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0521018994 - Carmen Christi: Philippians ii. 5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in
the Setting of Early Christian Worship

R. P. Martin

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CARMEN CHRISTI

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IN RECENT INTERPRETATION AND
IN THE SETTING OF
EARLY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

BY

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PREFACE

There are certain passages of scripture which both provoke and baffle study. Philippians ii. 5-11 is one such section, as all who have tried their hand at its interpretation know full well.

During the past half-century, this Pauline passage has been exposed to a searching scrutiny by a number of interpreters. Its apparent endorsement of the so-called Kenotic theory of the Incarnation has given it a special place in the field of systematic theology; its literary structure and style have made it suitable as a test-case for the tracing of early Christian liturgical fragments in the New Testament documents; and, more recently, it has taken on particular significance as a species of pre-Pauline confessional material, thus opening a window on what was believed and taught about the person and place of Jesus Christ in the Jewish-Christian and Gentile churches prior to the formative influence which Paul exerted on early Christian thought.

The tap-root of the present study, which seeks to investigate critically the form, setting and content of Philippians ii. 5-11 as these features are understood by recent scholarship, was put down by the author a decade ago. And so, by a coincidence, the appearance of the book in 1967 happens to agree with the advice given by Dr Vincent Taylor in *The Person of Christ in New Testament Teaching* (1958, p. 73) when he recommended that 'it seems to me the only way to enter into the meaning of a sublime, but difficult, passage (like Phil. ii. 5 ff.) is to summarize the views of many commentators and then to leave the summaries in storage for ten years'. As a result of this procedure, he anticipates, 'out of the welter of opinions we can form conclusions of our own'.

An attempt to expound the meaning of Philippians ii. 5-11 in the light of recent interpretation was made by the writer in 1960 and published under the title *An Early Christian Confession*. That brochure may be regarded as a tentative, and perhaps too hastily conceived, *Entwurf* of this larger work, which was originally composed as a Ph.D. exercise at King's College, the University of London and presented in 1963. A reassessment

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of the material has led to some modifications of the author's first views, chiefly in matters of the passage's form, dating and authorship; and these revisions are set out in the final chapter. But the important issue is the meaning of the hymn in the epistolary context of Paul's Letter, and this aspect calls for a comment.

That the hymn sets forth the Incarnation of Christ in His humiliation and subsequent enthronement is universally agreed. But that it depicts His example of humility and made an appeal to its first readers to follow in His steps, and that it is concerned with the mutual relationships of the Christian Godhead, are two assumptions which modern exegesis has seriously questioned.

The newer approach to the text, which is adopted in the following pages, sees the hymn as setting forth the story of salvation. The centre of gravity of this *carmen Christi* is the proclamation of Christ's lordship over all cosmic forces. The relevance of this understanding is a twofold one. In the context of early Christian worship the Christ-hymn proclaimed the drama of His descent to this world, His submission to death and His victory over spiritual powers. The hymn, which had an existence independent of the use which St Paul made of it, is cited by him in reference to the pastoral situation at Philippi in order to show how the Church came to be in the sphere of Christ's lordship; and this fact is made the basis of the ethical appeal.

It is a pleasant duty to record some expressions of the author's appreciation. Professor D. E. Nineham, now of Cambridge, supervised the study and made himself available for many hours of stimulating conversation on the themes of this passage. Professor C. F. D. Moule has added to his many kindnesses by offering the benefit of his criticisms and advice. Professor F. F. Bruce has taken the time and trouble to cast a vigilant eye over the proofs. Nor would the author wish to omit mentioning his sense of obligation to Professor A. M. Hunter whose interest in pre-Pauline Christianity first stimulated this study; and the late Professor T. W. Manson gave encouragement when the writer turned to post-graduate research in the complex area of Pauline studies.

These expressions of gratitude in no way hold the benefactors responsible either for the author's conclusions or for such

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errors in the text as remain. On the level of book production much valued assistance has been given by the staff and craftsmen of the Cambridge University Press who have had to cope with a difficult manuscript.

