

Thanksgiving and Hymn¹

Colossians 1:12–20*

- 1:12** With joy give thanks to the Father, who has authorized you to participate in the lot of the holy ones in the light.
- 13** He has delivered us from the tyrannical rule of darkness and transferred us into the domain of his beloved Son's rule,
- 14** in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
- 15** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn before all creation;
- 16** for in him all things have been created in the heavens and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions, powers or principalities, all things are created through him and for him;
- 17** and he is before all things, and in him all things are established,
- 18** and he is the head of the body, that is, of the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, in order that he might be the first in all things;
- 19** for in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell
- 20** and through him to reconcile all things to him, making peace through the blood of his cross, through him, whether on earth or in the heavens.

¹Lohse, E. (1971). *Colossians and Philemon a commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*. Translation of Die Briefe an die Kolosser und an Philemon. Hermeneia--a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (32). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

* ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.

¹³ He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son,

¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;

¹⁶ for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.

¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.

¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

²⁰ and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

the participial style, τῷ ἱκανώσαντι (v 12* “who has been authorizing us”), and the relative style, ὃς ἐρρύσατο (v 13* “he [who] has delivered us”), ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν (v 14* “in whom we have”), but also by the appearance of a series of terms not used otherwise, either in Col or in the *corpus Paulinum*. The word “to authorize” (ἱκανώω) reoccurs only in 2 Cor 3:6*, and there it is used for the apostolic ministry. The noun “part” (μερίς) comes up again only in 2 Cor 6:15*, a section which was hardly composed by Paul (2 Cor 6:14–7:1*) but probably goes back to pre-

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[Colossians 1:12 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹³ He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son,

[Colossians 1:13 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

[Colossians 1:14 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ⁶ who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

[2 Corinthians 3:6 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹⁵ What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever?

[2 Corinthians 6:15 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹⁴ Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness?

¹⁵ What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever?

¹⁶ What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

¹⁷ Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you,

¹⁸ and I will be your father, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”

¹ Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God.

[2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 \(NRSV\)](#)

Pauline tradition.² The word κληρος (lot), and the phrases ἅγιοι ἐν τῷ φωτί (saints in light), βασιλεία τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ (kingdom of his beloved son) are without parallels in the Pauline letters. The Greek word ἐξουσία is otherwise not used with the meaning of “(domain of) tyrannical rule” (1:13*); in 1:16* and 2:10* it signifies the cosmic powers and principalities. The word ἀπολύτρωσις (redemption) used in the sense of “the forgiveness of sins” (ἄφεσις τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν) is part of the theological language of the primitive Christian community. This can be seen in the sentences of confessional type in Rom 3:24f*; 1 Cor 1:30* as well as Eph 1:7*, 14*; 4:30*.

² Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “Qumran and the Interpolated Paragraph in 2 Cor 6:14–7:1*,” *CBQ* 23 (1961): 271–80.

* ¹⁶ for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.

[Colossians 1:16 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹⁰ and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority.

[Colossians 2:10 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ²⁴ they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

²⁵ whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed;

[Romans 3:24–25 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ³⁰ He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

[1 Corinthians 1:30 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace

[Ephesians 1:7 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory.

[Ephesians 1:14 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.

[Ephesians 4:30 \(NRSV\)](#)

The reasons for the summons to give thanks to the Father are given in the participial phrase τῷ ἰκανώσαντιύμας (1:12* “who has authorized you”) and in the relative sentence ὃς ἐρρύσατο (1:13* “he [who] has delivered”). The reference to the redemption wrought by Christ (1:14*) makes the transition to the Christological statements which are more broadly developed in the hymn. Vss 12–14* thus are placed before the Christ-hymn as a sort of introtit which introduces the solemn hymn sung by the community.³

■ **12*** The sound of joy ought to open the singing of this hymn—that is, the words μετὰ χαρᾶς (“with joy”) are not to be drawn into the previous sentence, but are to be connected to the εὐχαριστοῦντες (“give thanks”). Just as prayers are said with joy (cf. Phil 1:4*), the praise of the community should be with jubilation: “rejoice with unutterable joy” (ἀγαλλιᾶσθε χαρᾷ ἀνεκκλήτῳ 1 Pt 1:8*, cf. 4:13*). As a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22*), “joy” (χαρά) fills the life of the community and expresses itself in the “rejoicing” (ἀγαλλίασις) by which God is thanked for keeping his promises and inaugurating salvation (Acts 2:46*). This thankful praise to God is borne along by eschatological joy: “Rejoice always, pray constantly, *give thanks* in all circumstances” (Πάντοτε χαίρετε, ἀδιαλείπτως προσεύχεσθε, ἐν παντὶ εὐχαριστεῖτε 1 Thess 5:16–18*); “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice ... in everything by prayer and

³ Cf. Eduard Norden, *Agnostos Theos* (Leipzig: 1913 = Darmstadt: ⁴1956), 250–54; Ernst Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes*, tr. W. J. Montague, SBT 41 (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, 1964), 152f; Günther Bornkamm, *Aufsätze* 2, 196f; Eduard Lohse, “Christologie und Ethik,” 165. Cf. also below, p. 40, n. 63.

