

Richard G. Fellows* and Alistair C. Stewart

Euodia, Syntyche and the Role of Syzygos: Phil 4:2–3

<https://doi.org/10.1515/znw-2018-0012>

Abstract: In Phil 4:2–3 Paul urges Euodia and Syntyche to unite with each other. He also addresses ‘true yokefellow’, and asks him to assist the two women. This paper disputes the almost universally held assumption that Paul was asking him to mediate a conflict between the two women. Rather, Paul is here calling the church leaders, Euodia and Syntyche, to have the mind of Christ and to foster unity among the Philippian churches, and the other church members to support them. The term ‘true yokefellow’ is a piece of ‘idealized praise’ and is Paul’s way of diplomatically correcting one or more church members.

Zusammenfassung: In Phil 4,2–3 ermahnt Paulus Euodia und Syntyche, einig zu sein. Er spricht auch einen „wahren Jochgefährten“ (σύζυγος) an und bittet ihn, die beiden Frauen zu unterstützen. Dieser Beitrag bestreitet die häufig vertretene Annahme, dass Paulus diesen darum bittet, in einem Konflikt zwischen den beiden Frauen zu vermitteln. Vielmehr fordert Paulus hier die Leiterinnen der Gemeinde Euodia und Syntyche auf, im Geist Christi zu wandeln, und die Einheit der Gemeinde in Philippi zu wahren. Zugleich werden auch die anderen Kirchenmitglieder aufgefordert, die beiden zu unterstützen. Der Begriff „wahrer Jochgefährte“ ist eine rhetorische Figur des „idealisierten Lobes“ und ist als ein Versuch des Paulus zu verstehen, diplomatisch ein oder mehrere Kirchenmitglieder zur Ordnung zu rufen.

Keywords: Episkopoi, idealized praise, Euodia, Syntyche

1 Introduction

In Philippians 4:2, Euodia and Syntyche are encouraged to be of one mind. And then, in 4:3, a σύζυγος, or “yokefellow”, is addressed, and told to labour with them.

*Corresponding author: Richard G. Fellows, 8007 Champlain Crescent, Vancouver, B.C., V5S4K3, Canada; rfellows@shaw.ca

Alistair C. Stewart, St Peter’s Parsonage, Montem Lane, SLOUGH, SL1 2QJ, UK; vicar@uptoncumchalvey.org.uk

Εὐδοίαν παρακαλῶ καὶ Συντύχην παρακαλῶ τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν ἐν κυρίῳ. ναὶ ἐρωτῶ καὶ σέ, γνήσιε σύζυγε, συλλαμβάνου αὐταῖς ...

There is a long line of interpretation which suggests that Euodia and Syntyche were at odds, and that Syzygos, understood as an individual, is being asked to mediate in their dispute.¹ This article proposes instead that Euodia and Syntyche are not arguing, but are being gently reminded of the grace of humility as well as the importance of unity, and that the yokefellow is not an individual, but an apostrophe for the Philippian congregation; the congregation is simply being asked to co-operate with Euodia and Syntyche.

Firstly we will suggest that Euodia and Syntyche are named because of their leadership function within the church. Next we will show that Phil 4:1–4 can, and should, be understood entirely in the context of Phil 1:27–2:4, and that Paul is therefore calling yokefellow to unite with Euodia and Syntyche, not to mediate between them. We will then employ some recent research on Paul's use of compliments to show that the phrase "true yokefellow" is designed to correct one or more Philippians for not being supportive of Euodia and Syntyche. Finally, we will see that this explains why the two women are named but yokefellow is not.

