Sustainable Masculinity in Ecumenical Perspective
The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

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Abstract

Gender is an important topic of the WCC's Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. It is the result of both theological anthropological concerns and the ongoing search for justice and peace. In other words, it is a typical area where traditional Faith and Order and Life and Work concerns coincide. Yet, gender is often taken to mean concerns of the role, rights, and treatment of women primarily, with some attention to the position and treatment of transgender persons and sexual minorities. This article argues that, precisely from the point of view of these ecumenical theological concerns, attention for masculinity as a gender is also required. The reason for this is that although many different forms of masculinity are supported with an appeal to the Christian tradition, not all forms of masculinity are compatible with a desire for safeguarding human dignity and a sustainable journey into the future.

Introduction[1]

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[1] In the course of this contribution, relative frequent references to own publications serve to indicate places where lines of thought presented here have been discussed and documented more fully than is possible here.

this, this paper will first discuss gender in the context of the Pilgrimage, then discuss masculinities and their construction in relation to peace and justice – taken to include respect for human dignity and attention to sustainability -, and offer the example of masculinity in the letters of Paul as a possible, and ecumenically shared, resource for retrieving forms of masculinity that cohere with working towards peace and justice, including gender justice and an end to gender based violence. Use will be made of the stages of reflection and ressourcement outlined by the WCC Central Committee, i.e.: the 'via positiva', the 'via negativa', and the 'via transformativa', as it will be introduced below. In doing so, this paper also addresses a question raised by Faith and Order in its 2005 paper on theological anthropology: 'How, taking account both of the Christian Tradition and of scientific and other contemporary insights into the nature of gender, can we explore together the theological, pastoral and ecclesial significance of gender in the life of the Church?'[2] Finally, the paper places the notions of 'justice and peace' in the context of a broader frame of reference, with which the aims of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace seem to cohere: the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN. As there emphasis is placed on sustainability and gender (cf. SDG 5), this concept will also be considered here, given that masculinities that further peace and justice are also masculinities that contribute to a sustainable manner of inhabiting this planet.

The Pilgrimage and Gender: Women and Gender Based Discrimination

The WCC's Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace has as one of the areas in which a journey characterized by and towards justice and peace is pursued the area of gender, in particular gender violence and discrimination based on violence. This is not explicit in the message of the 10th Assembly itself, which mainly includes the call for a pilgrimage:

> We intend to move together. Challenged by our experiences in Busan, we challenge all people of good will to engage their God-given gifts in transforming actions.
>
> This assembly calls you to join us in pilgrimage.
>
> May the churches be communities of healing and compassion, and may we seed the Good News so that justice will grow and God's deep peace rest on the world.[3]

Yet, the Central Committee has in its message included the question of women and gender: 'Although women continue to advance into leadership, gender inequality in the churches persists.'[4] Also in (study) materials posted on the WCC website, the topic is prominent, such as in *An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*:

> Churches and organizations are encouraged to join the pilgrimage of the many WCC programmes, too, addressing such issues as water, gender justice, climate, food security, conflict resolution and peace-making, nuclear disarmament, global health, human rights, children's welfare, education, justice systems and incarceration, and racism.[5]

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[2] Faith and Order, *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology* (Geneva: WCC, 2005), Section 129.

[3] WCC General Assembly, 'Message of the 10th Assembly of the WCC' (2013), 2, available at: https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/message-of-the-wcc-10th-assembly (accessed 14 August 2018).

[4] WCC Central Committee, WCC Central Committee, *An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace* (Geneva: WCC, 2014), available at: https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2014/an-invitation-to-the-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace/@@download/file/GEN05rev_APPROVED_InvitationPilgrimageJusticePeace.pdf (accessed 14 August 2018), 2.

[5] WCC, *An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace* (Geneva: WCC Communications, 2016), 8.

In the words of Phumzile Mabizela, it also appears in the study guide:

> Then there is the issue of gender injustice. We as the church, we have used our sacred text to justify gender injustice. That is why women continue to be violated. That is why we have such high rates of rape within our countries – it's because the church is silent and has actually influenced people's attitudes towards how we view women. I would like to say that we as women are the backbone of the church. If we were to walk away from the church, there would be no church. Therefore, it is important for our leaders to reinterpret the Gospel so that it makes sense to me as a village woman who is living with HIV. This patriarchal and androcentric language we have used for a very long time is very destructive and has diminished the image of God within me.[6]