* ⁴ constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you,

Philippians 1:4 (NRSV)

* ⁸ Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy,

1 Peter 1:8 (NRSV)

* ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.

1 Peter 4:13 (NRSV)

* ²² By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,

Galatians 5:22 (NRSV)

* ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts,

Acts 2:46 (NRSV)

* ¹⁶ Rejoice always,

thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (χαίρετε ἐν κυρίῳ πάντοτε· πάλιν ἔρω, χαίρετε ... ἐν παντὶ τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ δεήσει μετὰ εὐχαριστίας τὰ αἰτήματα ὑμῶν γνωρίζεσθω πρὸς τὸν θεόν Phil 4:4–6*).⁴

The words “with joy give thanks” (μετὰ χαρᾶς εὐχαριστοῦντες)⁵ are directed to the whole community and therefore cannot be viewed as a connecting link to the prayer of thanksgiving, which opens the letter with the apostle’s thanks to God for the good condition of the community.⁶ Paul never closes the intercessions in his letters with thanksgiving or with a summons to it.⁷ It is not impossible to construct a connection between the apostle’s prayer and the summons “with joy give thanks” (μετὰ χαρᾶς εὐχαριστοῦντες) by supplying the intermediary thought that the good condition of the community had necessarily to be expressed in a prayer of thanksgiving;⁸ after all, there is no longer any mention of the condition of the community. Rather, the community is asked to receive the word and to offer a hymn of praise to God the Father for his eschatological act of salvation, which he has rendered to them and to all the world.⁹

¹⁷ pray without ceasing,

¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 (NRSV)

* ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Philippians 4:4–6 (NRSV)

⁴ Cf. also Phil 1:3f* “I give thanks ... making prayer with joy” (εὐχαριστῶ ... μετὰ χαρᾶς τὴν δέησιν ποιούμενος).

⁵ The insertions of καὶ (and) after μετὰ χαρᾶς (“with joy”) and of ἅμα (at the same time) after εὐχαριστοῦντες (“give thanks”) in the mss p⁴⁶ and B are secondary textual expansions. Cf. Blass-Debrunner, sec. 425.2.

⁶ The secondary reading ἡμᾶς (us) in A C **A** D G pm also would not achieve a connection. Cf. below p. 35, n. 19.

⁷ Correctly observed by Lohmeyer, ad loc.

⁸ Thus Dibelius-Greeven, ad loc., in that they explain that Paul understood the prayer of thanksgiving as “infused prayer,” *oratio infusa*.

⁹ Cf. James M. Robinson, “Die Hodajot-Formel in Gebet und Hymnus des Frühchristentums” in *Apophoreta: Festschrift für Ernst Haenchen*, BZNW 30 (Berlin: 1964), 194–235. Also, Fritzlothar Mand,

The verb εὐχαριστεῖν (to give thanks) does not appear often in the LXX, and does so only in books which lack a Hebrew original.¹⁰ In the Psalms the summons to thanksgiving is given by the hiphil form of יָדָה (to know), and this form is usually translated in the LXX as ἐξομολογεῖσθαι (to confess, to praise) as in the LXX Ps 135:1*, 2*, 3*, 26*; 137:1*, 2*, 4*; etc. The noun form יְדוּת becomes ἐξομολόγησις (confession, praise) as in LXX Josh 7:19*; Ps 41:4*; 92:4*; 95:6*; etc. Later, in the linguistic usage of Hellenistic Judaism, ἐξομολογεῖσθαι

“Die Eigenständigkeit der Danklieder des Psalters als Bekenntnislieder,” ZAW 70 (1958): 185–99; Günther Bornkamm, “Lobpreis Bekenntnis und Opfer,” in *Apophoreta*, 46–63.

¹⁰ E.g., Jdth 8:25*; Wisd Sol 18:2*; 2 Macc 1:11*; 10:7a*; 12:31*; 3 Macc 7:16*.

* ¹ O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

[Psalm 136:1 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ² O give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever.

[Psalm 136:2 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ³ O give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever;

[Psalm 136:3 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ²⁶ O give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever.

[Psalm 136:26 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹ Of David. I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise;

[Psalm 138:1 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ² I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything.

[Psalm 138:2 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ⁴ All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth.

[Psalm 138:4 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹⁹ Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel and make confession to him. Tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me.”

[Joshua 7:19 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ³ My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, “Where is your God?”

The Hodayoth, hymns of praise of the Qumran community, begin with a stereotyped and frequently used opening “I thank you, O Lord, for...” (אודכה אדוני כִּי). Thus 1 QH II, 20 continues “for you have placed my soul in the bundle of the living” and v 31 has “for you have (fastened) your eye upon me.” Also, 1 QH III, 19 has “for you have redeemed my soul from the Pit.” The one praying speaks in the first person singular, addresses God as his Lord, and then bases his laudatory prayer of thanks by making reference to God’s action. If these introductory phrases are translated into Greek, they become εὐχαριστῶ (ἐξομολογοῦμαι) σοι, κύριε, ὅτι.¹² Of course the whole community is able to join in this praise; thus there is the first person plural “we praise your name” (1 Q 34, 3, 1, 6 and also cf. 1 QS I, 24; CD XX, 28). In the place of the כִּי-ὅτι (*because...*) clauses, a relative clause (אֲשֶׁר-ὅς) can also give the reason for the thanksgiving: “let us give thanks to the Lord our God *who* is putting us to the test as he did our forefathers” (εὐχαριστήσωμεν κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν, ὅτι πειράζειήμᾶς κατὰ καὶ τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν Jdth 8:25*).

