

*Peter-Ben Smit*

## **That's Very Sweet of You, My Child, But No Thanks. A Note on Philippians 4:10-20 and Paul's Parental Authority**

Zusammenfassung:

Philipper 4:10-20 ist in der Exegese eine umstrittene Textpassage. Paulus dankt der Gemeinde in Philippi für ihre Unterstützung, aber zieht diesen Dank gleichzeitig zurück. Offenbar steht Pauli Autorität auf dem Spiel, denn wer empfängt, ist nicht autark und zeigt eine Schwäche. Der vorliegende Beitrag geht auf diese Dynamik zwischen Geber und Empfänger ein, und zwar aus der Perspektive des Beziehungsgeflechtes zwischen Eltern, besonders der Mutter und ihren Kindern in der Antike. Paulus erscheint als einer der Eltern der Gemeinde, der seine Autorität über die Gemeinde aufrecht erhalten möchte.

### **Introduction**

It has been recognized for some time that paying appropriate attention to the dynamics of (first century) family life may well help in interpreting early Christian (NT) theology (e.g. the central Father-Son-relationship), the traumatic experiences of the separation between Jesuanic and non-Jesuanic early Jewish communities,<sup>1</sup> as well as some of the dynamics within the emerging Jesuanic and the (emerging) early Christian communities.<sup>2</sup> Both 'the Elder(s)' and the author(s) of the Johannine Epistles,<sup>3</sup> as well as Paul take on the roles as fathers and mothers<sup>4</sup> of the communities they are addressing, while various New Testament books touch upon the issue of familial relationships within the respective communities they address.<sup>5</sup>

What will be focused on here is the role of (financial) obligations of children towards their parents (as expression of their *pietas*),<sup>6</sup> and the role parents have as the supporters of their children, not only through childhood but also through their (young) adolescence, and their possible significance with respect to Paul's ambiguous attitude towards accepting gifts and support from the communities he had founded or to which he was attached. Concretely, it will be argued that while reading the ambiguous 'thank you'-note of Paul in Philippians 4:10-20 against the background of filial and parental

relationships, it is especially the relationship of sons to their mothers that can illuminate the reasons behind and the inner dynamics of this periscope. In doing so, an additional perspective is added to other proposed interpretations in terms of stoic autarky and / or bonds of friendship (see below).

### **Paul and the Problem of Financial Support in Philippians**

Generally speaking, Paul refuses financial support from ‘his’ churches (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:3-18, in terms of an appropriate wage for his evangelistic work, 1 Thessalonians 2:9, *idem*), but he seems to have accepted it from the Philippians (cf. esp. Philippians 4:15). One reason for this changed attitude may well have been his imprisonment (cf. Philippians 1:12-30),<sup>7</sup> which probably deprived him from other ways of earning a living, though he also accepted support earlier on (Philippians 4:15-16). This notwithstanding, it remains striking that Paul is quite reluctant in expressing his thanks for this present. Even though he would have had the chance to do so at the beginning of his letter, he waits with it until the end of his writing, Philippians 4:10-20, whereas earlier he had found time to give thanks for his fellowship with the Philippians (Philippians 1:3-11) and to discuss the fate of Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:19-30), who was the carrier of the gifts that Paul received (Philippians 4:18). This oddity has in the past given rise to various source-critical solutions,<sup>8</sup> which, more recently, have become less popular in the light of more detailed studies of Philippians in the light of ancient epistolary conventions.<sup>9</sup>

When Paul finally gives thanks<sup>10</sup> as he should, he seems to have difficulties in formulating them in a heartfelt way.<sup>11</sup> First of all he states that he is glad that the Philippians have ‘revived’ (NRSV) their concern for Paul (Philippians 4:10),<sup>12</sup> but immediately adds to it that he was not in need, presenting himself as an autarkic person to the Philippians (Philippians 4:11-13),<sup>13</sup> though adding as an afterthought that he did nevertheless appreciate the Philippians’ thinking of him in his need (Philippians 4:14, the expression used, *καλῶς ποιεῖν* is quite a cliché<sup>14</sup>).<sup>15</sup> But even then Paul turns the matters in such a way, that he, already having mentioned the reciprocity of the whole matter (Philippians 4:15),<sup>16</sup> practically subordinates his benefit from the generosity of the Philippians to their benefit from it and argues that by receiving and benefiting from it he does not seek his own profit, but rather that of the Philippians,<sup>17</sup> as their generosity will be added to their (heavenly?) account (Philippians 4:17).<sup>18</sup> In fact, being allowed to support Paul is a privilege of the Philippians (Philippians 4:15). As Holloway has suggested convincingly, Paul steers between offending the Philippians<sup>19</sup> and

acknowledging a debt.<sup>20</sup> In Philippians 4:18-19 much of the content of the preceding verses returns: Paul underlines his autarky (Philippians 4:18), but adds in a manner, which slightly undermines his own argument, that he is fully satisfied after having received the Philippians' gifts from the hand of Epaphroditus (Philippians 4:18), only to turn this gift into an offering to God (Philippians 4:18, cf. verse 17), ensuring the reciprocity of the matter<sup>21</sup> by promising that Paul's God (Philippians 4:19: ὁ δὲ θεὸς μου) will compensate it,<sup>22</sup> before he concludes with a doxology on the God of Paul and the Philippians (Philippians 4:20: τῷ δὲ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ ἡμῶν ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων, ἀμήν. The shift between the possessive pronouns in Philippians 4:19 and 4:20 is probably not without significance.

Throughout this whole section one gains the impression that Paul on the one hand needed this gift from the Philippians, but on the other hand is embarrassed about it. Even though he does not ask the Philippians to put an end to their giving, and seems to be at pains to turn the gift to him into a gift to the Philippians, as Paul assures the Philippians that by allowing them to give to him, he in fact enables them to add to their account in heaven. On top of this they should be happy for being able to give to him, as Paul does not accept gifts normally (Philippians 4:15).