Also, in documents referred to by the Central Committee, gender is an issue. For instance, in *An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace*, it is said that 'To pursue peace we must prevent and eliminate personal, structural and media violence, including violence against people because of race, caste, gender, sexual orientation, culture or religion.'[7] All of this has, of course, its roots in a longer-standing commitment of the WCC to furthering gender equality and reducing gender-based discrimination and the violence resulting out of it. It should be stressed here – if not critically remarked – that the language used by the WCC's documents is somewhat unclear as to what sorts of gender are in view. Women are mentioned explicitly, and rightly so, as much gender-based discrimination and violence concerns women, but other kinds of gender are left unnamed. – A similar pattern can be found in Faith and Order's 2005 *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology*.[8] Even if one might be of the opinion that 'transgender' is too contentious a term for ecumenical documents (although advocating against *violence* against transgenders would seem to be something that churches might want to agree on, if even if they cannot agree on an endorsement of such identities), there is a much larger group of gendered identities that remains obscure in this manner and that is those gendered male or masculine. They play a key role in the entire discussion about gender and gender based violence for two reasons: (1) certain forms (constructions, if you like) of masculinity are likely to contribute to gender based discrimination and violence; one may think of extreme cases such as masculinities belonging to a 'rape culture' or to masculinities that are geared to excluding other genders from 'inner circles'; (2) there are plenty of forms of masculinity that are discriminated against or at that the subject of violence; one does not only have to think of gay men in this case, but also disabled men, who are seen as less than masculine, men of different 'races' (in the sense of critical race studies), who are, for instance, discriminated against or attacked due to their supposed hypersexuality, etc.[9]

The dynamics that the Central Committee sees for the various stages of the pilgrimage consist of 'Celebrating the Gifts (via positiva),' 'Visiting the Wounds (via negativa)', and 'Transforming the Injustices (via transformativa).'[10] The goal of all of this is transformation:

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[6] In: Emily Welty (ed.), *Beginning the Pilgrimage Towards Justice. A Study Guide for Congregations and Ecumenical Pilgrims* (Geneva: WCC, 2014), 9.

[7] WCC, *An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace* (Geneva: WCC, 2011), section 8.

[8] Although virtually every time that gender is mentioned, problematic forms of masculinity are at stake, the only time that the issue is mentioned explicitly is in section 24 (speaking about Brazil): 'There these forces have led to the increase of violence among youth in a society where masculinity is built on values of aggression.' See further, however, the section on HIV/AIDS and male behavior (sections 35-38).

[9] Which, with Said, could be called instance of 'orientalism,' cf. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

[10] In what seems a rather creative use of the terminology of the three 'via's', of which at least the second does not typically have much to do with sin and repentance, as is suggested here, but with apophatism. If

Being transformed ourselves, the pilgrimage may lead us to concrete actions of transformation. We may grow in our courage to live in true compassion with one another and with nature. This will include the strength to resist evil – injustice and violence, even if a church finds itself in a minority situation. Economic and ecological justice as well as the healing of the wounded and the striving for peaceful reconciliation is our call – in each and every context. The credibility of our actions might grow from the quality of the fellowship we share – a fellowship *of* justice and peace. – We are transformed through prayer and act in prayer.[11]

In the context of all of this, the WCC has the role of

"setting the table" for the churches as well as other organizations and communities including the Christian world communions, specialized ministries, interfaith organizations and social movements to share spirituality and practice developed in their search for transformation for justice, peace and sustainability.[12]

In particular, this will entail a

seven-year programme emphasis, the pilgrimage of justice and peace will combine community-based initiatives and national and international advocacy for Just Peace, focusing on

- life-affirming economies
- climate change
- nonviolent peace-building and reconciliation
- human dignity[13]

Gender justice can be seen as a dimension of all four of these items, not only of the final one: economy is always gendered (roles in an economy, effects on people), climate impact has everything to do with gender (e.g., patterns of consumption – eating more meat, a 'male' foodstuff harms the climate), peace-building involves the agency of men and women and human dignity precludes discrimination and gender-based violence. Again, it should be noted that 'gender' is broader than 'women' only and also includes forms of masculinities and transgender identities that are marginalized for a whole range of reasons, sometimes with an explicit appeal to religious, in particular: Christian, traditions.

In what follows, and somewhat inverting the sequence of the '*via positiva*', the '*via negativa*', and the '*via transformativa*' by focusing first on what is problematic and then concentrating on blessings, to be found in the (biblical) tradition, in order to subsequently point to potential for transformation, it will be argued that it makes sense to take gender, in particular masculinity seriously, given that it impacts peace and justice considerably and that, therefore, from an ecumenical theological perspective, there is a dire need for a theologically supported sustainable form of masculinity.

Gender and Theology: Masculinities and the Christian Tradition

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the triad derives from the work of Matthew Fox (e.g., *A Way to God: Thomas Merton's Creation Spirituality Journey* [Novato: New World Library, 2016]), one wonders why the 'via creativa' is omitted.

[11] WCC Central Committee, *Invitation*, 4-5.

[12] WCC Central Committee, *Invitation*, 4.

[13] WCC Central Committee, *Invitation*, 4.

In a first step, the relationship between the Christian tradition and masculinity needs to be problematized somewhat from the point of view of a desire for justice, peace and a sustainable way of interhuman relations and human-planet relations, one may call this a the *via negativa*, in the terminology of the WCC Central committee.