1 This view goes back to Marius Victorinus (*Ad Philippenses* ad loc.), who thinks yokefellow is Epaphroditus. Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 395 is typical: "Paul's erstwhile companion is thus asked 'to assist' Euodia and Syntyche, obviously to 'have the same mindset in the Lord.'" Similarly Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, NCB (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 152: "He (Paul) enlists the service of a third member [...] in a ministry of encouragement [...] to these offended ladies." Similar views are adopted by, among others, Jean-Francois Collange, *L'Épître de Saint Paul aux Philippiens*, CNT 10a (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1973), 125; Carolyn Osiek, *Philippians, Philemon*, ANTC (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2000), 112–113; Davorin Peterlin, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians in the Light of Disunity in the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 132, in conclusion of extensive discussion; Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 179–180. Dissenting voices have been raised, notably by Calvin (*Joannis Calvini commentarii in omnes Pauli Apostoli Epistolas, atque etiam in Epistolam ad Hebraeos* [Geneva: Eustathius Vignon, 1550], 410). It seems that a revival of Calvin's opinion was attempted in the late nineteenth century by James C. Watts, "Did Euodia and Syntyche Quarrel?," *Methodist New Connexion Magazine and Evangelical Repository* 61/3 (1893): 24–29. This has been forgotten by scholarship though one sees citations of the opposing note written by Joseph Agar Beet, "Did Euodia and Syntyche Quarrel?," *ExpTim* 5 (1894): 179–180. There is also the suggestion that the two were in dispute with Paul. So Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Women Partners in the New Testament," *JFSR* 6 (1990): 65–86, here 76, followed by Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, *Community and Authority: The Rhetoric of Obedience in the Pauline Tradition* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 105–108, and Joseph A. Marchal, *Hierarchy, Unity, and Imitation: A Feminist Rhetorical Analysis of Power Dynamics in Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2006), 147–149.

On the usual interpretation, as Lambrecht points out, the passage is puzzling in that it seems to strike a note alien to its surroundings, “the two women who are lacking in agreement in the Lord appear to disturb that exuberant joy.”² He further suggests that further research “will hardly provide satisfactory answers.” The authors of this note think that it might.

2 Euodia and Syntyche as leaders

Paul’s letter to the Philippians is unique in the Pauline correspondence in that it mentions congregational officers in the prescript, being addressed to those at Philippi along with the *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* (τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Φιλιππίοις σὺν ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνους).³ Recently Stewart has followed a long line of interpretation in arguing that the rationale for the address is that the *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* are the agents of the gift which the Philippians have sent to Paul,⁴ in line with what he sees as the economic role of *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* elsewhere. He also observes with approbation Campbell’s suggestion that this address indicated association between different Philippian congregations.⁵ Later in the work he observes the names which occur, including the names of Euodia and Syntyche, and accepts that these may be the (female) names of household leaders, or supervisors (*episkopoi*).⁶ Although the identification of the *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* as

² Jan Lambrecht, “Seven translations of Philippians 4,2–3,” in *In Search of Meaning: Collected Notes on the New Testament (2014–2017)*, ed. Jan Lambrecht (Saarbrücken: Scholars’ Press, 2017), 514–519.

³ Phil 1:1.

⁴ Alistair C. Stewart, *The Original Bishops* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 64–66, enunciating a view going back to John Chrysostom, *Hom. Phil.* 2 (195D). Among modern commentators he notes Helmut Merkel, *Die Pastoralbriefe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 91, Eduard Lohse, “Die Entstehung des Bischofsamtes in der frühen Christenheit,” *ZNW* 71 (1980): 58–73, here 63–64. Martin Dibelius, *An die Thessalonicher I/II; An die Philipper*, HNT, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1937), 60–62, suggests that these officers are the agents of the collection but that this does not mean that they had any leadership role.

⁵ Stewart, *Original Bishops* (see n. 4), 46, with reference to R. Alastair Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority within Earliest Christianity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 130–131.

⁶ Stewart, *Original bishops* (see n. 4), 347–348, with reference to Campbell, *Elders* (see n. 5), 123–125; so also Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald, *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 158–159; Osiek, *Philippians* (see n. 1), 110–112. Note also Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, BNTC (London: Black, 1997), 15. Marchal, *Hierarchy, Unity, and Imitation* (see n. 1), 83–90, considers them community leaders though without reference to the prescript. Peterlin, *Paul’s Letter* (see n. 1), 100–122, ar-

economic officers and agents of the gift to Paul is opposed by Ascough on the grounds that these officers are not mentioned on the occasion when thanks are particularly given for the gift at 4:10,⁷ we may perhaps observe a play in Euodia's name at 4:18, where the gift is described as a sweet scent (ὄσμῃ εὐωδίας). Indeed Fellows suggests that "Euodia" was a "leadership name"⁸. If this is so, then Euodia is given particular thanks, and thus the case not only for seeing the *episkopoi* as economic office-holders, but also for seeing Euodia among them, is strengthened.