### **Two Solutions: Autarky and Friendship**

Naturally, the question poses itself why Paul would be interested in trying to turn the tables of giver and recipient. Various reasons could be suggested. Most of them can be boiled down to the one issue of (male) authority, characterized by autarky, which is challenged by admitting need and the dependence upon the gifts of others, through which one becomes a client instead of a patron.<sup>23</sup> This issue can, and has been approached from a variety of angles. Often, in the tradition of Bultmann and others,<sup>24</sup> this has been done in terms of the (popularized) stoic concept of self-sufficiency, αὐτάρκεια, as Paul refers to himself being αὐτάρκεια in Philippians 4:11 and touches upon the same subject more often in his writings.<sup>25</sup> Naturally, the main difference between Paul and 'the Stoics' would be that Paul's freedom is provided by someone exterior to him - Christ, who empowers him (cf. Philippians 4:13),<sup>26</sup> – while also his implicit admittance of his need speaks against the idea of 'pure stoic' autarky here.<sup>27</sup> More recently, however, this occurrence of autarky here has been interpreted within the context of a broader concern of the Philippians: upholding the 'family' ties of friendship that bind Paul and the Philippians together.<sup>28</sup> This case is compelling, as it can be shown that both the concept of αὐτάρκεια as well as the 'contractual' language Paul uses

occur in the ancient discourse on friendship. The latter occurs in the context of mutual sharing (practically) everything, which also endangers the unselfish nature of friendship as Cicero notes:

It surely is calling friendship to a very close and petty accounting to require it to keep an exact balance of credits and debits (*ratio acceptorum et datorum*). I think that friendship is richer and more abundant than that and does not narrowly scan the reckoning lest it pays out more than it has received. (*Amic.* 58)<sup>29</sup>

The expression used by Cicero, *ratio acceptorium et datorum*, is a fairly close rendering of Paul's λόγον δόσεως καὶ λήμψεως (Philippians 4:15). Furthermore, the theme of self-sufficiency<sup>30</sup> is addressed explicitly in some discourses on friendship as well, as an obvious tension between the two exists which can be formulated as follows: 'how could a friend claim self-sufficiency and still participate in the exchange of benefits, which (...) was central to friendship?'<sup>31</sup> An extensive discussion is not possible here, but it is nevertheless helpful to refer to the views of Cicero and Seneca on this matter, both turning to the notions of (self-sufficient) desire and love to come to terms with this tension:

To the extent that a man relies upon himself and is so fortified by virtue and wisdom that he is dependent on no one and considers all his possessions to be within himself, in that degree is he most conspicuous for seeking out and cherishing friendships. Now what need did Africanus have of me? By Hercules! None at all. And I, assuredly, had no need of him either, but I loved him because of a certain admiration for his virtue, and he, in turn, loved me, because, it may be, of the fairly good opinion which he had of my character (...). (Cicero, *Amic.* 30)<sup>32</sup>

(...) The wise man is self-sufficient. Nevertheless, he desires friends, neighbors, and associates no matter how much he is sufficient to himself, that he can do without friends, not that he desires to do without them. (Seneca, *Ep.* 9.3:5)

Following this line of thought, however, would mean that the two 'friends,' here Paul and the Philippian community, would stand on an equal footing. This, though, does not seem to be the case: As the above reading of Philippians 4:10-20 shows, it may well be that Paul not only establishes his own αὐτάρκεια, and thus acknowledges his friendship

with the Philippians, while stressing its sincerity, but also tips the scales of this (hierarchical) relationship to his own favor by outlining that he has given something to the Philippians, by giving them the opportunity to give. Having established this, it is now useful to turn to some ancient family letters dealing with the issue of giving and receiving within the context of the relationships of parents and their children.

### **Light from Ancient Family Letters**

As will be proposed here, it may well be worth the trouble to approach the problem of Philippians 4:10-20 from the angle of the friendly relationships between parents and children, as here the economy of the gift plays a double role: whereas parents (are supposed to) support their children during childhood and (early) adolescence, it is part of the *pietas* of children to support their aging parents, who can only uphold their authority on the basis of the concept of *pietas*, but no longer on the basis of their autarky. Would it be possible to read Paul in these terms and would it be illuminating for the struggle surfacing in Philippians 4:10-20?

The aforementioned exchange of gifts between parents and their children is a common topic in so-called family letters and its structure differs at the various stages in the children's and parents' lives. Therefore, these letters may be used as a key to the dynamics of these relationships. The following three examples from various stages of the relationship between children and their parents may well illuminate this. As the discourse governing these relationships seems to be very similar in non-Jewish and Jewish circles, the use of non-Jewish letters here can well be accounted for.<sup>33</sup>

1. POxy I 119: 'Theon to his father Theon, greeting. It was a fine thing of you not to take me with you to the city! If you won't take me with you to Alexandria I won't write you a letter or speak to you or say goodbye to you; and if you go to Alexandria I won't take your hand nor ever greet you again. That is what will happen if you won't take me. Mother said to Archelaus, "It quite upsets him to be left behind (?)." It was good of you to send me presents (...) on the 12th, the day you sailed. Send me a lyre, I implore you. If you don't I won't eat, I won't drink; there now.'<sup>34</sup>
2. POxy XII 1481 'Theonas to his mother and lady, Tetheus, very many greetings. I want you to know that the reason I have not sent you a letter for such a long

time is because I am in camp and not on account of illness; so that you do not worry yourself (about me). I was very grieved when I learned that you had heard (about me), for I did not fall seriously ill. And I blame the one who told you. Do not trouble yourself to send me anything. I received the presents from Herakleides. My brother, Dionytas, brought the present to me and I received your letter. I give thanks to (the gods) ... continually, (...)'  
*Postscript.* Do not burden yourself to send anything to me.<sup>35</sup>