Attention to masculinity as a gender is relatively new, also in theological studies, at least to the extent that interaction with critical masculinities studies is meant – a concern with male and female roles is, of course, much older and permeates Christian tradition. Yet, when it comes to addressing the construction of masculinity and those embodying it, usually men, this has, unlike the construction and functioning of femininity and the role of those embodying it, usually women, in feminist research in general and feminist theology in particular, not led to a thoroughgoing analysis of masculinities and their construction in Christian tradition – neither by theologians, nor by other scholars of religion or expert in masculinities studies.[14] This is not unproblematic for a number of reasons, of which four are of importance in particular. First, it simply creates a blind spot when it comes to question of gender – as long as 'gender' more or less equals 'women' and 'transgender' – with some attention for the broader LHBTQ+ community -, 'masculinity' remains the great unknown, as to its construction, functioning and effect. Second, as the masculine gender is often seen as 'normative' or 'hegemonic', the situation is also one in which a certain set of anthropological norms are not scrutinized, but allowed to function as a norm nonetheless; this is problematic when it comes to developing a viable ecumenical theological anthropology. Third, and following on the second: the manner in which masculinities are constructed is enormously consequential for the way in which those embodying them function in society, both vis-à-vis of persons with other genders, e.g., violently or not,[15] but also, for instance, in relation to patterns of consumption. Justice, peace and sustainability are closely bound up with the manner in which 'men' are thought to behave.[16] Fourth, the construction of masculinities is an important part of theological anthropologies, even if only implicitly, and religious traditions are frequently called upon to legitimize particular constructions of masculinity – which in turn become 'typical' of a religious tradition (this can include constructions as radically diverse as an appeal to Jesus traditions to support male non-violence or interpretations of Christian self-sacrifice to include one's sacrificing for one's country in a war by taking up arms). With this, it is also apparent that masculinity is more than just biology, for instance the possession of XY chromosomes – much (cultural – and with that also: religious) construction is also involved. With theoretician Connell, masculinities can be described as follows:

> 'Masculinity' is not a coherent object about which a generalizing science can be produced. But this is not to say that no definitions can be attempted: 'Masculinity,' to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture.[17]

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[14] Cf. the survey in Peter-Ben Smit, *Masculinity and the Bible - Survey, Models, and Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2017) – of course, a number of studies exist meanwhile, yet, also due to the influence of Connell, it seems, religion has almost programmatically been neglected in masculinities studies.

[15] Cf. the often-cited report Ingeborg Breines, Robert Connell and Ingrid Eide (ed.), *Male Roles, Masculinities and Violence A Culture of Peace Perspective* (Paris: UNESCO, 2000).

[16] Naturally, something similar could be argued concerning constructions of femininity, for instance, but that it is not my interest here (and, likely, it is an issue raised more constructively by others) – one may think of the production of cosmetics and the like. The issue of a sustainable anthropology concerns all forms of gender. The focus of this essay only happens to be on masculinities.

[17] R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California, 2005), 71. See also, from the field of biblical studies: Jorunn Økland, 'Requiring an Explanation: Hegemonic Masculinities in the Hebrew Bible and

This circumscription also indicates that masculinity is, as any gender, 'intersectional': it emerges at the intersection of various aspects of a person, not just biological make-up in the sense of chromosomes, but also health, wealth, physical shape and 'integrity', ethnicity, age, intelligence, sexuality, etc. play an important role – with an example: in a Dutch setting, a smart, gay, disabled, Moroccan men is masculine in a different manner than an unintelligent, straight, 'healthy' Dutch man in great shape. – With all of this emphasis on social construction, I wouldn't want to deny the role of biological (and/or evolutionary) factors in the construction of masculinities at all, yet, it is also characteristic of Christian tradition to be interested in the shaping of nature – and certainly to be critical vis-à-vis of patterns of behavior that are viewed as 'natural' for cultural reasons (the inferiority of certain 'races' comes to mind as an example). In fact, even some of the most 'conservative' early Christian texts do not appeal to nature, but to God's grace as the basis for (gendered) patterns of behavior, for instance in Titus (cf. Titus 2.11-12: 'For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly' – gender is a result of 'grace based' *paideia*, given that these verses follow on instructions for variously gendered groups in 2.1-10). One could also argue – as has been done – that early Christianity is involved in the construction of models of masculinity that diverged from the dominant, 'hegemonic' patterns of masculinity in the Greco-Roman world. It is this transformative potential inherent in early Christian texts that will be mined now for insights that may contribute to contemporary constructions of sustainable masculinities.

Paul as Dialogue Partner

In a second step, one possible resource from the Christian tradition (although he is best understood as part of first century CE Judaism), i.e., Paul of Tarsus and part of his literary legacy, is considered in the sense of the *via positiva*, as identified by the WCC Central Committee as part of the process of stages on the pilgrimage of justice and peace.

