TERESA MORGAN

Being 'in Christ' in the Letters of Paul

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
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Saved through Christ and in his Hands

Mohr Siebeck

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For Bob

ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ

Preface and acknowledgements

In the autumn of 2019, I was working on the nature of early Christian trust and faith when I came to think that to understand what it means, for instance, to Paul to live in a relationship of *pistis* with God and Christ, I needed to take a view on what he means by being 'in Christ'. I set myself to write a paragraph on Paul's *en Christō* language. This is that paragraph.

I am grateful to the Leverhulme Trust for the award of a three-year Major Research Fellowship to write about 'The Invention of Faith', and to the John Templeton Foundation for the award, with fellow-PIs Daniel McKaughan and Michael Pace, of a three-year grant to study 'The Philosophy, Theology, and Psychology of Christian Trust in God'. Their support has enabled me, in addition to writing on those topics, to explore a question relevant to both projects which otherwise I could not have pursued at length.

Much of the book was written in 'lockdown', during the first wave of the covid-19 pandemic in early 2020. During this time there were fewer opportunities than usual to share work in progress with colleagues in seminars or at conferences, so I was especially grateful to the organizers of the New Testament Seminar at the University of Durham and the Biblical and Early Christianity Seminar at the Australian Catholic University for invitations to present work in progress. Early versions of the material in Chapters Seven and Eight were presented in seminars or as lectures at the Universities of Calgary, Oxford, and Yale, and at the Society of Biblical Literature in 2018. Warm thanks are due to the organizers of all those meetings for the opportunity to speak, and to participants for their stimulating questions and observations.

With the greatest generosity, John Barclay, Cilliers Breytenbach, Andrew Chester, Francis Watson, and Adela Yarbro Collins each read almost the whole manuscript. Their responses challenged me to think harder, strengthen arguments, and explore new questions, and conversing with them was one of the great pleasures of this project. Robert Morgan not only read almost all the manuscript, but let me use his library while university libraries were shut, and argued points of detail inexhaustibly on long walks around Oxford. Philomen Probert explained arguments of the verb to me, and innumerable friends and relations, in social isolation, let me enthuse about the implications of being 'in Christ's hands' via diverse forms of video communication.

Joseph Spooner edited the manuscript with the *doctrina* of a classicist, the *cura* of an editor, and the *curiositas* of a churchgoer. Michelle Leese kindly took time out of preparing her PhD thesis for publication to create the bibliography. Shortly before the manuscript went to press, Barbara Beyer let me see her just-completed doctoral dissertation on being 'in Christ' in Paul, and J. Thomas Hewitt shared the proofs of his book *Messiah and Scripture*. Both are important contributions to the field, and I greatly appreciate having been given a preview of both.

Oxford, 19th July 2020 Teresa Morgan

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The phrase *en Christō*, together with its close relatives *en Christō Iēsou*, *en kyriō*, *en hō*, and *en autō*, is one of the most distinctive and most puzzling expressions in the Pauline corpus.[1] It has received sustained attention for over a century, since its importance was recognized by a young Adolf Deissmann in his study *Die neutestamentliche Formel "in Christo Jesu"*.[2] Deissmann argued that the phrase was original to Paul and highly significant to him, but that it was more difficult to interpret than commentators had recognized.[3] After considering possible parallels outside Christian literature and finding none of interest, he examines the Pauline corpus and concludes that the phrase refers to what he terms the 'pneumatic Christ'.[4] Christians, Deissmann argues, have a relationship with the pneumatic Christ which is not comparable with anything in human relationships, but which is very like being 'in the Spirit'. He suggests further that, though we cannot be certain, Paul probably intends Christians to understand 'in Christ' as a locality: not just in a metaphorical sense, but literally.[5] Whether or not he is right about this, he says, he is certain that the phrase is Paul's way of expressing as strongly as he can the 'greatest imaginable unity' of the Christian with Christ.[6] Deissmann's most famous formulation of this theory appears two decades later, in *Paulus: Eine kultur- und religionsgeschichtliche Skizze*.[7] The living Christ is

[1] Deissmann (1892, 2 *et passim*) was right that the phrase is among the most common used by Paul, but his 164 instances are an over-estimate: see below, p. 26. Versions of the phrase also occur in the Johannine corpus, which falls outside the scope of this study, but see e.g. Oepke (1964); Moule (1977), 64–5; Malatesta (1978); Macaskill (2013), ch. 10; and Hooker (2017). Other New Testament uses of *en* are well understood and not usually problematic: cf. Oepke (1964), Moulton *et al.* (1976), Bauer (1988), Blass & Debrunner (1961), Harris (2012). This study focuses on the seven undisputed letters of Paul.

[2] The following discussion is confined to modern New Testament scholarship. In systematic theology, the concept of participation or union with Christ has a long history, notably in the later Church Fathers, Orthodox theology, Aquinas, Anselm, Calvin, and Luther: for an overview see Macaskill (2013), chs. 2–3.

[3] His argument for the distinctiveness of Paul is partly a presumption (first on p. 4). Some think *en Christō* likely, as a phrase, to be pre-Pauline, e.g. Kramer (1966), chs. 9–12; Schnelle (1983), 109–112, (2005), 479–82; de Jonge (1988), 41–2; and below, pp. 30, 43.

[4] Noting differences in the distribution of the phrase between what he views as 'older Paulines', letters of imprisonment or deutero-Paulines, and the pastoral epistles (pp. 2–3).

[5] (1892), 97–8.

[6] P. 98.

[7] Deissmann (1911), English translation 1912; 2nd ed. 1925, transl. 1926.

the *pneuma*, present and with Christians, and being in Christ is like being in the spirit, so we should speak of the 'Spirit-Christ': 'Just as the air of life, which we breathe, is "in" us and fills us, and yet we at the same time live in this air and breathe it, so it is also with the Christ-intimacy of the Apostle Paul: Christ in him, he in Christ'.[8]

Deissmann's concept of the 'Spirit-Christ' found some early support, notably from Johannes Weiss, but not widespread acceptance.[9] His underlying arguments, however, that the phrase *en Christō* is distinctive and central to Paul, and that, though difficult to understand, it bears a sense of locality, persisted. The durability of these ideas may be due, in part, to the fact that they themselves rest on two foundations which are mutually independent: a linguistic argument, and the conviction that Paul was a mystic.[10]

In the century since Deissmann's *Paul* was published, many scholars have continued to see Paul as a mystic, though the way his mysticism has been understood has evolved markedly. From being seen by the History of Religion school as Hellenistic in type (cognate, supposedly, with contemporary Greek mystery cults), it has come to be seen (following Schweitzer) as rooted in Judaism, or as related to the idea of *theōsis* in imperial Greek philosophy.[11] In all these evolutions, the idea that Paul envisions the relationship of the faithful with Christ as one of mystical union or participation in Christ has been thought attractive in its own right, and it has also drawn support from the argument that there is no good alternative explanation for Paul's use of *en* with *Christos Iēsous*.[12] Meanwhile, many scholars who are not primarily concerned with Paul's mysticism have continued to accept Deissmann's linguistic argument and, at least partly on that basis, have proposed a wide variety of alternative explanations of what Paul means by the phrase *en Christō*.

In *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus* (1930), Albert Schweitzer recast Deissmann's theory, arguing that the 'common denominator' of Paul's *en* expressions is the idea that the elect partake with Christ, in a unique way, in the corporeity which

[8] Deissmann (1926), 138, 140.

[9] E. g. Weiss (1937.2), 465, cf. Schnackenburg (1964), 162–6. Bousset (2013) also has some sympathy with it (the phrases *en Christō* and *en pneumati* 'coincide so completely that they can be interchanged at will', p. 160), but Bousset understands Paul's sense of being 'in Christ' as one of close personal belonging and spiritual relationship (cf. p. 154: 'For Paul Christ becomes the supra-terrestrial power which supports and fills with its presence his whole life').

[10] A view shared when Deissmann was writing, not least, by Wrede (1907), Weinel (1904), and Bousset (2013).

[11] Gladd (2008, 8–16) gives a compact history of scholarship; cf. Wikenhauser (1960), Brown (1968), Segal (1990), Marguerat (1996), Meier (1998), Ashton (2000), Shantz (2009), Rowland (2017), Yarbro Collins (2018), and below, p. 148–55.