3. '(...)<sup>36</sup> Sempronius to his brother Maximus very many greetings. Before everything I pray that you are well. I have been informed that you serve our mother and lady grudgingly. I beg you, sweetest brother, do not grieve her in anything; and if any of our brothers gainsays her, you ought to cuff them; for you ought now to take the name of our father. I know that without my writing you are able to humour her, but do not be offended by my letter of admonition; for we ought to revere our mother as a goddess, especially one so good as ours. This I have written to you, brother, because I know how sweet a possession our revered parents are. Please write me about your welfare. Goodbye, brother. (Addressed) Deliver to Maximus, from his brother Sempronius.'<sup>37</sup>

These three letters, taken together with the texts referred to and quoted when discussing the concept of filial *pietas*, illustrate the full spectrum of the economy of gifts as it develops during the subsequent stages of development of the relationship between parents and their children.<sup>38</sup>

Whereas the first letter eloquently illustrates the utter dependence of (small) children on their parents, even if they are as spoiled as young Theon, and the third letter clearly illustrates the parental need of filial support in old age, the second letter is more puzzling. At least it shows a recruit, Theonas, upholding the contact with his mother, but in a way that clearly shows his wish to distance himself somewhat from her (sphere of influence): He writes little and urges her not to send any gifts anymore.

Admittedly, the background of Theonas' attitude is unknown and open to speculation. However, reading the letter in the context of the two others, the possibility suggests itself that Theonas finds himself at a turning point in his biography: as a soldier he reaches economical independence from his mother, a fact which is expressed through his desire of an end of his mother's gifts coming his way. Soon, it may well be the other way around.<sup>39</sup>

What should be noticed here as well is that when the second letter is viewed against the foil of relationships between mothers and their sons in Greco-Roman society in general, the process of distancing that takes place is striking. The reason for this is that precisely mother-son relationships were often characterized by a relatively high degree of intimacy.<sup>40</sup> Observing this closeness, Aristotle argued that the reason for it are the sufferings of childbirth, a theme also taken up by Paul (cf. Galatians 4:19). As the former put it: ‘This is why mothers love their children more than fathers, because parenthood costs the mother more trouble.’ (*Nic. Eth.* 1168a.25).<sup>41</sup>

### **New Light on Philippians 4:10-20 within the Context of Paul’s Self-Portrayal as Parent and Mother**

With the dynamics outlined above then, it is possible to shed some (new) light on Philippians 4:10-20. Earlier, Alexander has associated this second letter with Philippians 4:10-20,<sup>42</sup> she, however, suggests that both Paul and the young soldier Theonas will have had their own (different) reasons for thanking so late and half-heartedly for the received gifts. As has been indicated above, and as may be concluded from Theonas’ letter as well, both do much more than only thanking late and a little grudgingly: they attempt to cancel (the recruit) or to revert (Paul) the exchange of gifts. Both are thereby attempting to gain (Theonas) or secure a certain amount of authority in the context of family relationships. Such a context can be plausibly reconstructed for the case of Theonas, and, when reading Philippians in the context of the *corpus Paulinum*, not less so for Paul. This will be shown here.

A starting point for the latter may be found in Philippians 2:22. There, Paul presents Timothy, probably in a paradigmatic and therefore exhortative way, to the Philippians as someone who has served the Gospel together with him like a son (assisting) his father. When pursuing this theme further, two sections of Paul’s Corinthian correspondence, 1 Corinthians 4:14-17 and 2 Corinthians 12:14-18, are, together with 1 Thessalonians 2:5-13, highly illuminating for Paul’s understanding of his ‘fatherhood’ over his communities in general. In the first text, Paul outlines his own unique significance for the Corinthian community: Whereas there may be many teachers in Christ (παιδαγωγοί, 1 Corinthians 4:15), there is only one father in Christ: Paul therefore holds a unique position of authority (possibly comparable to the *patria potestas*).<sup>43</sup> The second text, 2 Corinthians 12:14-18, prepared by a statement outlining



Paul's relationship to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 12:11-13, is highly significant for the purposes of this paper and therefore worth quoting in full:

<sup>14</sup>Here I am, ready to come to you this third time. And I will not be a burden, because I do not want what is yours but you; for children (τὰ τέκνα) ought not to lay up for their parents (τοῖς γονεῦσιν), but parents for their children. <sup>15</sup>I will most gladly spend and be spent for you. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? <sup>16</sup>Let it be assumed that I did not burden you. Nevertheless (you say) since I was crafty, I took you in by deceit. <sup>17</sup>Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? <sup>18</sup>I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Titus did not take advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves with the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?' (New Revised Standard Version)

In this passage, Paul does two things at the same time. Firstly, he restates his parental authority (verse 14). Secondly, he draws conclusions from it. Of these, the overarching conclusion is that parents selflessly sacrifice themselves for their children,<sup>44</sup> and as Paul is indeed the community's parent, this behavior must also apply to his relationship to the Corinthians. In this way, Paul claims authority and simultaneously presents himself well in line with someone who indeed possesses authority, as autarkic and a benefactor rather than a debtor of the community, which would have rendered his parental authority entirely unconvincing.