Turning to Paul for insight when it comes to working towards sustainable models of masculinity might not strike everyone as obvious: does he not have too much potential for growth when it comes to relating to sexual minorities (cf. Rom 1.26-27) and other genders (i.e. women, cf. 1 Cor. 14:34-35). This is true, of course, although much can be said about these texts, their context and likely interpretation as well, for which this is not the place, however. What is of interest is rather the way in which Paul positions himself vis-à-vis of the dominant patterns of masculinity, 'hegemonic masculinity' in the terminology of masculinities studies, of his time. In order to do this, first a brief outline of these patterns will be given, followed by a consideration of his dealing with this in the letter to the Philippians.

The study of the construction of masculinities in biblical texts, including those of Paul, pays attention both to what takes place in these texts and how this relates to views and performances of masculinity in the (historical) context of the texts at stake. For Paul, the dominant traits of the Greco-Roman discourse on masculinity, layered as it was, of course: for a free man other things were attainable than for a slave, and philosophical schools diverged in some respects concerning ideals and priorities, have been summarized in a much-quoted essay by Mayordomo, which will also serve as a point

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Second Temple Traditions,' *Biblical Interpretation* 23 (2015), 479–488, 482: "[C]ritical masculinity studies try to explain and understand the way male and heterosexist ideals, models and norms shape men's lives (particularly their appearance and sense of entitlement), women's lives, as well as social patterns, norms, laws and structures in general. In short, such studies de-naturalize any male default position, as well as the heterosexism and the patriarchy we find in contemporary societies, and they question the self-explanatory man 'who needs no introduction'. The man who needs no introduction no longer exists."

of departure here.[18] He mentions the following seven aspects of Greco-Roman masculinity: 1) The conventional Greco-Roman view of gender, sex, and body was that in reality only a 'monosexual' body existed that could manifest itself as (more) masculine or (more) feminine through genitals that had either grown outwardly or inwardly. 2) Masculinity was not necessarily a fact determined by the body with which one was born, but needed to be proved constantly in the public arena, through one's appearance, behavior, and performance. Everyone (m/f) could constantly become more or less masculine. 3) Masculinity was very closely bound up with the notions of activity and dominance; as Mayordomo puts it: 'Being a man in antiquity was very closely linked to the role of being an active agent rather than passive. Be it in politics, in sports, in war, in rhetoric or in the vast field of sexuality, what qualified an individual as a *man* was his active control of the situation.'[19] 4) Masculinity and being virtuous were closely intertwined, specifically through the cardinal virtue of ἀνδρεία and through the virtues in general (*virtutes*). 5) Self-control was an essential part of the aforementioned dominance: 'The most active agent would be a man who controls himself with respect to anger and all other forms of passions, especially those associated with sexuality.'[20] 6) This state of affairs also meant that, *sensu stricto*, no one was really born as a man, but that even the most elite boy needed to be educated and trained to be a proper man. 7) Finally, it should be noted that masculinity and femininity were both associated with respective social spaces, i.e. outside and inside, or: public and private. – This picture can, of course, be nuanced, and recent studies by, for instance, Conway, Wilson and Asikainen have indeed done so.[21] Yet, these contours remain helpful. That this discourse was also highly influential in early Judaism and with that in Christianity has been shown by a number of studies now and does not need to be repeated here.[22]

How, then, does Paul relate to this discourse on masculinity? Or, rather: does he do so to begin with and, if so, what are his challenges? The answer to the second question is positive – even if Paul wouldn't have wanted to do so, by presenting himself as a man, and one in a position of authority and leadership to boot, he was automatically evaluated from the point of view of masculinity *qua* virtue and *qua* a key characteristic for making someone a credible figure of authority. Moving out of such an evaluation would have been virtually impossible, especially as one did not decide oneself how one was evaluated, the beauty of masculinity (or lack thereof) existed primarily in the eye of the beholder and was, accordingly, always a matter of evaluation and negotiation. This also means that whoever considered another person's status in terms of masculinity could influenced when it comes to how certain things were evaluated. It is precisely the latter that Paul can be seen as doing in Philippians and to which attention will be given now.

In Philippians, Paul's conundrum is that he both feels the need to assert his point of view, and with that: himself as the one authenticating this message, is that he is not really in a position befitting a 'real man', that is to say: he is in prison (cf. Phil. 1.13-14) and with that in rather dire straits. His imprisonment also means that he is not at all in control of himself and not in a position to be active and exercise dominance, furthermore, he is removed from the public realm – even from the semi-

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[18] See Moises Mayordomo, 'Construction of Masculinity in Antiquity and Early Christianity,' *Lectio Difficilior* 2006:2 (http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/06_2/marin_construction.htm, accessed 14 August 2018). For this paraphrase, see also: Smit, *Masculinity*.

[19] Mayordomo, 'Construction,' 7.

[20] Mayordomo, 'Construction,' 8.