Although this suggestion is not new,⁹ the observation of the wordplay in 4:18, combined with the substantial evidence cited by Stewart for the economic role of officers in early Christian associations, re-inforces the connection between these names and the *episkopoi* of the prescript and thereby lends renewed support to the hypothesis.

Thus Euodia and Syntyche are being addressed as leaders of the Philippian churches, possibly as householder-patrons, probably as instrumental in the gathering and transmission of the gift to Paul, and in this capacity asked to be of one mind.

The leadership status of these women furthermore explains why they are named. If they were guilty of strife, then it would be strange that they be so named for if Paul is singling them out for criticism in this passage, this would be the reverse of the normal practice,¹⁰ as well as breaching the rhetorical convention of not naming women.¹¹ Beet observes that for Paul to name these people

gues at length that they were *diakonoï* on grounds similar to those of Stewart, without observing that the duties thus described are properly those of *episkopoi* (at least according to Stewart, here following Hatch).

⁷ Richard S. Ascough, *Paul's Macedonian Associations: The Social Context of Philippians and 1 Thessalonians*, WUNT 2.161 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 82, n. 52.

⁸ Richard G. Fellows, "Name Giving by Paul and the Destination of Acts," *TynBul* 67 (2016): 247–268, esp. 254.

⁹ Even in the nineteenth century Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's epistle to the Philippians*, 4th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1878), 158, surmised that Euodia and Syntyche might be "deaconesses".

¹⁰ As Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 235, puts it, "Paul does not name his adversaries nor commend their good qualities" (here contra Kittredge, *Community and Authority* [see n. 1]). See also the discussion and citations in Laurence L. Welborn, *An End to Enmity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 213–227.

¹¹ On which see David Schaps, "The Woman Least Mentioned: Etiquette and Women's Names," *CQ* 27 (1977): 323–330.

“there must be a reason” but can find no reason beyond their supposed dispute.¹² If we recognize them as leaders, however, then their naming may lie not in their putative dispute but in their demonstrable leadership roles.¹³

3 Phil 4:2–3 in the context of the letter

If Philippians 4:2–3 seems out of context at first sight, a contextualization may be possible if it is shown that its contents are in conformity with the overall aim of the letter.

Across the letter it is possible to discern common themes and vocabulary. Thus Paul’s rejoicing, which he describes in 1:18–19, is picked up in the fourth chapter in the exhortation to rejoice (4:4). Black, similarly, points out the recurring vocabulary between 1:3–11 and 4:10–20,¹⁴ and Garland between 2:6–11 and 3:20–21.¹⁵ It is our assertion that a similar congruence of common vocabulary and meaning may be discerned between 4:2–3 and other key points in the letter.

One key passage is 1:27–2:5. Paul begins with *μόνον*, an indication that this passage gives the things that are of central importance to him.¹⁶ As such we are given insights into the central themes of the letter.

Verbal parallels certainly suggest that Paul is laying out his message in 1:27 and repeating it in 3:20–4:3. Indeed, Dahl notes the “remarkable correspondence

¹² Beet, “Euodia and Syntyche” (see n. 1), 179.

¹³ Even whilst upholding the hypothesis of dispute, Peterlin, *Paul’s Letter* (see n. 1), 103, who also notes that naming Euodia and Syntyche in this way is contrary to Paul’s usual practice, recognizes that their leadership is significant.

¹⁴ David Alan Black, “The Discourse Structure of Philippians: A Study in Textlinguistics,” *NovT* 37 (1995): 16–49, here 24, noting *κοινωνία* ... *εἰς* (1:5) / *ἐκοινωνήσεν εἰς* (4:15); *συγκοινωνούς* (1:7) / *συγκοινωνήσαντες* (4:14); *ἀπὸ τῆς πρώτης ἡμέρας* (1:5) / *ἐν ἀρχῇ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου* (4:15); *φρονεῖν ὑπέρ* (1:7) / *ὑπέρ* ... *φρονεῖν* (4:10).

¹⁵ David E. Garland, “The Composition and Unity of Philippians,” *NovT* 27 (1985), 141–173, here 158.