[12] I use 'the faithful' throughout as the best common translation for *hoi pistoi* and *hoi pisteuontes*, and as preferable to *hoi adelphoi* because it is gender-neutral. I use 'Christians' sparingly and interchange 'churches' with 'communities', to remind myself, and perhaps also readers, to be wary of anachronistic assumptions about either.

is capable of resurrection. Being 'in Christ', which Schweitzer argues is key to Paul's theology (more so, in particular, than the doctrine of justification by faith), is an abbreviation of the concept of partaking in the mystical body of Christ, which Paul often presents as the antithesis of being in the corporeal body, the flesh, sin, or the law.[13] Both the idea that Christ is in us and the idea that we are in Christ, Schweitzer proposes, are expressions of this union.[14] Schweitzer understands the mystical body of Christ, in Paul's thinking, not as an image or a symbol, but literally, as an entity. Only by interpreting it in this way, he argues, can we understand how Paul believes that Christ can suffer for the elect and the elect for Christ and for one another.[15] In this union, the baptized person loses his or her 'creatively individual experience' and 'natural personality' and becomes a manifestation of the personality of Jesus Christ.[16] Schweitzer sees Paul's mysticism, including his understanding of being *en Christō*, as deriving from Jewish eschatology. Through their union with Christ, believers are not only already part of the new creation, but look forward to receiving the glorified body and resurrection life for which they are destined after the final judgment.[17]

Schweitzer's language of Pauline mysticism, like Deissmann's 'Spirit-Christ', has not gained many followers,[18] but, like Deissmann's, Schweitzer's affirmation of the centrality of being 'in Christ', described as participation in Christ or union with Christ, together with the close connection he makes between being in Christ and Paul's references to the body of Christ, and his argument that being in Christ is eschatological, have all been widely accepted. His interpretation, together with his view that Paul intended his language of participation to be heard literally, was given further weight by E. P. Sanders in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.[19] Sanders follows Schweitzer in arguing that eschatology is central to Paul's thought and calls his 'pattern of religion' 'participationist eschatology'.[20] He summarizes this view by saying,

> God has appointed Christ as Lord and saviour of the world. All who believe in him have the Spirit as the guarantee of future full salvation and are at present considered to par-

[13] Schweitzer (1931), 122–3.

[14] P. 122; so also are being 'with' Christ, putting on Christ, and being baptized into Christ.

[15] P. 127.

[16] P. 125.

[17] P. 132, cf. 130–40. On the importance of eschatology to Paul, see also e.g. (1964a), 205, and (1971a), 18, with Way (1991), 119–76; Sanders (2007), 445–53; de Boer (1989); and Martyn (1985, 2000).

[18] Though see e.g. Stewart (1935), 148–50; Wikenhauser (1960), 54; Bauer (1988), col. 521; Dunn (1988); and Jewett (2007) *ad* Rom. 6.11. Campbell (2009, 59) identifies it with 'union with Christ'. *Contra*, see e.g. Barth (1922), *ad* Rom. 8; Büchsel (1949), 145–54; and Macaskill (2013), 40; cf. Wright (2013), 529–37. Compare Cranfield (1975–9); and Barrett (1991) *ad* Rom. 6.11. Neugebauer (1961, 19) rejects Deissmann's and Schweitzer's mysticism.

[19] Sanders (2007), especially 435–523.

[20] P. 549.

ticipate in Christ's body, to be one Spirit with him. As such, they are to act in accordance with the Spirit, which is also to serve Christ as the Lord to whom they belong.[21]

In the wake of Sanders' reassessment of Schweitzer, discussions of *en Christō* and its relatives have burgeoned, and most have accepted that the concepts of participation and union (usually treated as interchangeable) are key to our understanding of the phrase.[22] To explore what participation or union means, scholars have cast the net increasingly widely, to include discussion of phrases such as *eis Christon*, *syn Christō*, *dia Christou*, and *en pistei*, together with Pauline ideas about the body, divine or social, physical or spiritual union, marriage, the seed of Abraham, corporate personality, the *eschaton*, the Church, the temple, the people of God, the family, baptism, the eucharist, the covenant, and the narrative of Christ's death and resurrection.[23]

Some commentators have seen the phrase as having one, or one dominant meaning. For Rudolf Bultmann, being in Christ means above all being a member of the *ekklēsia*.[24] W. D. Davies too sees being in Christ primarily as social, though also as involving an intensely personal relationship between Christ and the believer.[25] For N. T. Wright, it means belonging to the people of the Messiah and the community of the new covenant.[26] In *Dying and Rising with Christ*, Robert Tannehill explores how Christ-confessors partake in the crucifixion and resurrection, dying to their old lives with Christ and rising to new life individually, as a community, and at the end time.[27] Michael Gorman, in a series of studies, identifies being in Christ with 'resurrectional cruciformity' and the *theōsis* of believers.[28] Richard Hays argues that 'in Christ' involves imaginative identification with the narrative of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection: the story of Jesus 'summons his hearers (and readers) into a symbolic world in which cross, resurrection, and

[21] P. 463. Sanders observes that, however difficult we find it, there is no sign that Paul regards his 'in Christ' language as strange or incomprehensible.

[22] Following especially Schweitzer, but looking back to (modern interpretations of) patristic *theōsis* and *homoiōsis*. Several recent studies have included extensive literature reviews, especially Campbell (2012), ch. 2; Macaskill (2013), ch. 1; and Vanhoozer (2014). Cf. Bouttier (1962), with an astute assessment of Deissmann's influence down to the time of writing, and Parsons (1988).

[23] An approach already advocated by Strong (1913), 19–35. Perhaps the only interpretation which has been generally rejected, other than Deissmann's own, is that based on H. Wheeler Robinson's theory of corporate personality (1964), though more recent arguments for 'corporate unity' or the incorporation of his people into the Messiah: e. g. Wedderburn (1985), Wright (1991), 46–7, and Powers (2001), 109–11 can be seen as softer or metaphorical relatives of Wheeler Robinson's theory.

[24] (2007), 1.312, 2.177, 192–3.

[25] (1970), 85.

[26] E. g. (2013a), 109.

[27] (1967).

[28] (2017); cf. (2001), and (2009), 218.

Parousia are the events that define and shape the meaning of history'.[29] Susan Grove Eastman argues for the relationality of participation in Christ, in a universe in which relationships shape us, change us, and make us, physically and socially, who we are.[30] Grant Macaskill links being in Christ with the state of existence which is brought about by the crucifixion and resurrection and the 'eschatological gift of the new covenant'.[31] Michael Wolter emphasizes that for Paul being 'in Christ' (and 'with Christ') is a state of existence and belonging which is an 'objective datum', an existential reality of the same 'ontological dignity' as the construct of reality which is the everyday world.[32]

The diversity of these interpretations hints at the difficulty of applying any one explanation of *en Christō* language to the range of Paul's usage. Any single interpretation of the phrase that has enough specific content to be interesting fits some passages much better than others. It is therefore unsurprising that an increasing number of studies sees *en Christō* as bearing a cluster of loosely related meanings.[33] Albrecht Oepke, in his article on the preposition *en* in Kittel's *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, suggests that the phrase can denote, in some sense, membership of Christ or membership of the Church; it can characterize an activity or state as Christian; it can point to the basis of fellowship with God, for instance by qualifying *charis* or *sōtēria*; and it can refer generally to the gathering of many into one.[34] Michel Bouttier defines Paul's use

[29] (2008), 345, cf. 345–8. Hays also argues that, for Paul, participation can also mean participation in the family or political, military, or ecclesial community of Christ. Hays' argument for narrative participation is highly attractive to a 21st-century reader, but Stowers' criticism (2008, 354–5) that it relies on a modern, not a first-century concept has point. It is common in antiquity to treat narratives of great men as exemplary, sometimes to be imitated, and even to be identified with: e.g. Morgan (2007), Langlands (2018), and Roller (2018). Exemplary stories, however, are typically treated as examples of e.g. a moral (or immoral) quality; the story can be quite malleable and the moral drawn highly variable. The suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ are not treated as malleable material for moral reflection in this way by Paul (or any other early Christian writer).

[30] Eastman (2017).

[31] Macaskill (2013), 1–2, 249–50, (2019). Against the centrality of the covenant, however, see e.g. Martyn (1997b), 141–56, de Boer (1989); cf. Watson (2016), arguing that though Paul refers to the history of the covenant, he does not see God's actions in Christ as continuous with it, but as a new departure.