Another Pauline epistle shows the same picture. In 1 Thessalonians 2 the question of receiving goods and parental authority, which again seem to be irreconcilable, is taken up and, as in 2 Corinthians 12:14-18, the Pauline argument gains much of its strength from the thesis that Paul, in this case as the community's mother (verse 7) and later on as father (verse 11), is *qualitate qua* incapable of gaining from the community, rather he must be conceived of as giving (see above). Again it is helpful to quote the passage in full:

<sup>5</sup>As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; <sup>6</sup>nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, <sup>7</sup>though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. <sup>8</sup>So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also



our own selves, because you have become very dear to us. <sup>9</sup>You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. <sup>10</sup>You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. <sup>11</sup>As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, <sup>12</sup>urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. <sup>13</sup>We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.' (New Revised Standard Version)

The picture that emerges in these Pauline texts is precisely the picture that emerges from the three family letters quoted above: The true parent, notably the mother, is giving and thus caring, the child receiving, and as soon as this balance changes, parental authority changes, that is to say: it diminishes. Here it may also be helpful to draw the attention to Paul's further use of maternal metaphors,<sup>45</sup> as this strengthens the impression that the mother-child relationship, not only in terms of childbearing but also in terms of child raising, played a significant role in Paul's thinking and language, not denying, however, the significance of his self-identification as father.<sup>46</sup>

When taking 1 Thessalonians 2:7 as a starting point for this, the attention may further be drawn to 1 Corinthians 3:1-2, where Paul also refers to his taking care of the Corinthians in terms of a nurse, or mother providing them with milk first and only afterwards with solid food.<sup>47</sup> In this way, Paul is able to express his relationship to the Corinthians in a way, which suggests care as well as authority. The other main<sup>48</sup> text to which attention should be drawn here is Galatians 4:19, where Paul describes himself as a woman in labour, giving birth to Christ in the Galatians.<sup>49</sup> Again, Paul achieves two aims: He turns himself into the authoritative 'fountainhead' of the Galatians' faith and simultaneously underlines the efforts on his part, which (for the second time), bind him and the Galatians closely together. Even if these texts cannot be discussed at any length here, drawing attention to them allows for the integration of the dynamics observed in the 2 Corinthians 12:11-13, 1 Thessalonians 2:5-13, and suggested as a background for Philippians 4:10-20 into Paul's overarching self-identification as his communities' mother, with all the consequences this has for their relationship and its (hierarchical) structure.

## Concluding Observations

On the basis of the above considerations, it should now be asked whether Paul's attempts to avoid any reversal of roles in terms of parental giver and filial recipient in the Corinthian and the Thessalonian correspondence, thus taking part in the discourse also reflected in the three family letters quoted earlier, may indeed shed light on the reasons behind Paul's reluctant thanksgiving in Philippians 4:10-20.

The contention of this note is that it could indeed: In order to retain his parental authority over the Philippian community Paul has to turn his role of receiver beneficiary into that of benefactor (cf. Philippians 4:17) and thus (re)establish himself as a true parent (2 Corinthians 6:14), be it as a mother (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:7) or as a father (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:11, 1 Corinthians 4:14-15), though the above considerations point primarily into the direction of the former. Other structures of dependence and power may well play a role, but as it happens to be the case that Paul argues in two important passages on the basis of his parenthood, and, as has been suggested, especially motherhood, in order to reject claims of enriching himself at the cost of his communities, thus rendering himself an untrue parent / mother, precisely this may well be the conceptual background against which Philippians 4:10-20 (cf. Philippians 2:22) is enacted, thus explaining its flow, as well as its tone and its place, in the letter. It is indeed a belated and 'thankless' thanks for a gift which turns out not to be from the Philippians to Paul's benefit, but rather the other way around.

These considerations strongly suggest that the issue of authority at stake in Philippians 4:10-20 is not only an issue of 'patriarchal authority' in the broader sense of the word, but may well be read within the context of parent-child, probably especially mother-child, relationships in the narrower sense of the word, as it is this kind of relationship that is discussed in terms of an economy of gifts both in so-called family letters and more significantly, at other places of Paul's correspondence.

---

<sup>1</sup> So for example Ulrich Luz, 'Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of Matthew as a Historical and Theological Problem: An Outline,' in: Idem, *Studies in Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 243-261, especially 250-252.

<sup>2</sup> See Peter Balla, *The Child-Parent Relationship in the New Testament and Its Environment* Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament I.155 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 130-155, see: Mark 1:16-20 / Matthew 4:18-22, Luke 5:1-11, John 1:35-51 (see 21:3), Mark 3:31-35 / Matthew 12:46-50 / Luke 8:19-21,

---

Mark 6:1-6 / Matthew 13:53-58, see Luke 4:16-30, John 4:44, 6:42, Mark 13:12 / Matthew 10:21, Matthew 10:37-38, Luke 14:26-27 (see Gospel of Thomas 55, 101), Matthew 8:19-20 / Luke 9:59-60, see also: Matthew 23:9, John 2:4.

<sup>3</sup> See for example 1 John 2:1, 3 John 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> As father, see 1 Thessalonians 2:11, 1 Corinthians 4:14-16.17, 2 Corinthians 6:11-13, 11:2, 12:14-15, Philippians 4:17, Philemon 10 with a motherly attitude, see 1 Corinthians 3:1-2, Galatians 4:19-20, 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Balla, *Relationship*, 114-130.160-181.203-209, see most significantly: on the fifth (fourth) commandment: Mark 7:9-13 / Matthew 15:1-9, Mark 10:17-27 / Matthew 19:16-26 / Luke 18:18-27, further: Mark 5:21-43 / Matthew 9:18-26 / Luke 8:40-56, see: Mark 7:28 / Matthew 15:26.

<sup>6</sup> See Balla, *Relationship*, 64-68, *pietas* includes more than merely financial duties, however (see 68-70). Balla refers to two texts published in A. S. Hunt / C. C. Edgar (eds.), *Select Papyri* I Loeb Classical Library 266 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959): number 94 (page 279), a son (Philonides) writes the following to his father (Cleon) in circa 255 BCE: ‘Nothing truly will be dearer to me than to protect you for the rest of your life in a manner worthy of you and of myself, and if the father of mankind befalls you, to see that you enjoy all due honours; this will be my chief desire, honourably to protect you both while you live and while you have departed to the gods.’ Another interesting text is no. 82 (pages 238-239), a will, mentioning the children’s duties after mentioning them as beneficiaries of their parents property, Dionysius and Callista are the parents: ‘If in their lifetime Dionysius or Callista is in need or in debt, all the sons in common shall support them or contribute and contribute to pay their debts. If any one of them refuses to support them or contribute or does not help to bury them, he shall forfeit 1000 drachmae of silver and there shall be right of execution on him who is insubordinate and does not act in the manner stated.’ The precise (mutual) obligations of children towards their parents and vice versa were codified in Roman law in the *Digesta* (Dig. 24.3:5, 28.7:9).