Finally and on a personal note, a word of thanks is due to Miss Marilyn Wagnell who typed the original MS; to Murray J. Harris who, in the midst of post-graduate studies in the Faculty of Theology, carefully compiled the indexes; to R. F. Broadfoot of Dunstable who has discussed with the author over many years some of the intricacies of Philippians ii; and to the writer's wife and family who have shown considerable forbearance during the period of this research, which must often have seemed to them to be almost interminable.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS OF
REFERENCE WORKS, COMMENTARIES,
AND JOURNALS (including series of publications)

<i>Abh. T. ANT</i>	<i>Abhandlungen zur Theologie und Geschichte des Alten und Neuen Testaments</i> (Zürich)
<i>AJT</i>	<i>The American Journal of Theology</i> (Chicago, 1897–1920)
<i>ASNU</i>	<i>Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis:</i> curavit A. Fridrichsen (Copenhagen/Lund)
<i>Bh. ZNTW</i>	<i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i> (Giessen/Berlin)
<i>BjRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i> (Manchester)
<i>CB</i>	<i>Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges</i> (Cambridge)
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i> (Washington)
<i>CNT</i>	<i>Commentaire du Nouveau Testament</i> (Neuchâtel/Paris)
<i>CQR</i>	<i>Church Quarterly Review</i> (London)
<i>DB</i>	<i>Dictionnaire de la Bible</i> (Paris)
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i> (Munich)
<i>Expos.</i>	<i>The Expositor</i> (London, 1875–1925)
<i>ExT</i>	<i>The Expository Times</i> (Edinburgh)
<i>FRLANT</i>	<i>Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments</i> (Göttingen)
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i> (Cambridge, Mass.)
<i>HZNT</i>	<i>Handbuch zum Neuen Testament</i> (ed. Lietzmann, H.–Bornkamm, G., Tübingen)
<i>IB</i>	<i>The Interpreter's Bible</i> (New York/Nashville)
<i>ICC</i>	<i>The International Critical Commentary</i> (Edinburgh)
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i> (Philadelphia)
<i>JCP</i>	<i>Journal of Classical Philology</i> (London)
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i> (1900– ; 1950 new series, Oxford)
<i>MeyerKomm.</i>	<i>Kritischer-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament</i> (ed. Meyer, H. A. W., Göttingen)
<i>MNTC</i>	<i>Moffatt New Testament Commentary</i> (London)

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<i>NTD</i>	<i>Das Neue Testament Deutsch</i> (Göttingen)
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i> (Cambridge)
<i>RAC</i>	<i>Reallexicon für Antike und Christentum</i> (Stuttgart)
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i> (Jerusalem/Paris)
<i>RGG</i>	<i>Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> ³ (ed. Galling, K., Tübingen)
<i>RHPR</i>	<i>Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie religieuses</i> (Strasbourg/Paris)
<i>RHR</i>	<i>Revue de l'histoire des Religions</i> (Paris)
<i>RSR</i>	<i>Revue des Sciences religieuses</i> (Strasbourg)
<i>SBT</i>	<i>Studies in Biblical Theology</i> (London)
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i> (Edinburgh)
<i>ST</i>	<i>Studia Theologica</i> (Lund)
<i>ThBl</i>	<i>Theologische Blätter</i> (Leipzig, 1922–42)
<i>Theol. Revue</i>	<i>Theologische Revue</i> (Münster i. W.)
<i>ThQ</i>	<i>Theologische Quartalschrift</i> (Tübingen)
<i>TLZ</i>	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i> (Leipzig)
<i>TSK</i>	<i>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</i> (Hamburg/Gotha, 1828–1942)
<i>TWNT</i>	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i> (ed. Kittel, G. and Friedrich, G.). Band. I–VII (1933–60), Stuttgart
<i>WC</i>	<i>Westminster Commentary</i> (London)
<i>ZfTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i> (Tübingen, 1891–1917; new series 1920–)
<i>ZNTW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i> (Giessen/Berlin)