CHAPTER SIX

THE FOCUS OF CONFLICT (4:2, 3)

6.1 Introduction

In the last four chapters I have tried to demonstrate how the background of dissension in the Philippian congregation dominated Paul's thinking in the first part of his letter (1:1–2:18). In the introductory section of Phil it shines through the reiterated allusions to the entire audience addressed by Paul. Next, Paul replies to and corrects some misguided views about suffering in general and his own situation of imprisonment which caused apprehension and gave rise to division in the church. Further elaboration highlights more practical aspects of disunity, but even here Paul retains the large picture and is more interested in fostering attitudes then effecting particular actions.

The following sections of Phil also contain allusions to tension. In the paragraph 2:19–24 the sending and commendation of Timothy (2:19–24) is set against the backdrop of Paul's dissatisfaction with his co-workers, the description of whose reproachable behavior in 2:21 (τὰ ἐκαστὸν ζητούσιν) is parallel to that of the Philippians' in 2:4 (τὰ ἐκαστὸν ἐκαστοι σκοποῦντες). Epaphroditus' case (2:25–30) also gives indications of tension within the church and between Paul and part of the church. This text will be dealt with in detail in a later chapter. Finally, the previous chapter shows dangerous tendencies and their practical outworkings which have infected the life of the church. Certain ideas, difficult to describe with precision but definitely divergent from Paul's own and potentially lethal, have gained prominence. This makes the Philippian Christians vulnerable to a possible harmful influence of certain propagators of false views.

This overall background should be given appropriate weight in the discussion about the case of the two women in 4:2, 3. It alone suffices to invalidate the opinion of Bruce, that "from the fact that

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1 O'Brien, 320ff., discusses the identity of those referred to here and lists a number of ways in which Paul's indictment of them has been understood. He suggests that Luke of Aristarchus must have left Rome, and that Epaphroditus too must be excepted from the condemnation.
only two members are thus singled out by name, it may also be inferred that such personal dissension was exceptional in that particular fellowship,” as well as O’Brien’s claim that the dispute was not widespread. Furthermore 4:2, 3 is firmly rooted in the previous exhortation reflecting widespread contention. This is effected through the reiteration of the key phrase τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν from 2:1–4 which clearly situates the relationship between the two in the context of disunity, carries with it the whole baggage of 2:1–4, and serves to characterize the conflict. The observation about the repetition of τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν prompts Caird to state: “This suggests that, when Paul wrote the more general injunction, he already had this quarrel in mind.” Mengel, who has reservations about the view that Paul had these two in mind while writing 1:27–2:4, nevertheless affirms that their dispute is to be seen in the light of the earlier text. All this lends support to the prevailing view that the two women were actually at odds with each other, the view which has seldom been seriously challenged. In conclusion, 4:2, 3 is in a narrow sense a “concretization” of 1:27; 2:2, or of 2:1–11, or of the whole section 1:27–2:18. In a wider sense it grows out of the development of the whole preceding argument. In the words of Auguridis, there is no reason to mention Euodia and Syntyche unless they are related to the theme of unity.

In addition to affirming the reality of conflict, a few words must

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2 Bruce, 113
3 582.
4 Caird, 149.
5 279–80.
7 Egger, 69.
9 Savas Chr. Agouridis, “The Role of Women in the Church of Philippi.” Bulletin of Biblical Studies 1 n.s. 2 (1980): 84. J. R. Gray goes further in claiming that the quarrel between the two women was the occasion for the letter to the Philippans, but unfortunately he does not elaborate. John R. Gray, “Saints at Philippi!” Expository Times 79 (1967/8): 26. The only other commentator I have come across who puts it so bluntly is Aspin, “New Reading.” He states that “the division of Euodia and Syntyche actually comprises the fundamental concern of the letter” (282f.). As will become obvious in the course of this study, I am in great sympathy with these claims, although I will place them within a larger frame of reference.