[32] Wolter (2015), 228, 231, 228–40.

[33] Büchsel (1949), though assessed by Bouttier (1962, 20) as a less influential synthesizer than many, offers an early cluster definition of 'in Christ'.

[34] All these are widely accepted as making sense in some Pauline contexts, but continue to attract less discussion than participation. With Oepke see especially Longenecker (2015), 167–70, and the nuanced account of Seifrid (1995), who makes clear the complexity, and sometimes fluidity of Paul's usage. Oepke is substantially followed, among others, by Best (1955, 1 *et passim*), showing that some of Oepke's meanings, together with one or two others which he draws out of Oepke's broad categories, are best described as instrumental. Best points e.g. to the instrumentality of the ideas that 'God gives us/does something for us in Christ', God gives us gifts 'in Christ', and 'in Christ' all things are created. In his article on *en* in Aland and Aland eds (1988), col. 521, Walter Bauer entertains the possibility that being 'in Christ' is sometimes

of the phrase as instrumental when Paul uses it to refer to what God accomplishes through Christ in the crucifixion, inclusive and communal when it refers to the elevation of Christ to God's right hand and his presence in the Church, and eschatological when it refers to the establishment of the kingdom of God.[35] For Günther Bornkamm, *en Christō* can be equivalent to 'Christian' or 'as a Christian'; it can refer to membership of a church; it sums up what has come about for believers through Christ; and it signifies 'the new basic and all comprehending reality into which believers are transferred'.[36] C. F. D. Moule argues that most uses of *en Christō* are instrumental, but that a handful cannot be interpreted as anything but participatory, and, in these, Christ is 'an inclusive personality – one in whom believers find themselves incorporate'.[37]

Two recent studies, by Constantine Campbell and Grant Macaskill, both view Paul's use of *en Christō* language as complex within the broad concept of 'union with Christ'. For Campbell, Paul's use of *en Christō* language, together with phrases such as *eis Christon*, *syn Christō*, *dia Christou*, and a series of recurring metaphors of the body, buildings, and marriage, is part of the 'webbing' which holds Paul's theological thinking together.[38] Campbell teases out what he identifies as the meaning of each usage of *en Christō*, arguing that we should understand the phrase, according to context, as instrumental or locative; as referring to the redemption 'associated with' Christ, or to Christians' participation in the death of Christ, or to being Christian; as the new status Christians have in Christ, or as being 'in the sphere of' Christ; and as having ethical and eschatological dimensions, as well as being closely related to justification by faith.[39] Macaskill, as noted above, sees Paul's understanding of union between God, Christ, and human beings as above all covenantal, presented in terms of the formal union between God and Israel.[40] Within that framework, he sees 'in Christ' as used in various ways, but most often as locative, 'where it demarcates a sphere (or state) of existence that is eschatological and that has come to realization in, and through, the incarnational narrative of the crucified and risen

more spatial than temporal (he is attracted to the meaning 'in the presence of' or 'in the court of' which is common elsewhere in Greek), but thinks it captures the idea of a close relationship more than anything else.

[35] (1962), 87–133.

[36] Bornkamm (1971), 154–6.

[37] Moule (1977), 49, 55–69. There may be a dozen such passages, at most, but some of them (e. g. Rom. 8.1, 1 Cor. 15.22, Gal. 3.26) occur at such significant points in Paul's letters that they must form an important aspect of his thinking.

[38] P. 441, though he rightly emphasizes (pp. 26, 29) that his theme of union with Christ is not fully captured by *en Christō* language, and, indeed, that 'union with Christ' does not convey all Paul includes in Campbell's theme, which includes participation, identification, and incorporation.

[39] Campbell (2012, 2014).

[40] (2013), 1–2.

Son, sent by the Father'.[41] It has become increasingly common, in recent years, to speak of Christ-confessors as being in the 'sphere' of Christ or Christ's activity: a term used by Ernst Käsemann to refer to the sphere of Christ's lordship or power, but adopted by other scholars with more spatial, relational, or existential overtones.[42]

Cluster definitions have the attraction that, between them, the elements of the cluster can account for most, if not all, instances of *en Christō* language more easily than can any single interpretation. On the other hand, the internal connections in cluster definitions often seem rather loose: more a matter of convenience than interpretative necessity. No doubt, for example, it is true that Paul is concerned, in his letters, with both ecclesiology and eschatology, but in itself this does not explain why he should choose to use *en Christō* language in both contexts, so it falls short of explaining his understanding of the phrase. Almost all cluster definitions, moreover, include at least one relatively weak element to cover a range of the more difficult instances. There is something paradoxical about claiming that *en Christō* language is centrally important to Paul and then positing that, in a large proportion of cases, he uses it simply to mean 'Christian' – unless we can explain in more depth why it matters to Paul to use this phrase for that purpose, and how this use of the phrase connects with others.[43]

Amid all this activity, it is surprising how few scholars have gone back to examine the linguistic basis of their arguments in Deissmann's *Die neutestamentliche Formel*.[44] The main exception is Fritz Neugebauer, who, in *In Christus: Eine Untersuchung zum paulinischen Glaubensverständnis*, considers Deissmann's philology (fairly briefly but astutely), finds it wanting, and argues for an interpretation of *en Christō* and related phrases rooted in the instrumental.[45] Neugebauer's is one of the most stringent and consistent readings

[41] In this context, being in Christ and being in the Spirit go together, though they are not the same (249–50).

[42] E.g. Käsemann (1964a), 1.20/118–9, cf. e.g. Matera (1992) *ad* Gal. 2.17, 3.26–9; Schnelle (2005), 481; Campbell (2012), ch. 3.7; Macaskill (2013), 249–50; and Vanhoozer (2014), 28. Thüsing (1965, 233–7), however, argues against the concept of the sphere of Christ's power, seeing *en Christō* as directly focused on Christ's person. Thüsing also emphasizes the importance of instrumentality in Paul's language of the salvific relationship between God and Christ.

[43] It is true, for example, of *pistis* language that it is both centrally important to Paul and often used to mean 'Christian', but in that case, more has been done to show how *hoi pistoi/hoi pisteuontes* relate to the rest of Paul's usage (Morgan (2015a), chs. 6–7).

[44] Deissmann's philology has finally been given thorough critical scrutiny in Beyer's excellent dissertation (2020), ch. 4.

[45] Neugebauer (1961), 18–21, with criticism too (pp. 22–30) of the History of Religion school's 'mystical' interpretation of the concept. Büchsel (1949) had already argued for the dominance of an instrumental meaning. Bouttier (1962, 24–7) praises Deissmann's pioneering work on *koinē* in general, but notes that Blass' fundamental grammar of New Testament Greek (first published in 1898, so available to Deissmann for most of his working life, though not when he wrote *Die neutestamentliche Formel*) does not agree with Deissmann's dismissal of the instrumental meaning of *en* with the dative, and agrees with Blass. Moule (1977, 49, 55–69) ag-

of Paul's *en Christō* language. He argues that it means something like 'determined by the Christ event' or 'in a Christ-conditioned way'[46] and that Paul uses it, in his account of salvation history, to describe the objective reality of Christian existence in light of God's work through the death of Christ.[47] Those who propose cluster definitions of *en Christō* also tend, in practice, to include meanings (such as instrumental or eschatological meanings) which Deissmann would have excluded. The legacy of Deissmann and Schweitzer, however, together with the work of Bultmann, Bouttier, Käsemann, Sanders, Martyn, Hays, Wright, and a growing number of younger scholars, ensures that union and participation continue to form the main focus of writing about being 'in Christ'.

Modern discussions of union and participation, however, suffer from two difficulties. The more committed they are to the idea that the faithful are 'in' Christ as a person or a distinct being, the less they can explain what that means. But the more they broaden the idea to include being with Christ, in faith, in the church, in the people of God, in a body, a marriage, or a temple, the less distinctive content the terms 'union', 'participation', 'in', or even 'Christ' bear.