¹⁶ Andreas H. Snyman, “Philippians 4:1–9 from a Rhetorical Perspective,” *VeEc* 28 (2007): 224–243, here 227, writes: “In 1:27 Paul states quite explicitly that ‘the one thing’ (monon) that matters to him in writing the letter, is that the Philippians’ ‘way of life should be worthy of the gospel of Christ [...]’.” Similarly Duane F. Watson, “A Rhetorical Analysis of Philippians and its Implications for the Unity Question,” *NovT* 30 (1988): 57–88, here 65, writes, “The adverb *μόνον* (‘only’), which emphatically begins v. 27, marks the shift from *exordium* to *narratio* and indicates what is of central importance.” We may agree that the term marks a shift, though it is probably better, with Witherington, *Paul’s Letter* (see n. 10), 96–99, to see this as *propositio*. The letter opening and prayer have served the purposes of the *exordium*.

between the initial, general exhortations in Phil 1:27–2:5 and the special appeal to Euodia and Syntyche in the context of 3:20–4:3.¹⁷ The columns below highlight the words and ideas that connect the two sections.¹⁸

Μόνον ἀξίως τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πολιτεύεσθε, ἵνα εἴτε ἐλθῶν καὶ ἰδῶν ὑμᾶς εἴτε ἀπὼν ἀκούω τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν, ὅτι στήκετε ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι, μιᾷ ψυχῇ συναθροῦντες τῇ πίστει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, καὶ μὴ πτυρόμενοι ἐν μηδενὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀντικειμένων, ἥτις ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς ἐνδείξεις ἀπωλείας, ὑμῶν δὲ σωτηρίας, καὶ τοῦτο ἀπὸ θεοῦ: ὅτι ὑμῖν ἐχαρίσθη τὸ ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ, οὐ μόνον τὸ εἰς αὐτὸν πιστεύειν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ πάσχειν, τὸν αὐτὸν ἀγῶνα ἔχοντες οἷον εἶδετε ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ νῦν ἀκούετε ἐν ἐμοί. Εἴ τις οὖν παράκλησις ἐν Χριστῷ, εἴ τι παραμύθιον ἀγάπης, εἴ τις κοινωνία πνεύματος, εἴ τις σπλάγχνα καὶ οἰκτιρμοί, πληρώσατέ μου τὴν χαρὰν ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε, τὴν αὐτὴν ἀγάπην ἔχοντες, σύμψυχοι, τὸ ἐν φρονοῦντες, μηδὲν κατ' ἐριθείαν μηδὲ κατὰ κενοδοξίαν, ἀλλὰ τῇ ταπεινοφροσύνῃ ἀλλήλους ἠγούμενοι ὑπερέχοντας ἑαυτῶν, μὴ τὰ ἑαυτῶν ἕκαστος σκοποῦντες, ἀλλὰ [καὶ] τὰ ἐτέρων ἕκαστοι. **τοῦτο φρονεῖτε** ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ

Ἵστε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοὶ καὶ ἐπιπόθητοι, χαρὰ καὶ στέφανός μου, οὕτως στήκετε ἐν κυρίῳ, ἀγαπητοί. Εὐοδίαν παρακαλῶ καὶ Συντύχην παρακαλῶ τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν ἐν κυρίῳ. ναὶ ἐρωτῶ καὶ σέ, γνήσιε σύζυγε, συλλαμβάνου αὐταῖς, αἵτινες ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ συνήθησαν μοι μετὰ καὶ Κλήμεντος καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν συνεργῶν μου, ὧν τὰ ὀνόματα ἐν βίβλῳ ζωῆς.

Paul expresses affection for the Philippians (1:27a; 4:1a), they are to make his joy complete (πληρώσατέ μου τὴν χαρὰν, 2:2) and are indeed his joy (χαρὰ, 4:1). He asks them to stand firm (στήκειν, 1:27b; 4:1b) with one mind (1:27c; τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε ... τὸ ἐν φρονοῦντες, 2:2; 4:2–3a) striving side by side (συναθροεῖν) for the gospel (εὐαγγέλιον, 1:27d; 4:3b). They will be saved (1:28; 4:3c) and should be glad (1:29; 4:4). In this light the appeal for unity at the beginning of the fourth chapter is less disruptive than it first appears to be, since it is picking up vocabulary from earlier in the letter.

We may, moreover, read the appeal in the light of what is previously said about the need for unity in the letter, and the need, moreover, for humility, recognizing

¹⁷ Nils Dahl, “Euodia and Syntyche and Paul’s Letter to the Philippians,” in *The Social World of The First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks*, ed. L. Michael White and O. Larry Yarbrough (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 3–15, here 9.