[21] Cf.: Colleen M. Conway, *Behold the Man* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2008); Brittany E. Wilson, Unmanly Men: Refigurations of Masculinity in Luke-Acts (Oxford: Oxford University, 2015), Susanna Asikainen, *Jesus and Other Men* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

[22] See for a survey Smit, *Masculinity.*

public realm of the Christian community, he hardly has a voice at the table anymore.[23] All of this impacts Paul's standing as a man, his *andreia*. Paul embarks on a (rhetorical) quest to reinterpret this along lines that indicate that, contrary to what one may think at first sight. Three steps stand out in particular: (1) his identification of his own misery with that of Christ; (2) his according attempt to have his own position reassessed in the eyes of the Philippians; (3) his reassessment of his own priorities in the light of Christ (which partially serves to support [2]).

To begin with, Paul identifies his own situation with that of Christ, or, at least, understands it from the vantage point of Christ's 'career' and views it as a consequence of his allegiance to Christ. This begins already in the very first words of the letter. As soon as Paul writes (i.e.: dictates) Παῦλος καὶ Τιμόθεος δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ (Phil. 1:1), he prepares a connection between himself (and Timothy) with Christ, who is described rather emphatically as a 'slave' (or 'servant' – but 'slave' comes much closer to the realities of the first century CE) in the *enkomion* in Phil. 2.5-11 (cf. 2.7: ἀλλ᾽ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβών),[24] which there serves as the expression of Christ's obedience to God, which will both lead to his crucifixion and his (hyper)exaltation (i.e. to an even higher standing than before, now being given the divine name, cf. 2.9-11). As Christ is, for both the Philippians and Paul, the person whose authority – and with that: his standing as a masculine figure – is beyond any doubt, given that Christ the lord (*kurios*) of the community, following in Christ's footsteps as slave and someone who is confronted with suffering, becomes a mark of imitating Christ and therefore something that may not only be acceptable, but become a badge of honor, enhancing one's (masculine) status. It is this that Paul does in 1.13-14, where he argues that his 'chains' serve to make Christ known and that his imprisonment because of Christ has supported the proclamation of the Gospel. The fusing of his own identity, that of Christ and the suffering of Christ and his own suffering and struggling on behalf of Christ and due to his allegiance to Christ is also apparent in the conclusion of Phil. 1, in vv. 27-30:

27 Μόνον ἀξίως τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πολιτεύεσθε, ἵνα εἴτε ἐλθὼν καὶ ἰδὼν ὑμᾶς εἴτε ἀπὼν ἀκούω τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν, ὅτι στήκετε ἐν ἑνὶ πνεύματι, μιᾷ ψυχῇ συναθλοῦντες τῇ πίστει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου 28 καὶ μὴ πτυρόμενοι ἐν μηδενὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀντικειμένων, ἥτις ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς ἔνδειξις ἀπωλείας, ὑμῶν δὲ σωτηρίας, καὶ τοῦτο ἀπὸ θεοῦ· 29 ὅτι ὑμῖν ἐχαρίσθη τὸ ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ, οὐ μόνον τὸ εἰς αὐτὸν πιστεύειν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ πάσχειν, 30 τὸν αὐτὸν ἀγῶνα ἔχοντες, οἷον εἴδετε ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ νῦν ἀκούετε ἐν ἐμοί.	27 Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, 28 and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. 29 For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well-- 30 since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

What Paul proposes here is bold and with it, he has largely achieved crafting his proposal for his own reevaluation in the eyes of the Philippians already. Reading from back to front: Paul's struggle, both past and present (v. 30), is a gracious gift of Christ (v. 29: ἐχαρίσθη), which can therefore serve as an

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[23] Cf. Peter-Ben Smit, 'Are all Voices to be heard? Considerations about Masculinity and the Right to be heard in Philippians,' *Lectio Difficilior* 2015:1 (http://lectio.unibe.ch/15_2/smit.html)

[24] The notion of being a 'servant of God' in terms of a *doulos* as it is part of the LXX tradition also plays a role here, but not only. Cf. the discussion in: Peter-Ben Smit, *Paradigms of Being in Christ: Paul's Use of Exempla in Philippians* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

example for the Philippians.[25] Rather than a badge of dishonor, the suffering, including the imprison-ment has become something that establishes Paul's authority, because it is based both on Christ's own identity – as it will be laid out in the *enkomion* subsequently – and on his allegiance to Christ. By achiev-ing (1), i.e., his identification of his own misery with that of Christ, Paul virtually immediately begins to achieve (2), i.e., his according attempt to have his own position reassessed in the eyes of the Philippi-ans.[26]

With this, not just Paul's evaluation of himself in the eyes of the Philippians has changed. I think that one does not do justice to Paul when one overlooks that he also goes against the grain of his own culture for himself. This brings one to (3) his reassessment of his own priorities in the light of Christ. This happens in a most outspoken manner in Phil. 3, in particular in the well-known 'autobio-graphical' section there.[27] It runs in its fullest form from 3.4-3.14, with 3.4a a transitory clause and vv. 15-17 (or even until 21) being an exhortation based on Paul's own example presented in the preceding verses (cf. v. συμμιμηταί μου γίνεσθε, ἀδελφοί). Here 3.4b-12 suffice for the purposes of this essay.