It has become a *topos* of writing about being 'in Christ' as a person for the writer to admit that they cannot really explain what it means. Augustus Hopkins Strong, who was among the first scholars in the Anglophone world to take up Deissmann's ideas, already recognized this as a problem. He seeks to describe 'union with Christ', finds he cannot, and offers instead a string of Pauline terms as if they were explanatory. Union with Christ

> is a union of life, in which the human spirit, while then most truly possessing its own individuality and personal distinctiveness, is interpenetrated and energized by the Spirit of Christ, is made inscrutably but indissolubly one with him, and so becomes a member and partaker of that regenerated, believing, and justified humanity of which he is the head.[48]

Schweitzer, as we have seen, suggests that being 'in Christ' is an abbreviation of the idea of partaking in the mystical body of Christ, a phrase which is no more self-explanatory than 'in Christ' itself. He asserts that the mystical body of Christ is an actual entity, without explaining what such an entity might be.[49] Sanders, in

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rees largely with Neugebauer, but on grounds of sense rather than because he has reconsidered Deissmann. Klaiber (1982, 86–7 and n. 67) is also critical of Deissmann and argues for an instrumental interpretation in many passages.

[46] Paul uses this idea, he suggests, both adjectivally and adverbially.

[47] Cf. Neugebauer (1958). Kuss (1956) makes a similar argument very briefly. Wedderburn (1985) fairly criticizes Neugebauer for not entertaining seriously enough the possibility of other meanings, in particular whether there is a local sense of 'in' in some passages. Cf. Smedes (1983), 65, who is indebted to Neugebauer: 'to be "in Christ" is to be in the new historical order created by Jesus Christ and kept alive by His Spirit'.

[48] (1913), 17. Strong notes that at the time of writing union with Christ is a neglected topic which deserves more discussion.

[49] (1931), 122–3, 127. As Stowers (2008, 353) observes, 'he never tells us how the idea of one person being in another person or sharing in the experiences of another would make sense to Paul or to others in his culture'.

a passage which has been widely quoted by other scholars to express their own *aporia*, comments,

> It seems to me best [*contra* Bultmann] to understand Paul as saying what he meant and meaning what he said. Christians really are one body and Spirit with Christ … the end really will come and those who are in Christ will really be transformed. But what does this mean? How are we to understand it? We seem to lack a category of 'reality' – real participation in Christ, real possession of the Spirit – which lies between naïve cosmological speculation and belief in magical transference on the one hand and a revised self-understanding on the other. I must confess that I do not have a new category of perception to propose here. This does not mean, however, that Paul did not have one.[50]

Blass and Debrunner's *Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* lists several uses of *en* with the dative, among which it gives prominence to instrumentality, before concluding, with a hint of philological frustration, that '[t]he phrase *en Christō (kyriō)*, which is copiously appended by Paul to the most varied concepts, utterly defies definite interpretation …'.[51] The difficulty of explaining exactly what participation in the person or being of Christ means leaves major commentaries on the letters, understandably but unsatisfactorily, either glossing over the question or suggesting, tantalizingly but obscurely, that, for instance, in Christ Christians are 'ontologically united with Christ', or that the phrase is 'a pregnant expression of corporate mysticism'.[52]

Increasingly, since the mid-twentieth century, interpreters have responded to this difficulty by suggesting that the 'Christ' in *en Christō* language is metaphorical or metonymic. Being 'in Christ' (as we saw in some of the examples above) means being in a relationship with Christ or in the sphere of Christ's activity, in the new covenant, or in a new state of existence; it means having a new status or identifying imaginatively with the narrative of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, and more.[53] Clearly, Paul does think that to be a Christian means to have a relationship with Christ, to be part of the church, to live in a new state of

[50] (2007), 522–3. The likelihood that Paul did not, in fact, have such a category is indicated by 1 Cor. 15.39–42: 'Not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for human beings, another kind of flesh for animals … So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown corruptible; it is raised incorruptible …'. Paul sees human beings, including the faithful, as having one type of body, which is changed at the resurrection into another kind, not a kind which is changed once (or added to) by being 'in Christ' and changed (again) at the resurrection. Nevertheless, a few scholars have taken on the challenge of identifying such a category, notably Stowers (2008), Hays (2008), Macaskill (2013), and Wright (2013), 510–46. Others have continued to highlight the complexity and multivalency of participation and union, e.g. Schoberg (2014), and Campbell (2012).

[51] 9th–10th ed. transl. Funk (1961), 118 n. 4. Cf. Moule (1977), 48–51; Schnelle (1983), 107–8; Wedderburn (1985), 89–90; and Powers (2001), 70–2. See also Strong (1913), 80–1: one of the qualities of union with Christ is that it is inscrutable.

[52] Fitzmyer (1993), and Jewett (2007) *ad* Rom. 6.11. It is telling in itself that it is more common than not for commentaries to gloss over the meaning of *en Christō* where it occurs.

[53] Most recently, Hewitt (2020, e.g. 124–5, 193–6) speaks of 'solidarity' and 'inclusion' as alternatives to incorporation or participation, without either defending or giving up the concept of participation.

existence, and so on (though we should note that these are not necessarily equivalent to each other), but identifying any or all of these as forms of union with Christ or participation in Christ brings its own problems. We speak routinely, for instance, of participating in relationships, but not of participating in a sphere, and we speak of participating in relationships, covenants, and narratives in rather different senses, so when 'participation' is used for all these, even by different scholars, its meaning is being stretched very thin. Some interpretations invite the objection which many commentators have made to Deissmann, that they turn 'Christ' into something less personal than he is for Paul by identifying him with the community, the new covenant, or a form of life. Most problematic of all, perhaps, metaphorical or metonymic explanations of *en Christō* language do not explain why Paul should talk about being in the church, say, or being in a new state of existence, using this phrase specifically. Paul has, and uses, other ways of expressing these ideas. It seems preferable to assume, at least as a starting point, that when he uses *en Christō* language, he means something distinct by it which is indicated by the use of *en* with *Christos*, *kyrios*, and so on, rather than that he uses the phrase to mean something else.

Theologically, the perceived elusiveness of some of Paul's uses of *en Christō* and its relatives has provided rich food for thought, stimulating interpreters to probe more deeply the mysteries of incorporation, eschatology, or the meaning of the eucharist. There is ample room to explore further what Paul's language might mean for modern Christians, and this is a valid exercise in its own right. Historically, however, the investigation of Paul's *en Christō* language is better focused if we start from the assumption that the phrase means something *per se*; if we explore the connections between *en Christō* language and other Pauline ideas without trying to fit them all under one umbrella concept of 'participation' or 'union'; and if we confine the language of participation to its original meaning of participation in the person of Christ and do not extend it to a point where it is so multivalent as to be almost a vacant sign.

What follows will try to follow these guidelines. I will occasionally argue against a 'participatory' interpretation of a particular passage, and my objection in these cases will usually be to the claim that the passage refers to participation in the person or body of Christ. It is worth making clear that I think many of the studies cited above which explore what it means, for Paul, for the faithful to have a personal relationship with Christ, to be in the church, to identify with the story of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, to be in a new state of existence, to live in the sphere of Christ's activity, and more, make major contributions to our understanding of Paul. These contributions, in my view, would be no less persuasive or significant if they were not tied to an over-extended language of participation.[54]

[54] One could say, for instance, with Susan Grove Eastman's remarkable *Paul and the Person* (2017), that human beings are inescapably embodied, relational and social, 'porous' and 'entan-

Where I disagree with these interpretations of *en Christō* language, it will often be not because I disagree with their analysis or their conclusions, but because I think these are not most helpfully described in participatory terms.

Studies of Paul's *en Christō* language have tended to focus on what he meant by it: what was in his mind. We should also, however, take into account what Paul's listeners and interlocutors might have made of the phrase. Paul was wrestling with large concepts: the meaning of the new life which he believed he, and all Christ's confessors, had been given; the meaning of their new relationship with God and the Lord Jesus Christ; the nature of their new community and new hope. But he was also trying to communicate with the people he preached to, most of whom cannot have been thinking anything like as hard as he was about these ideas, in terms which they would understand and want to accept. The idea that a phrase which is so common in Paul's letters and so central to his thought requires an enormous volume of modern scholarship to interpret it, and, at the end of all our exploring, remains elusive, leaves a nagging doubt in the mind. Can Paul the preacher have intended *en Christō* to mean something so complicated; so obscure?