¹⁸ Cf. also Garland, “Composition” (see n. 15), 160–161.

that the single mind which the women are to have is the mind of Christ. Thus, on the basis that Euodia and Syntyche are congregational leaders, we may suggest that if there is a criticism here, it is not that the two women are at odds, but that their position of leadership, or perhaps patronage, might lead to a lack of humility.

This is in line with others' readings. Thus Winter suggests that the call to humility in chapter 2 derives from "struggle for primacy by an individual or leader"; although he suggests that this may have something to do with the "quarrel" between Euodia and Syntyche, he does not make the connection explicit.¹⁹ White similarly connects the exhortation to be of the mind of Christ with Euodia and Syntyche, as does Dahl.²⁰ If we see Euodia and Syntyche as the actual leaders, then we may understand that this is directed particularly at them; the mind that they are to have in common is that of Christ, so connecting 4:2–3 back to 2:3. Oakes persuasively suggests that the ἐριθεία and κενοδοξία of this passage may be interpreted as "concern with one's own social advantage" and "pride in one's own social position",²¹ which would fit with a critique of the leadership of the congregations. If this applies to Euodia and Syntyche, leaders of the Philippian congregations, then one may accept that there is no competition for office, but that *honor* is partially a motivation for these leaders. For Oakes this simply means mutual economic help,²² but we must note firstly that this has the potential in the Graeco-Roman world to be a source of *status*, and secondly that the number of persons likely to be able to offer such help is limited.

If we see an implied contrast between Christ's mind and that of the congregational leaders, then we may see that the issue with Euodia and Syntyche is not that they are in dispute, but that they do not have the mind of Christ. The discordant note which mention of a dispute calls forth is thereby resolved. Translations into English, many of which render τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν with "agree" or compounds of "agree" reflect that misunderstanding.²³

¹⁹ Bruce W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 98–102.

²⁰ Humility, he writes, is "the proper disposition to be maintained in all Christian relationships, and especially in the situation of Euodia and Syntyche" (see L. Michael White, "Morality between Two Worlds: a Paradigm of Friendship in Philippians," in *Greeks, Romans and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, ed. David L. Balch et al. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 201–215, here 214). Dahl, "Euodia and Syntyche" (see n. 17), 10. The reconciliation of Euodia and Syntyche is for him a fundamental aim of the letter.

²¹ Peter Oakes, *Philippians: From People to Letter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 183.

²² Oakes, *Philippians* (see n. 20), 187.

²³ See the translations discussed by Lambrecht, "Seven translations" (see n. 2).

4 The content of Phil 4:2–3

Having observed the coherence of Philippians 4:2–3 with preceding material we may turn to the content of this passage, to demonstrate that the supposition that “yokefellow” is to mediate in a non-existent dispute is groundless, not only because there is no dispute, but because 4:3 is continuing the thought of 4:2, and indeed of 1:27, rather than introducing the new subject of mediation.

Evidence for the suggestion that no new subject is being introduced may be found in the manner by which Paul begins 4:3: *ναὶ ἔρωτῶ καὶ σέ*. Paul uses the word *ναί* (yes) only in Phlm 20, Rom 3:29, and multiple times in 2Cor 1:17–20. It is the use of *ναί* in Phlm 20 that is most often cited as a parallel to Phil 4:3.

So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. (Phlm 17) [...].
Yes (*ναί*), brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! (Phlm 20)

Paul’s request to Philemon to release Onesimus to him has been in the background of the whole letter, and is made explicit in 17. Phlm 20, beginning with the particle, *ναί*, affirms that request. Here, as elsewhere, the word *ναί* does not introduce a new topic, but affirms what has already been expressed to the same addressee(s). Therefore, *ναί* in Phil 4:3 indicates that Paul is not introducing the new topic of mediation, but is reaffirming his call for unity, which he has made to the two women, and to the church as a whole throughout the letter.

