luther as Prophet," *Prophetic Fragments* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans; Trenton: Africa World Press, 1988), 257. Much of this sketch of Luther's stance is paraphrased from West, 257–59.

7. John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, *Protestant Christianity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), 323.

8.* Childs explicitly poses the dilemma of exercising moral agency with courage and confidence in the face of the ambiguity of human existence and the complexities of moral choice. His assertion that the source of moral courage and agency is the assurance of God's promise in Jesus Christ rather than the certainty of our judgments coheres with our sense of Luther's theological linkage of grace and Christian practice. In many ways our chapter offers another complementary reply to his organizing question: "How do we, as Christian people, and as a church, speak with courage and confidence to ethical issues, even in the most complex and disputed of circumstances?"

9. The phrase cited earlier from Dillenberger and Welch.

10.* There is a significant conversation to consider between this chapter and Hütter's. Both address the problem of moral quietism and the range of moral concern. Both link this to a "deep fault line"