What follows will argue for a new interpretation of Paul's *en Christō* language: one which understands it as well within the bounds of everyday Greek; which is complex but coherent; which makes sense of the passages which have been seen as most difficult to interpret; which both seeks to capture the distinctiveness of Paul's thinking and would have been linguistically comprehensible to first-century listeners; one which both fits well with some existing interpretations of Paul's theology and adds something to them. This interpretation draws in part on a meaning of *en* with the dative which is well attested in Greek, in a range of dialects, including *koinē*, throughout antiquity, but which, to my knowledge, has never been explored as a meaning of *en Christō* language in Paul. To understand why not, we must revert briefly to Deissmann.

1.1 *En* with the dative and Deissmann's philology

Having observed, in 1892, that the Pauline corpus makes extensive use of *en Christō* and related phrases, Deissmann set out to interpret them using up-to-date tools of philology and historical criticism. He emphasizes the linguistic importance of what he calls particles (among which he includes prepositions, adverbs, and conjunctions): they create meaning and can be used creatively to

gled' in our social and physical matrices (p. 125); that we are therefore infinitely vulnerable to our environments, good or bad; and that God's actions through Christ and our relationship with Christ transform our selves, our relationships, what it is possible for us to do for ourselves, and every aspect of our lived existence, without describing this as participation in the person of Christ.

forge new meanings.[55] To understand Paul's use of *en* with the dative, he argues, we must examine how the phrase is used, through time, elsewhere in Greek.[56] He offers a wide range of examples drawn from classical and Hellenistic Greek, including from the Septuagint. He concludes that *en* is not used with the first person singular in the dative elsewhere in Greek (or Semitic) literature in anything like the sense in which Paul uses it.[57]

Though Deissmann's own theory of the meaning of *en Christō* attracted scrutiny and criticism from an early date, the philological basis of his argument seems to have been accepted almost without question. It is, however, though methodologically rigorous, problematic in content. Deissmann asserts that the only really useful parallels to Paul in earlier sources will be cases of *en* with the dative of a person in the singular.[58] There is no linguistic reason why this should be so. *En* appears in all its meanings with nouns and pronouns both singular and plural, and the whole range of its usage is relevant to its interpretation, and therefore potentially relevant as we investigate how it may have been used by Paul. Deissmann then proposes that even *en* with a dative pronoun, rather than a proper name, is not a true parallel.[59] This is even less defensible, not least since *Christos* and *kyrios* are, in origin, titles rather than proper names, and Paul also uses *en* with *hos* and *autos*. Deissmann suggests that *en* with a singular proper name in the dative is extremely rare. *En* with a singular proper name is certainly less common in Greek than *en* with another type of noun or a pronoun (not least because, in general, there are more instances of nouns and pronouns than proper names in Greek texts), but 'extremely rare' is an exaggeration.[60] Deissmann himself gives examples in which something or someone is 'in Cypris', 'in Ares', 'in the Muses', or 'in Metellus', as well as examples of someone or something being 'in the god'.[61] Curiously, he seems to overlook what is by far the most common use of *en* with the proper name of a god, *en Haidi*, even though *Haidēs* with various prepositions appears not only commonly throughout mainstream Greek literature but several times in the New Testament. Hades is the name of the god who, in Greek myth and culture, rules the dead. His name is also used metonymically from an early date for the sphere of his power, and, by extension, for the place where he holds power: so 'in Hades' means 'in the hands of' or 'in the power of Hades', and, by extension, 'in the realm where Hades holds power'.[62]

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[55] (1892), 4–6, cf. 72. His point here is about prepositions; modern grammars distinguish particles from prepositions, adverbs, and conjunctions.

[56] Pp. 8–9. He is also prepared, in principle, to find that Paul is dependent on a pre-existing Christian idiom (p. 15), though he doubts he is.

[57] Pp. 22, 70.

[58] Pp. 16, 31–2.

[59] P. 22.

[60] *En theō* and *en daimoni*, moreover, are both quite common.

[61] Pp. 18, 28.

[62] E. g. Hom., *Il.* 23.244, *Od.* 4.834; and *Ev. Luc.* 16.23; cf. Hes., *Th.* 455; GVI 1875; SB 12.11247;

The second basis of Deissmann's argument that the use of *en* with the dative elsewhere in Greek does not offer any significant parallels with Pauline usage is his taxonomy of meanings of *en* with the dative in general. This taxonomy seems to be his own. Though he mentions the two most important dictionaries available to him, Stephanus' 1572 *Thesaurus Graecae linguae*, updated by Charles Benoît Hase, Wilhelm Dindorf, and Ludwig August Dindorf between 1831 and 1865, and the fifth edition of Johann Gottlob Schneider's *Kritisches griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch*, edited by Franz Passow as *Handwörterbuch der griechischen Sprache* in 1826 and updated continuously through the nineteenth century, he makes little use of either.[63] Schneider-Passow, for example, classifies uses of *en* with the dative as referring to place, state, instrument, or time, and locative meanings, which form the largest and most complex group, as including 'in', 'on', 'within', 'at', 'by' etc., 'in the number of', 'among', 'in the presence of', 'in one's hands', 'within one's reach', 'in one's power', 'in respect of', 'into', 'from' (as in 'made from'), 'in the form of', and 'in' (as in 'in the Book of Isaiah').

Deissmann divides the meanings of the passages he cites into 'instrumental', 'local', 'forensic' and 'psychological' (the last of which, it emerges, he thinks is really a form of the local). This is a heterogenous group of categories. The first two are properly grammatical, but the others, as Deissmann describes them, sometimes or always refer to the context (literal or metaphorical) in which the phrase is used in a passage rather than strictly to the grammatical use of *en*.

When, for example, Pindar, at Pythian Ode 5.85, says that the Trojans saw their city go up in smoke *en Arei*, Deissmann rightly identifies Pindar's meaning as instrumental. The destruction is done 'through Ares', the god of war.[64] When, in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus' daughter Ismene tells him that, after his death, the people of Colonus will regard him as their patron and protector, saying, 'They say that their power will come to be in you [*en soi*]', Deissmann identifies her meaning, debatably but defensibly, as local: Oedipus, though dead, will have a power within himself on which the people will draw.[65] In both these cases, what Deissmann describes is a straightforwardly grammatical meaning of *en*. Some of his examples, however, are more problematic. In a famous speech in Sophocles' *Antigone* (450–70), Antigone defends the fact that she has buried her brother, in accordance with the laws of the gods but against a law proclaimed

IG 14.1746; and CIL 6.14672. The names of other gods are used in the same way, in both Greek and Latin: so one can shiver 'under a cold Jove [sky]' (Hor., *C.* 1.1.25), or experience the 'astringent body of Neptune [the sea]' (Lucr. 2.472). Cf. the common usage 'in Isaiah', 'in Amos', meaning 'in the book by Isaiah' etc.

[63] Schneider-Passow formed the basis for the first edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek-English dictionary.

[64] P. 18; *Pyth.* 5.78 in Deissmann's edition.

[65] The meaning could also be instrumental or relate to the power Oedipus will have, so the line could be translated 'They say that their power will be in your hands' or (as the Loeb edition translates) 'They say that their power will depend on you'.

by King Creon. She declares to Creon (458–60) that 'I did not intend to pay the penalty [which she would have accrued for not burying her brother] *en theois* out of fear of the arrogance of any man'. Deissmann identifies the meaning of *en theois* here as forensic, by analogy with a use of *en* with the dative to mean 'before', as in 'before a judge' or a court.[66] But Antigone refers to herself, if she had not buried her brother, not as being tried before the gods, but as paying the penalty *en theois*. One does not pay a penalty in front of the judge or jury, but because of the judgment given by a judge or jury. Though Antigone's imagery here is judicial, therefore, her grammatical use of *en* is either instrumental, or belongs to one of the extended locative meanings of *en* (or something of both). It refers to a penalty that is in the hands of the gods and/or is administered at their behest.[67]

En with the dative, as noted by dictionaries from Stephanus' onwards, is relatively common in the extended locative meaning which in English is rendered 'in the hands of'. English is not alone in using this metaphor: German, French, and Spanish also use it, including, in Greek dictionaries and translations of texts, to render the same meaning of *en*. Schneider-Passow and Liddell-Scott-Jones do not give this meaning its own descriptive term, but it can appropriately be called 'encheiristic'.[68] The use of the image 'in the hands of' to describe this meaning of *en* reflects its internal complexity, which can encompass the idea that something or someone is 'in the power of', 'under the authority of', is 'the responsibility of' something or someone else, and more. We will return to this range of meaning below. Meanwhile, it is worth noting that, elsewhere, Greek itself, including New Testament *koinē*, often uses hands as an image of power and agency. *Encheirein* means to 'take [something] in hand', encompassing a sense of taking control and taking responsibility, while *encheiresthai*, to be 'handed' something, is a standard way of saying that one has been entrusted with something. A person's 'hand' often stands for their power and authority. Paul, for example, describes himself as escaping out of the 'hands' (the power and authority) of the governor of Damascus (ἐξέφυγον τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ) by being lowered in a basket out of a window in the city wall.[69] In Luke's gospel, Jesus, on the cross, quotes Psalm 30.6 LXX: 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit [Πάτερ, εἰς χεῖράς σου παρατίθεμαι τὸ πνεῦμά μου]' (23.46). Using the metaphor 'in the hands of' as a translation of 'en' meaning 'in the power of', 'under the authority of', 'the re-

[66] Soph., *Ant.* 459–60 (455 in Deissmann's edition); Deissmann (1892), 20.