This is confirmed by Paul’s inclusion of the word *καί*. He is asking Euodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind, and yokefellow too. Yokefellow is to be of the same mind as them, as they are to be of the same mind as Christ. The *καί* is hard to explain if yokefellow is being called to mediate a dispute.²⁴

We may also observe that Paul asks yokefellow to “assist these women” (*συλλαμβάνου αὐταῖς*). The word *συλλαμβάνειν* is rather general and there is no suggestion that it is a particularly fitting word for the assistance given by a mediator. The meaning here is simply “to help by taking part w. someone in an activity”.²⁵ In other words, *σύζυγος* is to co-operate with the ministry exercised by Euodia and Syntyche, to be yoked with them; it is surely no coincidence that the term *σύζυγος* describes the same kind of harmonious teamwork that Paul is

²⁴ J. Harold Greenlee, *An Exegetical Summary of Philippians* (Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1992), 237, writes that this *καί* “implies that others in addition to this faithful yokefellow may be able to help”. However, no other potential mediator is in view at this point in the text. It is further unclear whether more than one mediator would be desirable.

²⁵ The fundamental definition given in Frederick W. Danker et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 955.

urging in this passage and elsewhere in this letter. We may moreover note that he is asked to assist Euodia and Syntyche because they struggled beside Paul in the work of the gospel. συναθλεῖν appears in both 1:27 and 4:3, and it does so in the same relative position in both texts, as shown in the table above. Paul is offering the earlier behaviour of Euodia and Syntyche as an example for yokefellow to follow. The two leaders had struggled alongside Paul (συναθλεῖν), so yokefellow should now labour alongside (συλλαμβάνειν) them. Those who do a good thing deserve to have the same thing done for them. Such language is used elsewhere of patrons of the church; thus in 1Cor 16:15–16 Paul urges the Corinthians to put themselves at the *service* of Stephanas' household because it had devoted itself to the *service* of the saints and at Rom 16:1–2 Paul asks his audience to be benefactors towards Phoebe, “for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.” There is nothing in this designation that is specific to the role of a mediator.

There are thus few grounds on which we may see σύζυγος as mediating a dispute between these two leaders. Nonetheless he is asked to assist them. The manner of the request is noteworthy; in particular we may note the term of approbation with which he is addressed: “true yokefellow” (γνήσιε σύζυγε.)

This address may be seen in both respects as an item of idealized praise. On the unlikely hypothesis that Σύζυγος is a proper name (see further discussion below), Paul would have added the word γνήσιος to suggest that the man is appropriately named. Paul would then be calling him “truly named Yokefellow”. On any hypothesis, therefore, Paul is here paying a compliment to the man whom he addresses. To determine why Paul does so, we may note the purpose of compliments in the ancient world and in Paul's letters in particular.

Whenever Paul pays a compliment towards his addressees the compliment is followed by a request to the addressees to do even better at the same thing. For example, he writes to Philemon that “the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother” (Phlm 7) and then asks Philemon to “Refresh my heart” (Phlm 20). In 2Cor 9:1–2 Paul writes concerning the collection, “Now it is not necessary for me to write you about the ministry to the saints, for I know your eagerness”, but he then goes on to urge his readers to give. In 2Cor 7:16 Paul writes “I have complete confidence in you”, but it is clear from 6:11–7:3 and especially 12:20–13:2 that he is *not* completely confident. Furnish explains Paul's expression of confidence in 7:16: “In conformity with a familiar Hellenistic literary pattern, Paul emphasizes his confidence in those of whom he is about to make a substantial request.”²⁶ Similarly we may observe 1Cor 11:2, where for all the assertion that

²⁶ Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYB 32A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 392. For further discussion of Paul's tactics in both

the Corinthians had maintained the traditions handed on it is apparent that they had not, and Gal 4:15–16, where reference to Paul’s welcome indicates that there is now hostility. There are about twenty other cases when Paul compliments his addressees, and they follow the same pattern.²⁷ When the compliment is given in the letter opening, the corresponding appeal tends to occur in the letter body. However, when a compliment is given in the letter body, the appeal almost always follows immediately afterwards, usually within a verse or two. Paul’s rhetorical technique makes perfect sense and conforms to ancient practice. The compliment is necessary to reassure the addressees that Paul is not being severely critical of them. Paul precedes his appeal with a compliment when he wants to encourage his addressees rather than castigate them. The compliment prevents conflict and makes the recipient more receptive to correction. All this follows the rhetorical technique known as idealized praise. In keeping with the practices of moral philosophers and psychagogues in antiquity praise is employed to win over the hearer and at the same time to encourage the hearer towards some virtue, which is in turn embodied in the praise which is offered.²⁸

In Phil 4:3 we see the same pattern as in the other cases where Paul uses idealized praise. Paul’s request, “assist these women”, is preceded immediately by a compliment, and the content of the compliment matches the nature of the request. If he really had been a true yokefellow in every respect, Paul would not have needed to write 4:3b, which provides a reason why the women should be helped, and nor would it likely have been necessary to appeal to him in a letter to be read to the entire church.