<sup>7</sup> So with many: Stephen Fowl, ‘Know your Context. Giving and Receiving Money in Philippians,’ *Interpretation* 56 (2002), 45-58, here: 53-54. Significant is the combination of  $\theta\lambda\hat{\iota}\psi\iota\varsigma$  (see also 1:7) and  $\delta\epsilon\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$  in Philippians 1:17;  $\theta\lambda\hat{\iota}\psi\iota\varsigma$  is repeated in Philippians 4:14. See similarly: Nikolaus Walter, *Der Brief and die Philipper* Neues Testament Deutsch 8.2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 97.

<sup>8</sup> See in this tradition: Walter, *Brief*, 96-97. With this solution Walter indeed intends to solve the problem of the belated ‘thank-you note.’ Joachim Gnllka, *Der Philipperbrief* Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 10.3 (Freiburg i.B.: Herder,

1968), 172, does divide up Philippians in a letter A and a letter B, but leaves Philippians 4:10-20 in place as part of the main letter.

<sup>9</sup> See in this respect especially Loveday Alexander, 'Hellenistic Letter-Forms and the Structure of Philippians,' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 37 (1989), 87-101. See further the recent arguments in favour of the unity of Philippians by: Jeffrey T. Reed, *A Discourse Analysis of Philippians. Method and Rhetoric in the Debate over Literary Integrity* Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 136 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 124-152.406-418, Paul A. Holloway, *Consolation in Philippians. Philosophical Sources and Rhetorical Strategy* Societas Novi Testamenti Studiorum Monograph Series 112 (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001), 7-33. Without much attention for ancient epistolary conventions, Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary 43 (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 194, provides as rationale for the delayed character of Paul's thanks the latter's intention to treat sensitive matters as late as possible. This of course acknowledges the problem as it is noted here. Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* New International Commentary on the Greek Text (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 17, suggests an alternative reason for the late thank you note: Paul wrote it himself, wherefore it has ended up at the end of the letter as is the case in Rom. 16:1-20. This last proposal is problematic, as no autograph survives and worse: the text of Philippians 4:10-20 does not contain any obvious pointers into this direction. Yet another reason is put forward by Bonnie M. Thurston / Judith M. Ryan, *Philippians and Philemon* Sacra Pagina 10 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005), 158, suggesting that Paul uses this thank-you-section to recapitulate his main subjects from Philippians, and, with the situation of a letter being read aloud in mind, she helpfully observes that: 'When the letter is read aloud, the last thing the Philippians hear is Paul's gratitude. And they hear it in the context of the other major issues that were raised in the body of the letter.'

<sup>10</sup> It has often been noted that explicit thanksgiving (for example by using the verb *ευχαριστέω* as well as the acknowledgement of debt are absent from Philippians 4:10-20. Both elements may well be implied, however, in Paul's praise and rejoicing on the one hand (see Philippians 4:10) and his attempt to turn the tables of giver and recipient on the other. See for example Holloway, *Consolation*, 156-157, slightly diff.: Gerald W. Peterman, *Paul's Gift from Philippi: Conventions of Gift-Exchange and Christian Giving* Societas Novi Testamenti Studiorum Monograph Series 92 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 157-158. Holloway, *Consolation*, 155, uses the helpful expression 'formal acknowledgment of the Philippians' gift.'

<sup>11</sup> See for example Alexander, 'Letter-Forms,' 97-99. Otto Glombitza, 'Der Dank des Apostels. Zum Verständnis von Philipper iv 10-20,' *Novum Testamentum* 7 (1964), 135-141, puts it nicely: 'Darüber sind sich die Ausleger einig, daß mit den Versen 10 bis 20 der Dank für die dem Apostel zugestellten Gabe ausgesprochen werden soll, daß aber „jedes unmittelbare Wort des Dankes“ fehlt.' Glombitza refers to Ernst Lohmeyer, *Der Brief an die Philipper* Kritisch-Exegetischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953), 178. Glombitza's further exegesis, culminating in the following statement, is problematic: 'In diesem Abschnitt des Philipperbriefes geht es um die sich aus der Predigt des Evangeliums ergebende verantwortliche Antwort; sie gibt der Apostel darin, daß er unabhängig von der ihn umgebenden Welt alles erträgt, die Entehrung von der Welt; sie gibt die Gemeinde darin, daß sie in der Unterstützung des Apostels zum Ausdruck bringt: Wir leben allein aus der Gnade.' (140) One of the main problems with this exegesis is that it does no justice to the ambivalence between gratefulness and turning the tables of giver and recipient in Philippians 4:10-20. With regard to the 'thankless thanks,' see also the semantic observations of O'Brien, *Philippians*, 516-517, and Thurston, *Philippians*, 156-157.

<sup>12</sup> Which does not constitute a reproach, see Gnllka, *Philipperbrief*, 173. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 196-197, similarly: O'Brien, *Philippians*, 517-519.

<sup>13</sup> See on this for example: Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 199-202, O'Brien, *Philippians*, 522-527.

<sup>14</sup> See Nils Dahl, 'Letter,' in: *International Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*, 538-541, here: 539.

<sup>15</sup> Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 198, offers a helpful paraphrase: 'He says in effect: "I am glad that you assisted me, yes, but I do not say this because I lacked anything or needed your help."' Possibly contrary to his own intention, O'Brien's comment that Paul 'probably comes closest here in the letter to saying "Thank you."' (*Philippians*, 528) is telling.