Psalm 42:3 (NRSV)

*⁴ More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters, more majestic than the waves of the sea, majestic on high is the Lord!

Psalm 93:4 (NRSV)

*⁶ Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

Psalm 96:6 (NRSV)

¹¹ Cf. Robinson, “Hodayot-Formel,” 198f. The songs which the Therapeutae sing are called “songs of thanksgiving” (οἱ εὐχαριστήριοι ὕμνοι) in Philo, *Vit. Cont.* 87; cf. also *Ebr.* 94 and 105.

[Trans.] translator of this volume of Hermeneia

1 QH Hodayot, the Psalms of Thanksgiving

¹² Cf. Robinson, “Hodayot-Formel,” 208.

1 QS Serek hay-yahad, the Rule of the Community

CD The Cairo Genizah Damascus Document

*²⁵ In spite of everything let us give thanks to the Lord our God, who is putting us to the test as he did our ancestors.

The Christian community expresses its praise of God in formulations which were shaped by Judaism. Thus the hymn of the twenty-four elders in the book of Revelation opens with these words, “We give thanks to you, Lord God almighty, who is and who was, that you have taken your great power and begun to reign” (εὐχαριστοῦμέν σοι, κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν, ὅτι εἴληφας τὴν δύναμίν σου τὴν μεγάλην καὶ ἐβασίλευσας Rev 11:17*). In the eucharistic prayers of the Didache the form is “we give thanks to you, O Holy Father” (εὐχαριστοῦμέν σοι, πάτερ ἅγιε 10:2*), and “above all we give thanks to you because you are mighty” (πρὸ πάντων εὐχαριστοῦμέν σοι, ὅτι δυνατὸς εἶ 10:4*). Unlike the form of the Hodayoth of the Qumran community, in these Christian texts it is not an individual “I,” but rather the “we” of the community which is calling on God the Father. Beyond this, however, the praise and thanks given to God are rendered in the same words as in Jewish prayers.¹³

The same form of a summons to praise¹⁴ which was taken over from Judaism is also the basis for the words “with joy give thanks to the father” (μετὰ χαρὰς εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρί).¹⁵ The Father¹⁶ is praised because he has effected salvation and redemption in Christ—as the participial

Judith 8:25 (NRSV)

* ¹⁷ singing, “We give you thanks, Lord God Almighty, who are and who were, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign.

Revelation 11:17 (NRSV)

* ² He held a little scroll open in his hand. Setting his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land,

Revelation 10:2 (NRSV)

* ⁴ And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down.”

Revelation 10:4 (NRSV)

¹³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 210f. Further examples are cited there; one of these may be quoted in full: *Const. Ap.* 8, 38, 1, “We give thanks to you for all things, Master and Ruler of All, that you have not taken away your mercies” (εὐχαριστοῦμέν σοι περὶ πάντων, δέσποταπαντοκράτωρ, ὅτι οὐκ ἐγκατέλιπες τὰ ἐλέη σου) [adapted from ANF 7, 475].

¹⁴ Cf. Theodoret, *ad loc.*, who explains the verb εὐχαριστεῖν by means of ὑμνεῖν (to sing hymns): “we sing hymns (of thanks) to the benevolent Master that he has made us, who are unworthy, to share the light of the holy ones” [Trans.] (ὑμνοῦμεν δὲ τὸν φιλόανθρωπον δεσπότην, ὅτι ἡμᾶς ἀναξίους ὄντας κοινωνοὺς ἀπέφηνε τοῦ τῶν ἁγίων φωτός).

¹⁵ Cf. Robinson, “Hodayot-Formel,” 230–33.

¹⁶ The texts **Ⲙ** * (G) 69 it vg^{el} sy^p insert θεῶ (to God) before πατρί (“to the Father”); and 104 pm offer the reading τῷ θεῶ καὶ πατρί (to God and to the Father).

phrase τῷ ἱκανώσαντι ὑμᾶς (1:12* “who has authorized you”) and the relative clause ὃς ἐρρύσατο (1:13* “who has delivered us”) show by way of an additional explanation.¹⁷ Even though there is one instance in the Hodayoth where the author of the prayer says that his father does not know him and his mother abandoned him to God, and continues: “You are a father to all (the sons) of your truth” (1 QH IX, 35), nevertheless no other passage of the writings of the Qumran community calls God “Father.” In the introductory words of the Hymns of Thanksgiving he is always called “Lord.” The Christian community, however, prays to God as the Father.¹⁸ As Father of Jesus Christ (1:3*), he is our Father (1:2*), to whom “thanksgiving” (εὐχαριστία) is given through the Kyrios Jesus Christ (3:17*). The use of the aorist participle in the Greek τῷ ἱκανώσαντι (“who has authorized”) points to a definite act of God. The community is reminded that he has authorized “you to participate in the lot of the holy ones in light” (εἰς τὴν μερίδα τοῦ κλήρου τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ φωτί).¹⁹

The Greek nouns “part” and “lot” (μερίς – κλήρος) are close to each other in meaning and are often used together in the Old Testament. Thus, μερίς (“share,” “part”) is usually the translation of קֶלֶחַ, sometimes also for הֶלֶחַ. Also κλήρος (“lot”) can stand for הֶלֶחַ, but as a rule it is the translation for לְרֵג, which is never translated as μερίς. The tribe of Levi did not receive a

¹⁷ Cf. Nils A. Dahl, “Anamnesis,” *ST* 1 (1947): 86f, who certainly connects the concept “to give thanks” (εὐχαριστεῖν) too quickly with the celebration of the Eucharist.