As in the other cases of idealized praise, we can assume that the subject matter of the compliment corresponds to that of the request, and this is important because it gives us a clue about the nature of the assistance that “yokefellow” is being asked to give to the women. As Vegge notes, “That which the person is

2Cor 7:16 and 2Cor 9:1–2 see David R. Hall, *The Unity of the Corinthian Correspondence*, JSNTSup 251 (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 93–94.

27 In the following list the compliment is given first and is followed by the corresponding request in italics. Rom 1:8; *1:10–13*. Rom 6:17–18; *6:19*. Rom 15:14; *15:15*. Rom 16:19a; *16:19b*. 1Cor 1:4–5; *6:9–10, 19; 8:1–2; 9:24; 10:1; 12:1*. 1Cor 1:6–7; *12:1*. 1Cor 6:11; *6:11–20*. 1Cor 10:15a; *10:15b*. 1Cor 14:12a; *14:12b*. 2Cor 8:7a; *8:7b*. 2Cor 8:10; *8:11*. Gal 5:7a; *5:7b*. Phil 1:6a; *1:6b*. Phil 2:12a; *2:12b*. 1Thess 1:3, 8; *3:10, 12; 4:10–18; 5:8*. 1Thess 1:6; *3:8; 4:1–2; 5:19*. 1Thess 4:9–10a; *4:10b–11; 5:14*. 1Thess 5:1–2; *5:3–11*. 1Thess 5:11b; *5:11a*. Eph 1:15; *4:1–2; 5:2*. Col 1:4; *2:2; 3:14*. 2Thess 1:3–4; *1:11; 3:5; 3:13*. 2Thess 3:4; *3:7–12*.

28 On idealized praise in particular in 2Cor see Ivar Vegge, *2 Corinthians: A Letter about Reconciliation*, WUNT 2.239 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 65, and among ancient considerations of the art note Plutarch, *Adul. amic.* 72B–D, Demetrius, *Eloc.* 295.

praised for is that which he or she is counselled to follow.”²⁹ If Paul was appointing a man to mediate between Euodia and Syntyche, it is doubtful that he would need to use idealized praise, and if he did, he would probably have given him a more appropriate description.

5 Identifying σύζυγος

If σύζυγος is being asked to co-operate with Euodia and Syntyche, to join them in the same co-operation which is being urged on them, with the implicit suggestion that he is not in fact doing so, we may ask, in turn, whether this leads us in any way towards an identification.

Many suppose that σύζυγος is actually a proper name.³⁰ There are three reasons to discount this, however, beyond the fact that the name remains unattested.³¹ Firstly it would be a remarkable coincidence that the meaning of the name fits Paul’s present theme of cooperative assistance. Secondly Paul favours συν- compounds in this verse where σύζυγος is one of four such words;³² this indicates that the term is coined to emphasize the theme of co-operation. Thirdly the word γνήσιος also seems to rule out the possibility that σύζυγος is a proper name.³³ We thus conclude that σύζυγος is anonymous, and not a proper name.

Furthermore, there are reasons to believe that Paul did not have a specific individual in mind when he referred to σύζυγος. Firstly, to see σύζυγος as an individual would weaken the parallels between 1:27–2:5 and 4:2–3. The former passage addresses the Philippian church as a whole, whereas if the latter passage speaks only to an individual, then the relationship between these clearly related passages is weakened. Secondly, we may observe that if the phrase “true yokefellow” uniquely identifies an individual, Paul would be implying that the other members of his audience are not “true yokefellows”. In this case he would be making an invidious distinction that would be out of place in this section where

²⁹ Vegge, *2 Corinthians* (see n. 28), 135–136.

³⁰ This theory predates John Chrysostom, *Hom. Phil.* 14,301B-E.

³¹ It is very rare to find someone with a Greek name that is otherwise unattested. There are about 93 people in the New Testament with a Greek name and, of these, only Prochorus (Acts 6:5) has a name that is unknown elsewhere.