[67] We will see that the boundary between these meanings of *en* is often blurred.

[68] Many of Deissmann's identifications of forensic *en* are problematic in similar ways, but a few are more plausible, e.g. Aesch., *Eum.* 469 (447 in Deissmann's edition), where Orestes asks Athena to judge whether he killed his mother justly or not, and says, 'Whatever happens to me *en soi*, I will praise [i.e. accept]'. Orestes may here be putting himself in Athena's hands (the Loeb edition translates, 'However I fare at your hands, I shall be content with the outcome'), but since he is inviting her to judge his guilt or innocence, he may be imagining himself coming before her as judge.

[69] 2 Cor. 11.33, cf. Gal. 3.19. On other uses of 'hands' imagery, see p. 96 n. 80.

sponsibility of' and so on, therefore, fits well with the way Greek itself uses 'hand' imagery elsewhere.

To return to Deissmann's categories: when, in Xenophon's *Anabasis* (1.5.17) the Spartan mercenary Clearchus is described as coming *en heautō*, 'to himself' or 'to his senses', Deissmann reasonably identifies Xenophon's meaning as a psychological (and so as a form of the local), because Clearchus' coming to himself takes place in his own mind. When, however, in the *Oeconomicus* (7.14), the Athenian landowner Ischomachus' wife tells him that she cannot be his partner in household management, because *en soi panta estin*, 'everything is in you', Deissmann again identifies Xenophon's meaning as psychological. This cannot be right: though Ischomachus has commented shortly before this passage that when they married, his wife knew very little of household management and he had to teach her (7.4–7), her point here is not that all domestic knowledge is in Ischomachus' mind, but that they cannot be true partners in managing the estate (7.12–13) because she has no power (7.14). 'What would I have the power to do for you?' she asks. '[E]verything is *en soi*', 'in your power'. Similarly, when, at the end of *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus' son Polynices says that the outcome of the war on which he is about to embark against his brother is *en tō daimoni*, he does not mean, as Deissmann suggests, that the outcome is somehow psychologically within the god or the god's state of mind, but that it is in the god's power or the god's hands.[70]

As it turns out, despite identifying plenty of examples of each, Deissmann has relatively little interest in what he calls instrumental, forensic, or psychological meanings as possible parallels for Paul's use of *en Christō*. Though he does not explain his reasoning in detail, his view seems to be that he does not find these meanings in the Pauline corpus (though most modern scholars do identify many of Paul's uses of *en* as instrumental, and the forensic meaning, given Paul's interest in judicial language, may deserve more attention than it has received).[71] Deissmann is more interested in the local meaning of *en* with the dative. Through his examples, however, he defines 'local' in narrower terms than grammarians: terms which, as we have seen, export some of what are usually identified as locative meanings, particularly the encheiristic meaning, into other categories which he treats as irrelevant to his purposes.

Deissmann does not simply treat encheiristic instances of *en* as belonging to one category or another in which he is not interested; in one passage he goes out of his way to discount it as insignificant even where it appears.[72] There is, he says, a meaning of *en* with the dative which is equivalent to *penes* with the accusative

[70] *OC*, 422, 1443–4; pp. 21–2. The god here may be Fate.

[71] P. 18; he seems to rule them out implicitly on the basis that it is not the meaning he finds in what he regards as the most significant instances of *en Christō* in the corpus (pp. 78–80). On possible forensic meanings of *en* in Paul, see pp. 15, 35.

[72] Pp. 20–21.

in Latin, meaning 'in the hands of', but Friederich Ellendt's *Lexicon Sophocleum* (*sic*) regards this meaning as marginal. Deissmann does not mention that both Stephanus and Schneider-Passow treat the meaning as well attested and relatively common.[73] He does note that August Bernhardi's grammar of 1801 recognizes the meaning, calling it 'ethical', but he dismisses this as over-complicating the matter. *En* meaning 'in the hands of', he concludes, is a minor form of the psychological meaning, which he has already ruled out as irrelevant to Paul's letters.

Deissmann then argues that the local meaning of *en*, as he characterizes it, is not used in the same way in pre-Pauline Greek as in Paul. He directs the reader's attention to the fact that many instances of *en* with the dative outside Paul involve pronouns rather than proper names, and the plural rather than the singular, which, he holds, distances them from Paul.[74] The first claim is true but, as we have noted, not significant. The second does not follow from it. Deissmann suggests, wrongly, that, though *en* with the dative of persons is quite common in classical Attic, it declines in use through the Hellenistic period.[75] He cites, unreferenced, the opinion of Tycho Mommsen (Theodor Mommsen's younger brother) that Paul's use of *en* with *theos*, *kyrios*, and *Christos* is new.[76]

Deissmann's approach to understanding *en Christō* in Paul is, in many ways, exemplary, as we would expect of one of the pioneers of modern historical and philological approaches to the New Testament. Shortly after writing *Die neutestamentliche Formel "in Christo Jesu"*, he would publish a series of transformative studies of biblical Greek, treating it in the context of contemporary *koinē* with wide reference to sub-literary and documentary papyri and inscriptions.[77] His studies of grammar, syntax, orthography, nomenclature, and of biblical Greek's translation of Hebrew idioms, remain fundamental in biblical scholarship. But although Deissmann's approach, in this monograph, is already marked by the historical concerns which make his later work so important, it is hard, reading through its first seventy pages, not to find in the content of the argument a sustained piece of special pleading. Deissmann's claim that instances of *en* with the dative of pronouns or plurals of non-proper names are irrelevant to Paul's usage does not hold water. His taxonomy of uses is idiosyncratic, and he dismisses most

[73] P. 24 n. 5 invokes Passow, but inaccurately: Deissmann says that the example he cites is taken by Passow to be forensic, but Passow lists it simply as an example of *en* with the dative in the sense of 'in the hands of'. Dictionaries, grammars, and studies of Greek prepositions have continued to recognize the meaning 'in the hands of': see e. g. Dutton (1916), Luraghi (2003). Grammars of New Testament Greek, though, have not: e. g. successive editions of Blass and Debrunner (1896–1990), and Baur (1988), col. 521. Campbell (2012), ch. 3.2 is one of only two or three commentators who note that that this meaning is available: cf. Goodwin (1955), § 1208, noted by Wedderburn (1985), n. 7; but none of them follows it up.

[74] Pp. 31–2, 70.

[75] P. 28.

[76] Pp. 20–2, 74. *En Christō*, unsurprisingly, does not occur outside Christian sources, but *en theō*, *en daimoni*, *en theois* etc. do.

[77] Deissmann (1895, 1897, cf. 1906, 1908).

of them as possible parallels to Paul's usage with little or no argument. His treatment of the encheiristic meaning stands out as particularly tendentious.

Having concluded that instances of *en* with the dative in non-Christian literature offer no useful comparisons for the interpretation of Paul, Deissmann proposes his own interpretation of *en Christō*.[78] Most scholars have rejected this on the basis that they do not find it a convincing reading of Paul. To disagree with Deissmann it has not been necessary to look behind his reading of Paul to his philology, but his philology has had an influence – indirect and unobtrusive, but significant – on later interpretations. By claiming that there are no useful comparisons for Paul's language elsewhere in Greek, Deissmann encouraged later interpreters not to look beyond Paul in developing their views, or at least not to look further than early Christian writings, and not to look far beyond the idea of participation. His influence, as we have seen, has not gone unchallenged: the instrumental meaning, in particular, is now widely regarded as the best interpretation of *en Christō* language in many passages. Other possible meanings of *en* with the dative in Paul's letters, however, have all but vanished from scholarly discussion. In particular, the encheiristic meaning, which Deissmann was eager to marginalize as specialized, rare, or simply a minor form of the psychological meaning, has never overcome his negative judgment. It is, however, a meaning whose relevance to the Pauline corpus is worth revisiting.