¹⁸ The words “the Father” appear without apposition in phrases which have received their stamp in the liturgy, e.g., Gal 4:6*; Rom 8:15*; Phil 2:11*, as well as in creedal sentences, e.g., 1 Cor 8:6*; Rom 6:4*.

* ³ In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

[Colossians 1:3 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ² To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

[Colossians 1:2 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

[Colossians 3:17 \(NRSV\)](#)

¹⁹ The variant ἡμᾶς (us) in A C **A** D G pm is an assimilation to the first person plural of the confessional style preserved in vss 13* and 14*. The mss. D G 33 pe it alter ἱκανώσαντι (“qualified”) to read καλέσαντι (called), and B has both καλέσαντι καὶ ἱκανώσαντι. The verb ἱκανοῦν appears again in the NT only in 2 Cor 3:6*, concerning the qualification of the apostle for his ministry. For ἱκανός (qualified, worthy) cf. 1 Cor 15:9* and 2 Cor 3:5*. In the LXX only the passive from ἱκανοῦσθαι “to be made worthy” appears, as indeed outside the NT the passive is generally used. Cf. Bauer, *s.v.*

* ⁹ Therefore Levi has no allotment or inheritance with his kindred; the Lord is his inheritance, as the Lord your God promised him.)

[Deuteronomy 10:9 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹² And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you together with your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, and the Levites who reside in your towns (since they have no allotment or inheritance with you).

[Deuteronomy 12:12 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ²⁷ As for the Levites resident in your towns, do not neglect them, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you.

[Deuteronomy 14:27 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ²⁹ the Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake.

[Deuteronomy 14:29 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹ This entire commandment that I command you today you must diligently observe, so that you may live and increase, and go in and occupy the land that the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors.

[Deuteronomy 8:1 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ⁹ the Lord's own portion was his people, Jacob his allotted share.

[Deuteronomy 32:9 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ⁹ The inheritance of the tribe of Simeon formed part of the territory of Judah; because the portion of the tribe of Judah was too large for them, the tribe of Simeon obtained an inheritance within their inheritance.

[Joshua 19:9 \(NRSV\)](#)

²⁰ For the connection between “part” and “lot” (μερίς – κληρος) cf. further LXX Gen 31:14*; Num 18:20*; and also Acts 8:21* “you have neither part nor lot” (οὐκ ἔστιν σοι μερίς οὐδὲ κληρος). Further examples are in Werner Foerster, *TDNT* 3, 759–61.

* ⁶ Among the smooth stones of the valley is your portion; they, they, are your lot; to them you have poured out a drink offering, you have brought a grain offering. Shall I be appeased for these things?

[Isaiah 57:6 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ²⁵ This is your lot, the portion I have measured out to you, says the Lord, because you have forgotten me and trusted in lies.

[Jeremiah 13:25 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ⁵ The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.

[Psalm 16:5 \(NRSV\)](#)

²¹ Cf. Lohse, "Christologie und Ethik," 165.

²² Also 1 QM I, 5; IV, 2; XIII, 2.

1 QM Milḥamah, the War of the Children of Light against the Children of Darkness

²³ Also 1 QM XIII, 5; XV, 1; XVII, 7.

²⁴ Cf. 1 QM III, 5; VI, 6; X, 10; XVI, 1; etc. Cf. above, p. 8, n. 17.

The “holy ones” (ἅγιοι) are the angels, and the Christian community has been authorized to participate in their “portion of the lot” (μερὶς τοῦ κληῖρου)—this is unmistakably clear from the parallel statements from the Qumran community.²⁷ So the host of those chosen by God is joined to the angels and they are likewise called “Holy Ones.” As God’s possession, they are holy ones (cf. 1:2* “saints”) who will receive the heavenly inheritance. In contrast to the darkness which rules the godless world, the light is truth, redemption, salvation and the nearness of God. Light (φῶς) thus characterizes the domain in which God has placed his own by his action.²⁸ The terms “part” and “lot” are joined together in the phrase “to participate in the lot” and this expresses the same thought as was already indicated by the reference to the content of “hope” which is stored up in heaven for the saints (1:5*). Here again the concept does not have temporal—eschatological connotations, but rather a spatial orientation.²⁹ By his unfathomable mercy, God has now *already* made his own capable of participating in the heavenly inheritance with the holy ones, and also capable of conducting themselves in the light.³⁰

²⁵ Cf. Martin Noth, “The Holy Ones of the Most High” in *The Laws of the Pentateuch*, tr. D. R. Ap-Thomas (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 215–28; Christianus Henricus Wilhelmus Brekelmans, “The Saints of the most High and their Kingdom,” *Oudtestamentische Studiën* 14 (1965): 305–29; Robert Hanhart, “Die Heiligen des Höchsten,” *Hebräische Wortforschung, Festschrift für W. Baumgartner*, Supplement to VT 16 (Leiden: 1967), 90–101.