4b. If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of He-brews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness un-der the law, blameless. 7 Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. 8 More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of know-ing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suf-fered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, 11 if somehow I may attain the resur-rection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.	Εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἄλλος πεποιθέναι ἐν σαρκί, ἐγὼ μᾶλλον· 5 περιτομῇ ὀκταήμερος, ἐκ γένους Ἰσραήλ, φυλῆς Βενιαμίν, Ἑβραῖος ἐξ Ἑβραίων, κατὰ νόμον Φαρισαῖος, 6 κατὰ ζῆλος διώκων τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, κατὰ δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ γενόμενος ἄμεμπτος. 7 [Ἀλλ'] ἅτινα ἦν μοι κέρδη, ταῦτα ἥγημαι διὰ τὸν Χριστὸν ζημίαν. 8 ἀλλὰ μενοῦνγε καὶ ἡγοῦμαι πάντα ζημίαν εἶναι διὰ τὸ ὑπερέχον τῆς γνώσεως Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου μου, δι᾿ ὃν τὰ πάντα ἐζημιώθην, καὶ ἡγοῦμαι σκύβαλα, ἵνα Χριστὸν κερδήσω 9 καὶ εὑρεθῶ ἐν αὐτῷ, μὴ ἔχων ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου ἀλλὰ τὴν διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει, 10 τοῦ γνῶναι αὐτὸν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ καὶ [τὴν] κοινωνίαν [τῶν] παθημάτων αὐτοῦ, συμμορφιζόμενος τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ, 11 εἴ πως καταντήσω εἰς τὴν ἐξανάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν. 12 Οὐχ ὅτι ἤδη ἔλαβον ἢ ἤδη τετελείωμαι, διώκω δὲ εἰ καὶ καταλάβω, ἐφ᾿ ᾧ καὶ κατελήμφθην ὑπὸ Χριστοῦ [Ἰησοῦ].

What is apparent here is that Paul moves, at least within the 'value system' or 'ranking system' of early Judaism,[28] gives up a very high-ranking position, with impeccable credentials – the result of pursuing

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[25] Cf. Peter-Ben Smit, 'Paul, Plutarch and the Practice of Self-Praise,' *New Testament Studies* (2014), 341-359.

[26] What must remain undiscussed in this contribution is how Paul presents two of his coworkers, Epaphroditus and Timotheus; it can well be argued that he presents both as exempla of the kind of (masculine) identity that he thinks is desirable, or even required 'in Christ.'

[27] On the rhetorical use of autobiography, see, e.g., Smit, 'Paul.'

[28] E.g., circumcision and being a member of an obscure tribe would not have helped him elsewhere, given widespread prejudices vis-à-vis of Jews (cf., e.g., the survey by Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia. Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* [Cambridge: Harvard University, ²1998) and the more than

the Jewish *cursus honorum* very successfully –, for something else, i.e. Christ, which leads him to (losing and) giving up his other kind of status. While one might be content with the aspect of status, it can well be argued that Paul is also playing in the register of masculinity here. One reason for this is that status is always a gendered thing and usually gendered male. It is part of the intersectional phenomenon that gender, and with that masculinity, is. Someone who performs well according to a generally accepted system of markers of success will have a much easier time of being seen as masculine than someone who doesn't. Yet also other aspects of the identity and status that Paul describes and then declares to be discarded have much to do with masculinity. Indeed, there is circumcision, which was much debated in the ancient discourse on masculinity – those promoting it, would also argue that it enhanced masculinity (in the sense of enabling a better control of the passions by 'cutting them down to size'), opponents would argue the opposite (e.g., by indicating that a circumcised man had his penis always at the ready, a sign of lack of self-control). What Paul does here is complex: he both underlines that he is masculine, yet also leaves a system behind that considers (physical) circumcision of high importance.[29] This leaves him very vulnerable: outside the system that values his circumcised state, yet with a circumcised body. It does little for his credibility as a man, at least in pagan eyes – and in Jewish eyes his discrediting of his heritage (in terms of its radical reinterpretation) helps little. It would be like having a gang tattoo that one doesn't value anymore while attending a peace rally. Furthermore, there is the question of Paul's ethnicity, which he states in no uncertain terms here (ἐκ γένους Ἰσραήλ, φυλῆς Βενιαμίν, Ἑβραῖος ἐξ Ἑβραίω, v. 5), only to discount its importance together with the rest of his credentials (καὶ ἡγοῦμαι σκύβαλα, v. 8). Again, this leaves him in a vulnerable position, also in terms of masculinity – earlier on, he could claim a certain kind of status on the basis of the tradition of Israel and the tradition of masculinity in it (cf., e.g., the apologetic strategy of 4 Macc. that hinges on the superiority of Jewish masculinity, in particular as it is embodied by, seemingly, unmanly [in the sense of: unvirile] persons, such as old Eliezer, the mother of the Maccabean brothers and the youngest brother in particular),[30] but he has now given this up in order to be a person of foreign, colonial descent without a clear place in the Greco-Roman world (leaving aside the question of Paul's citizenship here, to which he does not appeal here at all). A colonial man can hardly be a real man, except for in the eyes of his own people, it would seem, someone who has left the reference system of his own people behind in a manner as Paul has, begins to perform a rather liminal, or even 'queer' identity:[31] an identity that is neither the one nor the other thing and is accordingly vulnerable. It can hardly exist, both epistemologically speaking and (as a consequence) socially speaking. Something similar happens in relation to righteousness: Paul gives up his righteousness according to the law and refers now to righteousness based on Christ, righteousness based on the life and death of a convicted criminal (one might be able to learn a lot from a crucified person, but to have someone like that serve as an example