1.2 *En* with the dative: the encheiristic meaning

'In the hands of', as we have noted, is a relatively common meaning of *en* with the dative. It is first attested in Homer's *Iliad*, which is not only the earliest surviving Greek poem, but is constantly claimed as the greatest, and as such is re-performed and re-read everywhere throughout antiquity and is therefore, in some sense, for Greek-speakers, always contemporary. After Homer, *en* meaning 'in the hands of' appears in poetry and prose, in classical and Hellenistic literature, across dialects, including *koinē*, in both literary and sub-literary writing, and is used in connection with both human beings and gods.[79]

Saying that someone, or something, is in the hands of a person often means that he, she, or it is their responsibility. *En soi* is the standard way of saying in Greek that something is 'up to you'. In Herodotus' account of the Persian wars, for example, in 490 BCE, Athens faces an invasion under the Persian king Darius I. The Athenian generals debate whether to make a stand or to with-

[78] P. 70.

[79] e. g., in addition to Deissmann's references, Hom., *Il.* 7.102; Archil., fr. 111 (Loeb); Lucian., *Pisc.* 23.21; *Schol. in Pi. O.* 8.19–21.1; *Virt. herb.* 2 epil. 1.2; and *TAM* 4.1.364; cf. Ezek. Trag., *Exag.* 120 *ad* Eus. Hist.; and *PE* 9.29. Ambiguous examples are omitted, e. g. where *en theois* may mean either 'in the hands of the gods' or 'among the gods'.

draw from the city. They decide to make a stand, and Miltiades tells the leading general, the polemarch Callimachus, 'it is now in your hands [*en soi*] to enslave Athens or to make her free' (Hdt. 6.109.3). The outcome of the battle is not, of course, physically 'up to' Callimachus alone, but to every member of the fighting force. Nor is it entirely in his power to determine strategically: he may be outwitted by the Persians, or the gods may be on the other side. As Athens' military leader, however, whatever the outcome, Callimachus will bear responsibility. (In the event, the Athenians met the Persian force at Marathon and won what was remembered as their greatest victory. Callimachus was killed, but the idea that the battle was *en autō* was remembered and rewarded: he was commemorated on the great painted wall of the Stoa Poikilē in the Athenian agora, alongside many of the gods and heroes of myth.)

Something that is 'in the hands of' someone is in that person's power. At the beginning of Homer's *Iliad* book seven, Hector, King Priam's eldest son and the Trojans' greatest warrior, challenges one of the Greek leaders to single combat. The Greeks debate who, if anyone, should respond. No-one is eager to do so, but eventually, Menelaus says that he will arm against Hector: 'but the issues of victory are held from on high in the hands of the immortal gods [*en athanatoisi theoisin*]'.[80] Menelaus does not mean that the human beings in the combat will not fight and do their best to win, but that more than the strength and courage of the fighters will be involved when the issue of battle is decided. The gods always have the power to tip the balance between the combatants by supporting one man or the other. (On this occasion, Agamemnon, knowing that Menelaus is physically no match for Hector, prevents him from fighting. A ballot is held; Ajax the Greater wins it and goes out to fight, but the duel is aborted by Zeus when night falls.) At every point, human warriors must do their best to win, but they are never alone, and when the gods involve themselves, their power is always decisive.

Those who are in the hands of a greater power may also be under its protection. The author of 1 John concludes his letter by affirming, 'We know that any person who is begotten by God does not sin, but the one begotten by God [Christ] protects him, and the evil one cannot touch him' (5.18). Those begotten by God, other than Christ himself, are those who believe that Jesus is the Christ (5.1), love God, and obey God's commandments (5.2). The writer continues, '[w]e know that we belong to God and the whole world is in the hands of the evil one [οἴδαμεν ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐσμεν, καὶ ὁ κόσμος ὅλος ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται]'. Being 'in the hands of' is parallel to 'belonging to' a greater power. If that power is God, then the faithful can have confidence that God will hear them, answer their prayers, and protect them, so that the evil one cannot touch them (vv. 14, 15, 18).[81]

[80] 7.101–2, transl. Loeb.

[81] This is the standard interpretation, e.g. von Wahlde (2010), *ad loc.*

The converse of the degree to which human beings are in the power of divinities is the degree to which the gods choose whom they support. Human beings may offer cult to many gods, and may offer to put themselves into the gods' hands, but the gods choose whom they call to serve them and whom they help. This too is a major theme of the *Iliad* (and, in general, of literature which draws on myth and cult). The Greeks and Trojans worship the same pantheon of gods, but some, such as Hera and Thetis, reliably favour the Greeks; some, such as Aphrodite and Poseidon, favour the Trojans; some, including Zeus and Hades, favour neither side; and Athena changes sides twice.[82]

To put something in somebody's hands, or recognize that something is in somebody's hands, is always to acknowledge an imbalance of power, which may be trivial (if I ask you to post a letter for me), or decisively significant (if I put my life in your hands). It is often an admission of dependence; of my inadequacy to help myself. I know of no example from the ancient world, however, where the use of the phrase implies that the one who is in someone else's hands is passive or heteronomous. A common and related word exists in Greek, *entheos*, 'full of the god', 'inspired', 'possessed', which is used of prophets, bacchanals, and others who are overtaken by a god.[83] Greek usage distinguishes between being *entheos*, which implies that a god is working through a person, and sometimes that they have lost control of themselves (normally temporarily), and being *en theō*, in the hands of a god, which is not used to describe someone's being possessed or driven out of their mind.[84] Psalm 17.29–30 LXX illustrates the point. The psalmist affirms that 'Because you light my lamp, Lord, my God, you light my darkness. Because in your power [or 'hands', *en soi*] I will rush against an armed band, and in the power/hands of/with the help of my God [*en tō theō mou*] I will leap over a wall'.[85] In the hands of God, the psalmist is saved by being enabled to act superhumanly, but there is no suggestion that he is driven to rush on the enemy or to leap over a wall against his will.

[82] A recurring theme in fables is the worshipper who asks for something and is refused, because the god or hero concerned does not want to act for him or her: e.g. Aes. 18, 72, 131, 166 (Chambry); see Morgan (2013), 8–9, 16–18. One of the simplest uses of *en* with the dative in religious contexts refers to all kinds of holy or religious matters, which are described as being the realm or power of the gods, e.g. 'in matters which are in the hands [or the 'realm'] of the gods [*en theois*] … women have the greatest share' (Satyr., *Vit. Eurip.* fr. 39.11.20; *P.Oxy.* 9.1176).

[83] TDNT well surveys this kind of inspiration under '*Pneuma: Pneuma in the Greek world: Pneuma* and inspiration'.

[84] Bultmann (2007, 258) is right to emphasize that there is no magical transfer from one power to another when someone becomes a Christian; they retain autonomy throughout. See Barclay and Gathercole (2007) on this theme in Paul and contemporary Greek philosophy, and Duff (1989, 282–5) on the implications of Käsemann's and Martyn's view of apocalyptic for Paul's sense of autonomy. New Testament writers do not use *entheos*, perhaps because they want to avoid any suggestion that Christians are possessed.

[85] Ps. 70.6, Deut. 5.14, refer to the stranger who lives *en soi* – 'in your house', probably from 'under your authority/in your power', as in the case of *en Haïdi*; cf, Hom., *Od.* 7.132 ('in Alcinous' for 'in the palace of Alcinous'); and Ap. Dysc. *Constr.* 2 (Uhlig) p. 154 l. 6, *ad* Hom., *Od.* 4.191–2.

When something is in the hands of a human being, their power may not be ultimate or decisive, but may rather be somebody else's best hope. When, for example, Sophocles' Oedipus, King of Thebes, is trying to find out the source of the plague which is ravaging his city, he consults the city's blind prophet of Apollo, Teiresias. Oedipus tells Teiresias that '[the inhabitants of Thebes] are in your hands [*en soi*]' (l. 314). Teiresias has neither ultimate power over them nor ultimate responsibility for them, but he is their best hope of understanding the cause of their suffering.