²⁶ Cf. also Wisd Sol 5:5*. The godless, full of remorse, ask concerning the righteous one, “Why has he the been numbered among the sons of God? And why is his lot among the holy ones?” (πῶς κατελογίσθη ἐν υἱοῖς θεοῦ καὶ ἐν ἁγίοις ὁ κληῖρος αὐτοῦ ἐστίν). For the rabbinic word usage, cf. Billerbeck 3, 625.

²⁷ Cf. also Eph 1:18*; Acts 20:32*; 26:18*; and also Ernst Käsemann, *Leib und Leib Christi: Eine Untersuchung zur paulinischen Begrifflichkeit*, BHTh 9 (Tübingen: 1933), 142, 147; as well as Lohmeyer, ad loc.

²⁸ The words “in the light” (ἐν τῷ φωτί) do not belong only to the preceding word, but rather to the whole phrase.

* ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel

Colossians 1:5 (NRSV)

²⁹ Cf. Abbott, Dibelius-Greeven, ad loc.

³⁰ The word “light” (φῶς) does not here mean the “transcendent realm of salvation where God dwells” (thus Conzelmann, ad loc.), but simply the domain into which God has transferred the saints and which, therefore, determines their conduct of life here and now. Cf. the parallels in the texts of Qumran.

■ **13*** Sharing the inheritance of the holy ones in light, however, means that God has delivered us from the domain of the power of darkness and placed us in the domain of the rule of his beloved Son. v 13*, composed of two corresponding lines, adds a substantiating explanation to v 12*. It switches from the second person plural used in the summons of v 12* to the first person plural. In a credal statement the community pronounces that it has been freed by God's redeeming act.³¹ The Greek *ῥύεσθαι* (to save, rescue, deliver) is usually the LXX translation of the Hebrew hiphil of *לָצַד*, and it describes God's helping and saving intervention.³² He delivered his people from the hands of the Egyptians (Exod 14:30*; Judg 6:9*, 13*), from bondage (Exod 6:6*), and from the hands of all its foes (Judg 8:34*). This deliverance occurs according to his great mercy (Neh 9:28*), according to his mercy (LXX Ps 32:18f*), for his name's sake (LXX

³¹ The subject of the relative clause (ὅς) is God. This clearly distinguishes vss 13f* from the relative clauses of vss 15* and 18*, in which Christ is the subject of the relative clauses.

³² Cf. Wilhelm Kasch, *TDNT* 6, 998–1003.

* ³⁰ Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.

[Exodus 14:30 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ⁹ and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians, and from the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you, and gave you their land;

[Judges 6:9 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹³ Gideon answered him, "But sir, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has cast us off, and given us into the hand of Midian."

[Judges 6:13 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ⁶ Say therefore to the Israelites, 'I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.

[Exodus 6:6 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ³⁴ The Israelites did not remember the Lord their God, who had rescued them from the hand of all their enemies on every side;

[Judges 8:34 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ²⁸ But after they had rest, they again did evil before you, and you abandoned them to the hands of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them; yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you rescued them according to your mercies.

The Christian community prays to God “deliver us from evil” (Mt 6:13* ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ) and awaits its Lord “who delivers us from the wrath to come” (τὸν ῥυόμενον ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ὀργῆς τῆς ἐρχομένης 1 Thess 1:10*). The anxious question “who will deliver me from this

[Nehemiah 9:28 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹⁸ Truly the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love,
¹⁹ to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.

[Psalm 33:18–19 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ⁹ Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and forgive our sins, for your name’s sake.

[Psalm 79:9 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ⁷ Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul;

[2 Samuel 12:7 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹ A Shiggaion of David, which he sang to the Lord concerning Cush, a Benjaminite. O Lord my God, in you I take refuge; save me from all my pursuers, and deliver me,

[Psalm 7:1 \(NRSV\)](#)

1 QpHab Peshar Habakkuk, the Commentary on Habakkuk

* ¹³ And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.

[Matthew 6:13 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

[1 Thessalonians 1:10 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

Romans 7:24 (NRSV)

³³ Cf. LXX 4 Kg. 20:13*; Ps 113:2*; 135:8f*; Isa 39:2*; Jer 28(51): 28*; etc.

³⁴ The connection ממשלת חושך = ἐξουσία τοῦ σκότους (dominion of darkness) appears in 1 QH XII, 6; it is not, however, used there in a figurative sense, for the one praying declares that he wishes to praise God “at the beginning of the dominion of darkness,” i.e., in the evening.

³⁵ For Belial and darkness, cf. 1 QS II, 5; 1 QM I, 1, 5, 11; IV, 2; XIII, 2; etc. For the Holy Ones and light, cf. 1 QS I, 9; II, 16; XI, 7f; 1 QH XI, 11f; etc.

³⁶ Cf. Hans Conzelmann, *TWNT* 7, 424–46, esp. 443.

³⁷ Lk 22:53* also uses the words “the power of darkness” (ἐξουσία τοῦ σκότους). At his arrest Jesus says to those taking him “But this is your hour, and the power of darkness” (αὕτη ἐστὶν ὑμῶν ἡ ὥρα καὶ ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ σκότους).