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problematic status of circumcision, which would give anyone wishing to claim a credible status as a man in the Greco-Roman world reason to be very wary of making the sort of claim that Paul makes here, cf. Karin B. Neutel and Matthew R. Anderson, 'The First Cut is the Deepest: Masculinity and Circumcision in the First Century,', in: Peter-Ben Smit and Ovidiu Creanga (ed.), *Biblical Masculinities Foregrounded* (Sheffield: Phoenix, 2014), 228-244.

[29] Cf. on this also Peter-Ben Smit, 'In Search of Real Circumcision: Ritual Failure and Circumcision in Paul,' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (2017), 1-28.

[30] Cf. Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, 'Taking It like a Man: Masculinity in 4 Maccabees,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 (1998), 249-273.

[31] To avoid a returning misunderstanding, the term *queer* does not denote 'homosexual' primarily, even if it is also used to indicate 'deviant' sexualities, but it is at its core a term that denotes performances of identity that go beyond what is thought to be fitting, possible, or desirable, thereby exposing the fiction of normality that any given social system creates and upholds and, subversively, creating a space for alternatives. See, e.g., Gerard Loughlin, (ed.), *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007) for queer theology.

of δικαιοσύνη is a bold move indeed), a rather odd choice and one that is certainly less respectable (the older is the better!) than his previous option. Paul also indicates that he has shifted from being a persecutor to someone who is himself marginalized, if not persecuted due to his (new) commitment to Christ, existing now as part of a minority (the Christ sect) within a minority (Judaism) within the Greco-Roman world. In sum, whatever status and credible forms of masculinity Paul may once have embodied at the intersections of the body, ethnicity, lineage, virtue (righteousness), religion (piety), and social standing (being a powerful persecutor), he has now lost it all. He has done so, however, as a conscious choice, as part of his commitment to Christ, in whom he finds a new kind of status, a new way of being human and with that a new way of being man – in a rather more vulnerable way, while looking forward to his own vindication with Christ in the eschaton. In the meantime, Paul can embrace his own vulnerability as a mark of honor and masculinity, rather than as a reason to feel ashamed and, with that, unmasculine. Paul begins, in different terminology, to inhabit a 'queer space', a space that cannot be in the eyes of his contemporaries (neither Jew, nor Greek, etc.), but a space that is crafted through his faith in Christ and offers access to an alternative reality, as it were.

Thus, moving away from a more common way of finding status in the eyes of contemporary society, Paul turns to finding status, including masculinity, in Christ. All of his suffering and misfortunes are interpreted in the light of Christ's suffering, suffering for Christ and suffering with Christ.[32] Although Paul uses the contemporary cultural motif of the struggle, αγών, for this, the result remains rather controversial. Paul also does long for a certain kind of glory, his vindication with Christ, in the end, but in the meantime, he inhabits a space for forms of masculinity that will have appeared as less than 'hegemonic' in the eyes of his contemporaries who did not subscribe to the same frame of reference, i.e. Christ, as Paul. In fact, Paul seems to be involved to convince the Philippians that his embodiment and performance of masculinity is credible with reference to Christ, probably competing with the people he argues against in, for instance, ch. 3 of the letter, who may well have been more 'worldly successful' (for instance: free, not imprisoned) than he.

Perspectives

Finally, in the sense of the *via transformativa* as described by WCC's Central Committee, the question of the transformative potential of Paul's de- and reconstruction of masculinity as it has been outlined above. This is somewhat of a hermeneutical challenge, given that Paul was, to all extents and purposes, not involved in a 21st century pilgrimage of justice and peace, not operating in the context of #MeToo and not in the context of an ecological crisis either. Yet, even if Paul would have been involved in all of this in the 1st century, one would still have a problem, given that simply repeating him, by means of a 'copy and paste' hermeneutics, would likely lead to a mismatch: answers of the 1st century cannot be exactly the same in the 21st, as the context is a different one. This not the way to do justice to Paul, rather, it would be inviting to see whether continuing the dynamics of his way of thinking would offer any opportunities.[33] Key to Paul's way of dealing with masculinity, as one major cultural frame within

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[32] In fact, Paul continues this line of reasoning in ch. 4, with much emphasis on his own self-sufficiency, but discussing that separately here would go beyond the intended scope of this paper.