³² So Fee, *Philippians* (see n. 1), 393.

³³ So Collange, *Philippiens* (see n. 1), 125: “l’adjectif qui qualifie ice ce nom, γνήσιος, ne peut guère s’appliquer à un nom propre.”

he has just described the Philippians collectively as his joy and crown;³⁴ since the Philippians are his joy and crown, they would qualify as true yokefellows (at least in Paul's rhetoric). The phrase might still refer to an identifiable individual if it unambiguously referred to a close companion of Paul who is not part of the Philippian congregation, such as Timothy, Epaphroditus or Luke,³⁵ all of whom have been suggested. However, if this were the case, it would be surprising that yokefellow needs to be encouraged with the same term, συναθλεῖν, as the Philippian church as a whole, and surprising, moreover, that this close companion is effectively being accused of a failure to collaborate.

In the light of the difficulty of identifying any individual as a "true yokefellow", and in the light of the coherence of 4:2–4 with 1:27–2:5, we suggest that the phrase thus does not single out any one individual but is an indication of the church as a whole, asked to co-operate with their leaders. This is not a new suggestion; both Hawthorne and Silva suggest that "true yokefellow" is Paul's way of referring to the Philippian church as a whole.³⁶ However, this does not fit with the assumption, which Hawthorne and Silva share, that Paul is asking them to mediate a dispute between the two women. For it does not seem likely that Paul would call on more than one person to act as a mediator.³⁷ If Paul were appointing a mediator, he would need to identify the individual unambiguously because ambiguity could lead to further conflict.

The use of a singular term to address multiple people indicates not that the σύζυγος is being asked to mediate, but that *he* is being corrected. Silva cites a number of examples of Paul's use of the second person singular to address the recipients of the letter,³⁸ but admits that "Most of these instances, however, are negative in tone".³⁹ Indeed, with the possible exception of Rom 8:2, they are *all* negative. Therefore, σύζυγος could represent the church as a whole if Paul is correcting them. However, if Paul is correcting σύζυγος, his anonymity is easily

34 Phil 4:1.

35 Peter Wick, *Der Philipperbrief: Der formale Aufbau des Briefs als Schlüssel zum Verständnis seines Inhalts*, BWANT 135 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994), 111, goes so far as to write: "aber man muß annehmen, daß diese Person mindestens entscheidend am Aufbau der philippischen Gemeinde beteiligt ist."

36 Hawthorne, *Philippians* (see n. 1), 180. Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 193.

37 J. Hugh Michael, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928), 193, writes "But on *a priori* grounds it is not probable that Paul would desire a number of persons to engage in the delicate task of helping to reconcile two women who were at variance."

38 Rom 2:1, 17; 8:2; 9:20; 11:17–24; 1Cor 14:17; 15:36; Gal 6:1.

39 Silva, *Philippians* (see n. 36), 193.

explained, for if Paul had written his name, or their names, he would have publicly shamed him/them and risked creating enmity. Paul's decision to use anonymity here is thus diplomatic, as is his use of idealized praise discussed above. Ambiguity about who is being addressed with the term *σύζυγοι* would be tolerable, or even desirable. If Paul suspected that more than one member of the Philippian church was unhelpful towards their (female) leaders, he would have wanted each of them to hear 4:3 as being addressed individually to him/her. But if a mediator is being appointed, then anonymity is counter-productive. We may finally note that if both the anonymity of *σύζυγοι* and the fact that this is a collective term (multiple mediators are unlikely to be effective), then this, in turn, provides further grounds for denying any dispute between Euodia and Syntyche.

The appeal to *σύζυγοι*, therefore, like the appeal to Euodia and Syntyche, is picking up the language of 1:27–2:5. Whereas the leaders are to have the mind of Christ, the followers are to be united with them in the face of suffering and opposition.

6 Conclusion

We thus reach the conclusion that there is no dispute between Euodia and Syntyche, and therefore no need to mediate. The yokefellow is the whole church, and not a named individual. Paul is endorsing the leaders of his congregation(s) towards the end of his letter, as he does elsewhere, whilst urging the two leaders, Euodia and Syntyche, to humility, and correcting any members of the church(es) of Philippi who have not been supportive of their leaders (4:3). These two women struggled beside Paul and so, in turn, the congregation(s) should, as a true yokefellow, labour alongside them.