³⁸ Cf. 2 Cor 6:14* “What fellowship has light with darkness?” (τίς κοινωνία φωτὶ πρὸς σκότος); 1 Pt 2:9* “... who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (τοῦ ἐκ σκότους ὑμᾶς καλέσαντος εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν αὐτοῦ φῶς); Eph 5:8* “... for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord” (ἦτε γὰρ ποτε σκότος, νῦν δὲ φῶς ἐν κυρίῳ); and 1 Clem 59:2 “through whom (i.e., Christ) he called us from darkness into light” (δι’ οὗ ἐκάλεσεν ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ σκότους εἰς φῶς). Concerning this subject, cf. below p. 38, n. 49.

Much like a mighty king who is able to remove whole peoples from their ancestral homes and to transplant them to another realm,³⁹ so God is described as taking the community from the power of darkness⁴⁰ and transferring it “to the domain of the rule of his beloved Son” (εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ).⁴¹ The word βασιλεία (rule, domain of rule), the counterpart of the previous word ἐξουσία (power), corresponds to the Hebrew מְלָכּוּת. According to 1 QM VI, 6, kindly rule will belong to the God of Israel, who is terrible in the glory of his rule (מְלָכּוּת, 1 QM XII 7). The “covenant of kingly rule over his people” (ברית מלכות עמו) is given to the scion of David according to divine promise for everlasting generations (4 Q Patriarchal Blessings, 4). In the age of salvation, Israel will receive rule and exercise it (1 Q Sb V, 21; 1 QM XIX, 8). The eschatological concept “the kingdom of heaven” (מְלָכּוּת הַשָּׁמַיִם) is taken up in the preaching of Jesus and given unprecedented urgency: God’s rule is coming, it is at hand (Mk 1:15*, par.). Wherever Paul mentions the “rule of God” (βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ) in his letters, the futuristic meaning of the concept is presupposed, just as throughout primitive Christian proclamation. The future kingdom of God and the inheriting of the “kingdom” are repeatedly mentioned,⁴² but only in 1 Cor 15:23–28* does Paul speak of Christ’s kingly rule. Christ, who is

³⁹ Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 9, 235, who uses the same Greek verb. The Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser took captive the populace of areas of Palestine which he had conquered and “transported them into his own kingdom” (μετέστεσεν εἰς τὴν αὐτοῦ βασιλείαν).

⁴⁰ Cf. Chrysostom, ad loc., who explains “from the power” (τῆς ἐξουσίας) by the words “from the tyranny” (τῆς τυραννίδος).

⁴¹ The Greek verb μεθιστάναι signifies the transferring from one place to another, cf. 1 Cor 13:2* “to remove mountains” (ὄρη μεθιστάναι) and cf. also Acts 19:26*. It may also mean transferring in the sense of removing (Lk 16:4*; Acts 13:22*). But it does not mean a “lifting up” or a “being carried off” (*contra* Lohmeyer, ad loc., who has “entrücken”).

Q Qumran documents:

* ¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

[Mark 1:15 \(NRSV\)](#)

par. parallel.

⁴² Cf. 1 Thess 2:12*; Gal 5:21*; 1 Cor 6:9f*; 15:50*; 2 Thess 1:5*; and also 1 Cor 4:20*; Rom 14:17*. In Col 4:11* “kingdom of God” (βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ) is used as a fixed formula, “fellow workers for the kingdom of God” (σύνεργοι εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ). Eph 5:5* mentions the “inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God” (κληρονομία ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ).

* ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

²⁴ Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power.

²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

²⁷ For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him.

²⁸ When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all.

[1 Corinthians 15:23–28 \(NRSV\)](#)

⁴³ The “rule” of Christ is “as it were, an already present, representative ‘forerunner’ of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ (rule of God) and is exercised by the exalted Christ.” Since according to apocalyptic ideas the messianic interregnum can only begin at the Parousia, “the βασιλεία of 1 Cor 15:24* cannot be identified with it,” Hans-Alwin Wilcke, *Das Problem eines messianischen Zwischenreiches bei Paulus*, AThANT 51 (Zürich: 1967), 99 [Trans.].

* ¹² when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

[Colossians 2:12 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹ So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth,

[Colossians 3:1–2 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹¹ In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

[Colossians 3:11 \(NRSV\)](#)

The hebraizing Greek construction ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ (“the son of his loved,” i.e. “his beloved son”)⁴⁴ corresponds to the usual expression ὁ υἱὸς ὁ ἀγαπητός (Mk 1:11*, par; 9:7*, par; 12:6*, par.) or ἠγαπημένος (Eph 1:6* “the Beloved”).⁴⁵ As the heavenly voice in the baptismal story proclaims, God has revealed Christ as his beloved Son (Mk 1:11*, par). The resurrected Christ is appointed Son of God (Rom 1:4*) and has been enthroned at God’s right hand (Rom 8:34*; Col 3:1*; Acts 2:34f*; etc.). The aorist forms ἐρρύσατο (delivered) and μετέστησεν

⁴⁴This is clearly a Semiticism (cf. Blass-Debrunner, sec. 165) and not a poetic Attic manner of expression which “had come down into the market place” (thus Dibelius-Greeven, ad loc.; from J.H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, ³1919], 74).

* ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

[Mark 1:11 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ⁷ And he stood up and went to his home.

[Matthew 9:7 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ⁶ He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’

[Mark 12:6 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

[Ephesians 1:6 \(NRSV\)](#)

⁴⁵The beloved Son is the only son, cf. Gen 22:2*. Further examples are cited by Lohmeyer, ad loc. Eduard Schweizer, “Dying and Rising with Christ,” *NTS* 14 (1967–68): 5, n. 3, considers the possibility that the expression “the beloved son” could have been taken “from a first line of the hymn quoted in 1:15–20*”; “for ... it occurs rather frequently in Egyptian texts ... together with the concept of the image of God (v. 15*).” Cf. below, p. 41, n. 64.

* ⁴ and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,

[Romans 1:4 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

[Romans 8:34 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹ So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

[Colossians 3:1 \(NRSV\)](#)

(transferred) point to baptism as the event through which the change from one dominion to another has taken place, in that we have been wrested from the power of darkness and placed in the “kingdom” of the beloved Son of God.⁴⁶ This does not mean that those baptized have been taken up into a transcendent realm of light.⁴⁷ There is no mention of an enthusiastic anticipation of the consummation. Rather, just as darkness designates those who are lost, light characterizes the rule of Christ,⁴⁸ which here and now shapes the life and conduct of those who are baptized.⁴⁹

* ³⁴ For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand,

³⁵ until I make your enemies your footstool.” ’

Acts 2:34–35 (NRSV)

⁴⁶ Cf. Käsemann, *Essays*, 158–61; Bornkamm, *Aufsätze* 2, 190f; and Eduard Schweizer, *TWNT* 8, 370.

⁴⁷ *Contra* Lohmeyer, Conzelmann, ad loc.

⁴⁸ This meaning for the concepts of light and darkness is assured by the parallels from the Qumran texts. This should not be taken to mean that the author of Col had direct contact with the writings or the tradition of the Qumran community. Rather, certain concepts and ideas from the teaching of this community had been accepted in the Hellenistic synagogue—cf. the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs!— and in this way also became known to the Christian community. Cf. below, note 49 and Braun, *Qumran* 1, p 226.

⁴⁹ In Acts 26:18* almost the same words are used to formulate the commission given to Paul outside Damascus: to open the eyes of the Gentiles, “that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” (τοῦ ἐπιστρέψαι ἀποσκότους εἰς φῶς καὶ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ σατανᾶ ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν, τοῦ λαβεῖν αὐτοὺς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν καὶ κληρὸν ἐν τοῖς ἡγιασμένοις πίστει τῇ εἰς ἐμέ). This sentence elucidates the turning from darkness to light as a turning from “the power of Satan” (ἐξουσία τοῦ σατανᾶ) to God. Whoever has turned to him receives, as a member of the community of salvation, a share among the saints through faith in Christ. This means he receives forgiveness of sins. The use of the contrast between the concepts of light and darkness in connection with the conversion to the God of Israel is already known from the Hellenistic synagogue, as *Joseph and Asenath* shows in 8:9 (49:19–21) “Lord God of my father Israel, the Most High and mighty God who brings all things to life and calls *from the darkness to the light* and from error to truth and from death to life ...” (κύριε ὁ θεὸς τοῦ πατρὸς μου Ἰσραὴλ, ὁ ὕψιστος καὶ δυνατὸς θεός, ὁ ζωοποιήσας τὰ πάντα καὶ καλέσας ἀπὸ τοῦ σκότους εἰς τὸ φῶς καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς πλάνης εἰς τὴν ἀλήθειαν καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν). Again 15:12 (62:11–13) has “Blessed is the Lord your God who sent you *to deliver me from the darkness* and to bring me from the foundations of the abyss itself *into the light*” (εὐλογητὸς κύριος ὁ θεός σου, ὁ ἐξαποστείλας σε τοῦ ῥύσασθαί με ἐκ τοῦ σκότους καὶ ἀναγαγεῖν με ἀπὸ τῶν θεμελίων αὐτῆς τῆς ἀβύσσου εἰς τὸ φῶς). (Trans. adapted from E. W. Brooks, *Joseph and Asenath*, Translations of Early Documents, Series 2, Hellenistic-

■ **14*** The relative clause, “in whom we have” (ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν)⁵⁰ speaks of the new life which we have received in Christ. The word ἀπολύτρωσις (“redemption”),⁵¹ which was seldom used in Greek at this time,⁵² designates liberation from imprisonment and bondage.⁵³ In the New Testament the term is used with an eschatological sense when there is mention of the hope of the “redemption of our bodies” (ἀπολύτρωσις τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν Rom 8:23*), or of the “day of redemption” (Eph 4:30* ἡμέρα ἀπολυτρώσεως, cf. also Eph 1:14*). Most often, however, the “redemption” is recognized as having already taken place: Christ has become our “redemption” (1 Cor 1:30*), and “redemption” means nothing other than “forgiveness of sins” (ἄφεσις τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν Col 1:14*; Eph 1:7*).⁵⁴ Normally, however, Paul seldom speaks of the forgiveness of sins. He understands ἁμαρτία (sin) as a power which found entrance into the world through Adam’s deed (Rom 5:12*) and since then has exercised its tyranny over men. Its power, how-

Jewish Texts [London: SPCK, 1918].) Cf. also Christoph Burchard, *Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth*, *Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 8 (Tübingen: 1965), 102, n. 3.