[33] Cf. James A. Sanders, "What's up now? Renewal of an Important Investigation," in: Lee M. McDonald and James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jewish and Christian Scriptures: The Function of "Canonical" and "Non-Canonical" Religious Texts* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 1–7. This line of thought is compatible with hermeneutical proposals made by, for instance, Michael Wolter, see: "Die Vielfalt der Schrift und die Einheit des Kanons," in: John Barton and Michael Wolter (ed.), *Die Einheit der Schrift und die Vielfalt des Kanons* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), 45–68. This line of thought is also developed in relation to ecumenical hermeneutics in: Peter-Ben Smit, *From Canonical Criticism to Ecumenical Exegesis? A Study in Biblical Hermeneutics* (Leiden: Brill: 2015).

which he operates (whether he likes it or not), is to distance himself from it and to construct an alternative frame of reference based on his allegiance to Christ. In in particular, this frees him from being bound to the cultural expectations of his time with regard to gender to such an extent that he loses all space for creativity. He cannot, of course, escape his own time and context – that would be an illusion and a utopian pipedream at best -, but what he can do is to argue how, in this case, the truest performance of masculinity is found in a Christ-shaped life. This also enables him to reinterpret his less than masculine status – characterized by all sorts of lack of control over himself and others – in terms of a newly understood kind of masculinity, a masculinity that can incorporate forms of subjection and suffering because of Christ on earth, in the hope of heavenly glorification, a kind of 'postponed' achievement of (hyper)masculine status. Eschatological hope is thus of immediate practical importance: Paul does not have to achieve in the here and now what he hopes to receive as a gift in the eschaton. Also hoped for grace liberates from having to perform the 'works of masculinity' as it were. This *modus operandi* may well provide perspectives for one's approach to masculinity today: it invites embracing a freedom to relativize, deconstruct and creatively reinvent what masculinity really is. It might take minds that are more creative than mine to work this out in detail, yet one can think of examples. For instance, what does it add to my credibility as a 'man in Christ' that I dine on steak and beer ever night that it is possible, if I also confess that the most important food that I receive is that of the Lord's own body and blood? What does it add to my credibility as a 'man in Christ', if I consider myself only worthwhile, I have high status, if my CV consists of a string of successes, if I commit myself to a Lord who's glory is not of this world (and whose CV would look terrible from a contemporary perspective)? Also, I could ask: what does it add to my standing as a 'man in Christ' when I consider each and every other person as a possible object of sexual desire and enjoyment, if I follow a Lord who does not seem to have been sexually interested at all, yet Lord of all? Asking such questions may well open up the space for a further journey along the 'via transformativa.' In doing so, one would, of course, connect with earlier attempts to reconsider (gendered) anthropology in the Christian tradition, whether one things of early ascetics such as Thecla, who, as a woman, embodied a masculinity more credible than that of Paul (in the Acts of Paul and Thecla), the later ascetic movement, the introduction of compulsory clerical celibacy, the protestant reformation (that undid the latter), movements such as 'muscular Christianity' and 'promise keepers' and so on – even if the kinds of masculinity that they ended up with also diverge wildly. What they have in common is: discerning masculinity based on a certain freedom and space for creativity that comes with committing oneself to Christ as Lord and not to, for instance, dominant cultural values as lords.

Concluding Observations: Towards Sustainable Masculinities in Ecumenical Perspective

In the above, three things were achieved in responding to the question that was raised: what about masculinity in the pilgrimage of justice and peace? Arguing that 'gender' in the context of such a pilgrimage will also have to mean attention to problematic and promising constructions of masculinity, rather than primarily giving attention to questions of women's rights and roles and the position of the LHGBTQ+ community, given that masculinities and their construction can both contribute enormously to the problems at hand and to their solution, it was shown how the three stages of 'via positiva', 'via negativa' and 'via transformativa' can point the way here as well. The 'via negativa' stage consisted of highlighting possible problematic constructions of masculinities, the 'via positiva' stage consisted of analyzing a key Christian (re)source in this respect, part of the work of the apostle Paul, which shows indeed promise when it comes to questions of addressing, deconstructing and reconstructing masculinities, which led to brief hermeneutical consideration as to how Paul's attitude and insights can contribute to transformation, i.e. the 'via transformativa' in the ecumenical pilgrimage of justice and peace. In doing so, an ecumenical problem, gender justice as part of theological anthropology and

ethics, was addressed by means of an ecumenical methodology, as proposed by the WCC Central Committee, and the use of a deeply ecumenical source: the Holy Scriptures, in the hope of contributing in this manner to the pilgrimage, in particular by highlighting a somewhat neglected topic and pointing to a way of integrating it into the common ecumenical journey.