When one person puts something in the hands of another, or finds that something is in the hands of another, the situation is an opportunity, in different ways, for both parties. The one in whose hands the situation is placed has the chance to change it: to do good or evil, or to bring about a certain outcome. The one who puts, or recognizes that something is in someone else's hands may find their situation changed beyond anything that is in their own power. The act of putting something in somebody's hands, or recognizing that something is in someone's hands, therefore always involves trust. When Oedipus calls on Teiresias for advice, he entrusts him with the lives of his people. When the Athenians give Callimachus responsibility for taking them into battle, they entrust him with the safety of the city. Trust and hope are equally involved when people recognize that their lives are in the hands of the gods. The gods under whose power the peoples of the ancient Mediterranean live are gods with whom they have a relationship – whom they trust, as long as they worship them appropriately and obey them when necessary, not to disregard that relationship and behave with random tyranny. They may be in the hands of the gods, but those hands, they hope and trust, are to some extent influenced by the relationship between them.

As some of these examples show, when something is said to be in somebody's hands, the context is often serious: even a crisis of some kind. This may be one reason why the phrase is not as common as some other meanings of *en* with the dative. When something is in somebody's hands, things happen, situations change, and the outcome matters, often decisively. It may mean the difference between life and death, triumph, or destruction.

The encheiristic meaning of *en*, though not uncommon in Greek in general, is rare in the Septuagint (though we have already seen one example).[86] There are, however, passages in the historical, wisdom, and prophetic books where

[86] Instrumental meanings, which Paul also uses, are also relatively rare in the Septuagint, e. g. Judg. 1.1, 1 Reg. 20.22, and Hos. 1.7 LXX. It occasionally uses the local 'before the Lord' (e. g. Iud. 20.23, 3 Reg. 17.1, cf. 2 Par. 26.16) and the phrase 'in the hand(s) of' (God or a human being) using *cheiri/chersi* (e. g. Judg. 20.28, 1 Reg. 24.21, and Sir. 33.13). People more frequently boast in, rejoice in, hope in the Lord etc. (e. g. 1 Reg. 2.1, 2 Par. 20.20, Ps. 33.2, 72.28), using *en* as an argument of the verb without modifying the noun (see pp. 25–6). Also relatively common is swearing 'in', i. e. 'in the name of' the Lord (e. g. Judg. 21.7; 2 Reg. 1.29, 2.8, 19.8; and 2 Par. 15.14).

it is the best translation. At 1 Reigns 23, for example, David is in flight from Saul in the wilderness of Mount Ziph. While Saul looks for him, he is found by Jonathan, who 'strengthened his hands in the Lord [*en kyriō*]' (23.16).[87] Both an instrumental reading and a broader local meaning would make some sense here: no doubt Jonathan is acting, and David is strengthened, in general terms, both through the Lord and in the Lord's sight, but neither translation does full justice to the phrase in context. Jonathan is strengthening David in order that he may become king over Israel (v. 17), and the two make a covenant that when this happens, Jonathan will become David's second in command (v. 18). For this to happen, David will need to call not only on God's and Jonathan's support on this occasion, but on God's strength and power constantly in the coming months and years. The translation 'Jonathan … strengthened his hands in the hands [i. e. in the power and under the authority] of the Lord' captures not only the significance of this moment, but also its significance for the future.

Septuagintal passages which can be read as encheiristic often involve the idea that someone is being strengthened (Ps. 17.29–30 was also an example). Another instance occurs not much later in 1 Reigns, when David is campaigning against Saul. He arrives at the city of Sekelak (Ziklag), which has been destroyed by the Amalekites. The people, distraught, threaten to stone him, but 'David was strengthened *en kyriō theō autou*' (30.6). Here, again, David is doubtless strengthened, on some level, by God and in God's sight, but, in the passage, the emphasis is on the fact that David then goes out, at the Lord's command (v. 8), and destroys the Amalekites (vv. 17–20). He has strength not only through the Lord, but because he acts under God's authority; he is in God's hands and acts for God.

In a more peaceful context, in the Wisdom of Solomon, the lives of the impious come and go like dust in the wind, leaving no trace (5.13–14), but 'the just live forever, and their reward is *en kyriō*, and their care is with the Most High' (5.15).[88] The third clause of the verse points strongly to an encheiristic reading of the second: the just are not only rewarded by the Lord, but their reward is to be in the hands, and the care, of the Lord forever. The security of the just in the Lord's hands is elaborated in the following verses: the Lord not only crowns them, but protects and shields them, making his zeal his armour and the whole of creation his weapons for vengeance on his enemies (vv. 16–17). A passage from Zachariah takes up the same theme in the form of prophecy. The Lord assures Israel that he will save them from their enemies: 'And I will strengthen them *en kyriō theō autōn*, and they will boast in his name, says the Lord' (10.12).[89] The people of Israel are doubtless made strong through God and in God's sight, but the prophet,

[87] Cf. NAB (translating the Masoretic text): Jonathan 'strengthened his resolve in the Lord'; Kohlenberger (1979): Jonathan 'helped him find strength in God'.

[88] NAB: 'The just live forever, and in the Lord is their recompense'.

[89] NAB: 'I will strengthen them in the Lord, and they shall walk in his name'.

like the author of Wisdom, also makes clear that the Israelites are strong, because they are in their right relationship with God (here, because they have been forgiven, cf. vv. 6, 8), and implies that they will remain strong only as long as they remain obedient to God. Their strength abides in their being in God's hands, in God's power and under God's authority.

Shortly after this passage, Zachariah offers another instance of *en kyriō* in association with the verb *heuriskein*, in an intriguing pre-echo of one of Paul's more complex instances of *en Christō* language at Philippians 3.9. Zachariah foretells that God will allow Israel's enemies to destroy Jerusalem, but that the house of Judah will be spared and will save the city and destroy her enemies. 'And the chiliarchs of Judah will say in their hearts, "We will find for ourselves the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the Lord Almighty, their God"' (12.5). *Heurēsomen* seems to be a mistranslation of the Hebrew, which translates, 'The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the Lord of hosts their God', or, 'The inhabitants of Jerusalem have their strength in the Lord almighty, their God'.[90] Here, however, as in other passages we have seen, strength is 'in' the Lord: it comes not only through God, but to those who are in God's hands, who obey God and allow God to direct their actions. 'On that day,' God, through Zachariah, continues of the chiliarchs of Judah, 'I will make [them] like a firebrand in wood and like a torch of fire in stubble, and they shall devour all the peoples round about …' (v. 6).

It should already be obvious why, as a potential meaning of *en Christō* language, 'in the hands of' has considerable attractions. It is a grammatically regular Greek phrase widely used through time, including in *koinē* and in the Septuagint. In the Septuagint, it appears several times in the form *en kyriō*, which Paul also uses. It would not have been difficult for Paul's audiences, Jewish or gentile, to understand. It is used of relationships of power and dependence which often also involve responsibility and even care, trust, and hope, but which do not take all power away from the subaltern partner (and, in the Septuagint, give the subaltern partner strength). It is often used in crisis situations which also offer those involved new opportunities.

In what follows, I will argue that 'in the hands of' is not only a possible and plausible reading of much of Paul's *en Christō* language, but that it contributes more widely to our understanding of Paul's thought. Chapters Two, Three, and Four offer close readings of *en Christō* language in each letter. Chapters Five and Six turn to the terms and concepts which have most often been linked with *en Christō* language, to see whether they really do cohere with it and add to our understanding of it. Chapters Seven and Eight shift the focus from *who* is in Christ's hands and how, to *what* is in Christ's hands, examining two ways

[90] Lowe (1882), *ad loc.*; NAB. The Targum paraphrases, with some freedom, 'salvation has been found for the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the Lord'.

in which Paul imagines and describes the community of Christ-confessors *en Christō*. Chapter Seven also asks what aspects of Christ himself Paul's *en Christō* language highlights: who this person is in whose hands the faithful live. Chapter Nine concludes by looking briefly forwards, to some of the ways in which later writers of the late first and early second centuries use and adapt Paul's *en Christō* language, or use the phrase in their own way.