<sup>16</sup> The expression used, λόγον δόσεως καὶ λήμψεως was common in business transactions. See for example Fowl, 'Context,' 54, textual support for this thesis has been provided by Lohmeyer; *Philipper*, 185. Peterman, *Gift*, 53-65.146-14-151, draws with Peter Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians* Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2.23 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 163 the attention to the use of this expression as 'an idiomatic expression indicating friendship' and thus the relational character of the formula. Whereas a relational aspect should not be excluded from business transactions, the

significance of friendship in these matters should not be overestimated either, as Plutarch eloquently shows, see for example *Mor.* 616A, see also *Mor.* 660B-C.

<sup>17</sup> With Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 206: ‘Although he could do without the gift, and would prefer to do so, he is nevertheless jealous for the welfare of his friends in Philippi. For this reason he accepts their generosity (...).’ Similarly: Gnülka, *Philippenerbrief*, 179, O’Brien, *Philippians*, 539.

<sup>18</sup> A.o. Walter, *Brief*, 99-100, interprets Paul’s line of thought in analogy to the Old Testament / Hebrew Bible sacrificial theology: ‘Was die Philipper dargebracht haben, entspricht in Wahrheit einem Opfer, wie es fromme Menschen in allen Götterkulten und auch Israel im Jerusalemer Tempel darbringt: eine Ehrengabe für Gott, der mit solcher Kulthandlung angebetet wird.’ See further: Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 206-207, O’Brien, *Philippians*, 540-542.

<sup>19</sup> Paul’s initial answer (Philippians 4:10-13) comes very close to what Seneca describes as an ungrateful response in *De Benef.* 2.24.2-3: ‘Alius accipit fastidiose, tamquam qui dicat: Non quidem mihi opus est, sed quia tam valde vis, faciam tibi mei potestatem’ (‘Others accept a gift disdainfully, as one who says: I really do not need it, but because you so much want to give it to me, I will submit my will to yours.’) See Holloway, *Consolation*, 148, Peterman, *Gift*, 144. Also Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 203, comes to a very similar reading of Philippians 4:15-16: ‘[T]he apostle deliberately restrained himself in extending his thanks, because he wished to maintain his independence. But at the same time he had no desire to offend by what might be conceived of as ingratitude on his part for what was an obvious act of love on their part.’ Similarly: O’Brien, *Philippians*, 514.

<sup>20</sup> See Holloway, *Consolation*, 159.

<sup>21</sup> These considerations suggest that Fowl’s contention (‘Context,’ 54) that ‘Paul’s partnership with the Philippians is not to be understood in terms of Greco-Roman social conventions’ is misleading: The appropriate interpretative matrix for this partnership remain precisely these social conventions, but, while remaining within this discourse, the only thing Paul does is to turn the tables of benefactor and recipient.

<sup>22</sup> Paul makes sure that he himself is also included in this exchange of gifts by making underlining that it is his God who will compensate for the Philippians’ gift. Therefore Fowl’s statement that ‘God, not Paul, will meet their needs’ (‘Context,’ 56) is slightly misleading.

<sup>23</sup> See Peterman, *Gift*, 158, asking the following question and answering it affirmatively: ‘[S]hould not these statements at least in part be understood as reflecting Paul’s desire to avoid the assumption that he has contracted a personal social obligation by accepting



this gift?’ and on page 159: ‘Paul has not become socially obligated, and thereby in a sense inferior, by accepting their gifts. Rather, because he has accepted their gifts, they have been elevated to the place of partners in the gospel.’ This line of thought is also followed by Fowl, ‘Context,’ 59-60 and Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 202. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 576-577, convincingly states with special reference to 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, that this issue is of importance throughout the discussion on Paul’s authority as it emerges from his letters.

<sup>24</sup> See for example Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting* (Cleveland: Collins, 1956), 138.

<sup>25</sup> See for example 2 Corinthians 9:8 (αὐτάρκεια) and further Abraham J. Malherbe, ‘Paul’s Self-Sufficiency (Philippians 4:11),’ in: John T. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Friendship, Flattery and Frankness of Speech. Studies on Friendship in the New Testament World* Novum Testamentum Supplements 82 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 125-139.

<sup>26</sup> See for example Gnilka, *Philippenerbrief*, 174, Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 198-199, O’Brien, *Philippians*, 514.520-522.

<sup>27</sup> So: Walter, *Brief*, 97-98.

<sup>28</sup> For friendship in Philippians 4:10-20 at large, see Ken L. Berry, ‘The Function of Friendship Language in Philippians 4:10-20,’ in: Fitzgerald (ed.), *Friendship*, 107-124. For an overview of the language of friendship in Philippians at large, see for example: John T. Fitzgerald, ‘Philippians in the Light of Some Ancient Discussions of Friendship,’ in: idem (ed.), *Friendship*, 144-160, and in the same volume: John Reumann, ‘Philippians, Especially Chapter 4, as a “Letter of Friendship”: Observations on a Checkered History of Scholarship,’ 83-106. Significant elements of friendship occurring in Philippians at large include the following: being of one soul (Philippians 1:27, see 2:2, cf.: Aristotle, *Nic. Eth.* 11168B.5-10, Diogenes Laertius, 5:20, Plutarch, *Mor.* 96E, see: Acts 4:36), being of one mind (i.e. thinking the same: Philippians 2:2, 4:2, see Cicero, *Amic.* 15, 16, 21, Dio Chrysostomos, *Or.* 34:20, Dionysos Hallicarnensis, *Ant. Rom.* 4.20.4:2 ,9.59.5:9, 8.15.1:6), they share everything (see Philippians 1:5.7, 2:1, see: Plato, *Lysias* 207C, Cicero, *Off.* 1:51, Diogenes Laertius, 8:10, cf.: Acts 4:32), the commonplace of rejoicing together occurs in: Philippians 1:4,18,25; 2:2,28-29; 3:1, 4:1,4,10, cf.: Aristotle, *Eth. Eud.* 7.6.9, see on this, with respect to Philippians: Fitzgerald, ‘Philippians,’ 146, furthermore, loyalty is of importance, see Philippians 1:6.14.25, 2:24 (cf.: Cicero, *Amic.* 33-34, 64-65, Plutarch, *Mor.* 52A-53B, 95AB, deferring to each other: Philippians 2:8,17,27,30 (cf.: for example Cicero, *Amic.* 34, 69-73), and undertaking things together (see the συν-



composita in Philippians 2:25, 4:3: συνεργός, 1:27, 4:2: συναθλέω, 2:25: συστρατιώτης, 4:3: σύζυγος, 2:8.17.27.30: συγκοινωνός).

<sup>29</sup> Translation taken from: Malherbe, ‘Self-Sufficiency,’ 129.

<sup>30</sup> See for an overview of attitudes towards self-sufficiency: Malherbe, ‘Self-Sufficiency,’ 131-135 and the literature referred to there.

<sup>31</sup> Malherbe, ‘Self-Sufficiency,’ 135.

<sup>32</sup> Translation: Malherbe, ‘Self-Sufficiency,’

<sup>33</sup> This justifies the use of the (exclusively non-Jewish) letters quoted below, as well as the relative neglect of the commandment to love one’s parents and parental metaphors applied to God in the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament (on which see especially Annette Böckler, *Gott als Vater im Alten Testament: Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Entstehung und Entwicklung eines Gottesbildes* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2000). See in general: O. Larry Yarbrough, ‘Parents and Children in the Jewish Family of Antiquity,’ in: Shaye J. D. Cohen (ed.), *The Jewish Family in Antiquity* Brown Judaic Studies 289 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1993), 39-59, here: 53: ‘In almost every instance, the Hellenistic moralists provide parallels to the discussion of honoring one’s parents found in Jewish literature.’ His extensive discussion of non-Jewish (pp. 53-59) and Jewish (49-52) authors and works does not need to be repeated here. In the same volume, Adele Reinhartz, ‘Parents and Children: A Philonic Perspective,’ 61-88, eloquently illustrates this thesis. For the present purposes, it is of special significance that, as a Hellenistic Jewish author, Philo places a heavy emphasis on the hierarchical character of the relationship between parents and their children, basing this upon an analogy between God as creator of humankind and parents as the ‘creators’ of their children (see a.o. *Spec.* 2:225.228, *Dec.* 107). Here this subject cannot be pursued in any detail, however.

<sup>34</sup> Translation taken from: Bernard Pyn Grenfell (ed.), *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri I* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1898), 186. If it be preferred to have a look at the other side of the coin, see Hunt / Edgar, *Papyri*, 335 (a mother taking care of her sons finances and education).

<sup>35</sup> John L. White, *Light from Ancient Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), no. 102.

<sup>36</sup> The part of the letter to his mother is of less relevance but may be added for completeness’ sake: ‘Sempronius to Saturnila, his mother and lady, very many greetings. Before everything I pray for your health and that of my brothers, unharmed by the evil eye, and withal I make supplication for you daily before (before?) the lord Serapis. How many letters have I sent you and not one have you written me in reply, though so many people have sailed down! I beg you, my lady, be not slow to write me

news of your welfare that I may live in less anxiety; for your welfare is what I pray for always. Salutations to Maximus and his wife and Saturnilus and Gemellus and Helena and her family. Inform her that I received a letter from Sempronius from Cappadocia. Salutations to Julius and his family, each by name, and to Scythicus and Thermouthis and her children. Gemellus salutes you. Fare you well, my lady, always.’

<sup>37</sup> Translation taken from: A. S. Hunt / C. C. Edgar (eds.), *Select Papyri I* Loeb Classical Library 266 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 319-320. The letter was first published in *Revue Egyptienne* 15 (1919), 204.

<sup>38</sup> This reversal is referred to in a eloquent way by Hierocles, as quoted by Yarbrough, ‘Parents,’ 137: ‘We should, therefore, procure for our parents liberal food ... a bed, sleep, unction, a bath, garments; and in short, all the necessaries which the body requires, that they may never at any time experience the want of any of these; in thus acting, imitating their care about our nurture, when we were infants.’ From the work of an author like Philo, it may be deduced that the span of the financial support of parents for their children ranged from redeeming the firstborn (see *Spec.* 4.139), to paying for their full education (see *Spec.* 2:233) and / or dowry (see *Spec.* 1:125). See extensively: Reinhartz, ‘Perspective,’ 69-77.

<sup>39</sup> Striking in this context is, that the latter two letters are both addressed to the respective mothers of the (young) men writing. Their fathers are not mentioned, not even in the section of the letter dealing with the greetings. What this may suggest is that here, as in many other situations, the mother-son relationship lasted longer than the father-son relationship, due to the demographical constitution of ancient societies. In fact, in view of the contemporary average life expectancy and the average age at which men and women married, it should not surprise that many young men spend much more of their lives with their mother than with their father, whereas the former may well have been as close in age to them as to their husband. See for example Balla, *Relationship*, 54-55.

<sup>40</sup> See Balla, *Relationship*, 54-55. His thesis is supported by many others, see: Cheryl Anne Cox, *Household Interests. Property, Marriage Strategies, and Family Dynamics in Ancient Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 99-103, though noting that conflicts between mothers and their sons arose when the mother was thought to prevent the son from getting the full share of his paternal estate (101), see Aeschines, *Or.* 1.98-99, though admittedly discussing an earlier era. In a study, which covers the date of origin of the Gospel of John, Diane E. E. Kleiner, ‘Family Ties. Mothers and Sons in Elite and Non-Elite Roman Art,’ in: Diana E. E. Kleiner / Susan B. Matheson (eds.), *I Claudia II. Women in Roman Art and Society* (Austin: University of Texas

Press, 2000), 43-60, the development of the ties between imperial mothers and their sons are surveyed in an illuminating way: often a mother, who helped her to acquire the emperorship was afterwards involved in a power struggle, no longer with her husband, but with her son and protégé. For the mother as guardian or in a guardian-like role on lower levels of society, see Riet van Bremen, *The Limits of Participation. Women and Civic Life in the Greek East in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1996), 254-255. See for a mother promoting her sons also Matthew 20:20-28par. A good overview, which focuses on Jesus and the beginnings of the Jesus movement, is found in Halvor Moxnes, 'What is Family? Problems in constructing early Christian Families,' in: Halvor Moxnes (ed.), *Constructing Early Christian Families* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 13-41, emphasizing the close, emotional bond between mothers and sons. It is interesting to note, however, that, even if it is true that Matthew and Luke establish a 'royal' and therefore 'honorable' parentage for Jesus by means of their genealogies, John does this in the same by means of his prologue, establishing Jesus' divine parentage quite firmly. The view that the relationship between sons and their mothers was an affectionate one is confirmed by Jens-Uwe Kraus, 'Antike,' in: Andreas Gestrich / Jens-Uwe Kraus / Michael Mitteraurer, *Geschichte der Familie Europäische Kulturgeschichte I* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 2003), 77-78.138-141. See also: Ritva H. Williams, 'The Mother of Jesus at Cana: A Social-Science Interpretation of John 2:1-12,' *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59 (1997), 679-692, here: 681-682.

<sup>41</sup> Aristotle, whose voice was of significance for the first century philosophical discourse, also offers another argument for mothers' greater love for their children: one the basis of the closeness of origin. See *Nic. Eth.* 1161b.15-30.

<sup>42</sup> See Alexander, 'Letter-Forms,' 97-98.

<sup>43</sup> See for example Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox, 1991), 101, and its critique by Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* New International Commentary on the Greek Text (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 371-373, and especially Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 7.1 (Zürich / Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger / Neukirchener, 1991), 354-355. Even if Paul does not claim *patria potestas* in the narrower sense of the word, it is difficult to see, how he would use an entirely non-hierarchical concept of parental relationships, Philippians 2:22, referred to by Schrage, does not prove his point, as that verse could suggest an hierarchical element just as well. For example Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 111, argues in this direction. On *patria potestas* in general, cf.: Gottfried Schiemann, 'Patria Potestas,' *Der Neue Pauli* 9 (2000), 402-404. Even though the term

*patria potestas* as such may well be too juridical to be used for Paul's claims based on his fatherhood, nevertheless it points into the right conceptual direction.

<sup>44</sup> Well in line with much of the Hellenistic discourse on this subject. See especially Plutarch, *Mor.* 526a and Philo, *Mos.* 2:245. See further the comments of Yarbrough, 'Parents,' 134-135.

<sup>45</sup> See for this especially Beverly Roberts Gaventa, 'Our Mother St Paul: Toward the Recovery of a Neglected Theme,' in: Amy-Jill Levine / Marianne Blickenstaff (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to Paul* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 85-97, originally published in: *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 17 (1996), 29-44. Roberts Gaventa refers at the beginning of her contribution to a prayer by Anselm of Canterbury, which is best described as a medley of most Pauline maternal metaphors: 'O St. Paul, where is he that was called / the nurse of the faithful, caressing his sons? / Who is that affectionate mother who declares everywhere / that she is in labour for her sons? / Sweet nurse, sweet mother, / who are the sons you are in labour with, and nurse, / but those whom by teaching he faith of Christ / you bear and instruct? / Or who is a Christian after your teaching / who is not born into faith and established in it by you? / And if in that blessed faith we are born / and nursed by other apostles also, / it is most of all by you, / for you have laboured and done more than them all in this; / so if they are our mothers, you are our greatest mother. (Translation: Benedicta Ward, *The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm* [London: Penguin, 1973], 152).

<sup>46</sup> The relevant texts are: 1 Corinthians 4:15, Philippians 2:22, 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12, Philemon 10. See Roberts Gaventa, 'Mother,' 89-90.

<sup>47</sup> These statements may be less metaphorical than they seem in the first place, as Keith R. Bradley, 'Child Care at Home: The Role of Men,' in: idem, *Discovering the Roman Family: Studies in Roman Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 37-75, 50, draws the attention to a man called Mussius Chrysonicus, who describes himself as a *nutritor lactaneus*, which he interprets as a male nurse feeding a baby with milk. This, however, must not have been the rule.

<sup>48</sup> Further texts, listed by Roberts Gaventa, 'Mother,' 86-87, which do use maternal metaphors but not in the relational way on which this paper focuses and which are therefore less relevant for the present study include: 1 Romans 8:22, 1 Corinthians 15:8, Galatians 1:15, Thessalonians 5:3. In these texts somebody else than Paul is the mother.

<sup>49</sup> Galatians 4:19: τέκνα μου οὓς πάλιν ᾧδίνω μέχρις οὗ μορφωθῆ Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν The metaphor in this verse can be interpreted in such a way, that Christ is formed, i.e. born, in the Galatians. See also Yarbrough, 'Parents,' 133, on the significance of

childbirth for the ancient evaluation of mothers' love for their children. Cf. Aristotle, *Nic. Eth.* 1168a.25.

.....

Peter-Ben Smit (\*1979) is an Old-Catholic priest of the diocese of Haarlem (The Netherlands) and a chaplain intern at Bellevue Hospital, New York. After studies in Amsterdam (MA 2000), Sheffield (MA 2002), and Utrecht (M.Div equivalent, 2003), he received his doctorate from the University of Berne in 2005 ('Fellowship and Food in Paradise. Studies on the Eschatological Meal and Scenes of Nutritional Abundance in the New Testament'). Email: [pbajsmi@gmx.ch](mailto:pbajsmi@gmx.ch).