⁵⁰ The ms. B reads ἔχομεν (we had) and thereby assimilates with the aorist in v 13*.

⁵¹ Cf. Friedrich Büchsel, *TDNT* 4, 351–56.

⁵² Examples for the use of ἀπολύτρωσις (redemption) begin to appear only from the second and first century B.C. onward, and in the LXX it is used only in Dan 4:34* for the “redemption” of Nebuchadnezzar from his insanity. Cf. Büchsel, *TDNT* 4, 351; and Bauer, s.v. For the subject matter, cf. also *Test Zeb* 9:8 “He shall redeem all the captivity of the sons of men from Beliar” (αὐτὸς λυτρώσεται πᾶσαν αἰχμαλωσίαν υἱῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐκ τοῦ Βελιάρ); *Test Joseph* 18:2 “And you shall be redeemed by the Lord from all evil” [Trans.] (ἀπὸ παντὸς κακοῦ λυτρωθήσεσθε διὰ κυρίου). The Qumran community understood itself to be “the people whom God redeemed” [Trans.] (עם פדות אל) 1 QM I, 12) or to be the “poor whom you have redeemed” (אביוני פדותכה) 1 QM IX, 9). Cf. also 1 QM XIV, 5, 10; XV, 1; and XVII, 6.

⁵³ Examples in Büchsel and Bauer, see preceding note.

* ²³ and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

Romans 8:23 (NRSV)

⁵⁴ There is here no connection with the practice of freeing a slave from captivity. Deissmann, *LAE*, p. 330, however, points to the freeing of slaves in antiquity. On this matter, cf. Werner Elert, “Redemptio ab hostibus,” *ThLZ* 72 (1947): 265–70.

* ¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—

Romans 5:12 (NRSV)

ever, was broken by Christ's cross (Rom 8:3*), for he was made to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21*). Where there is mention of the forgiveness of sins in the Pauline letters,⁵⁵ it is a matter of a common Christian expression.⁵⁶ Rom 3:24* is based on a Jewish-Christian creedal statement which Paul takes up in order to substantiate and develop his understanding of the "righteousness of God" (δικαιοσύνηθεοῦ).⁵⁷ God has accomplished "redemption" in Christ. The "passing over former sins" (πάρεσις τῶν προγεγονότων ἀμαρτημάτων Rom 3:25*)⁵⁸ is guaranteed by the expiatory death of Christ. Reference to his vicarious death is also made in Eph 1:7*, "in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses" (ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ,

*³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,

Romans 8:3 (NRSV)

*²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NRSV)

⁵⁵ Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *TDNT* 1, 511–12.

⁵⁶ Primitive Christian usage on this subject took up the language of the OT and of Judaism. There are many passages in the writings of the Qumran community which mention the forgiveness of sins (,סלס) or the atonement (כפר). Cf. 1 QS I, 23–26; II, 8; III, 6–12; IX, 4; XI, 14; CD II, 4f; III, 18; IV, 9f; XIV, 19; 1 QH IV, 37; VII, 35; IX, 13, 34; X, 21; XI, 9, 31; XIV, 24; XVI, 16; XVII, 12, 15, 18; etc. For rabbinic evidence see Billerbeck 1, 113f and 421.

*²⁴ they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

Romans 3:24 (NRSV)

⁵⁷ Cf. Ernst Käsemann, "Zum Verständnis von Römer 3, 24–26" in *Aufsätze* 1, 96–100; also Eduard Lohse, *Märtyrer und Gottesknecht: Untersuchungen zur urchristlichen Verkündigung vom Sühnetod Jesu Christi*, FRLANT 46 (Göttingen: 1955), 149–54.

*²⁵ whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed;

Romans 3:25 (NRSV)

⁵⁸ The word πάρεσις (passing over) does not mean something like "overlooking," but has the same sense as ἄφεσις, i.e., forgiveness, Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *TDNT* 1, 511.

τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν παραπτωμάτων).⁵⁹ Yet the forgiveness of sins is received in baptism. In the baptism of John was expectation of the future “forgiveness of sins” (ἄφεσις ἁμαρτιῶν) on the day of judgment which was drawing near (Mk 1:4*; par). In primitive Christian baptismal practice, however, the “forgiveness of sins” was granted directly (Acts 2:38*).⁶⁰ Thus, in the book of Acts the forgiveness of sins can be cited repeatedly as the content of salvation.⁶¹ By defining “redemption” as “forgiveness of sins,” in agreement with the common Christian understanding, the summons to praise clearly refers to baptism.⁶² This, in turn, indicates in what sense the following hymn is to be understood.⁶³ All speculations about knowledge of higher worlds are con-

⁵⁹ Several late witnesses insert the words “through his blood” (διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ), from Eph 1:7*, in Col 1:14* (35 1912 al vg^{el} sy^h).

* ⁴ John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Mark 1:4 (NRSV)

* ³⁸ Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:38 (NRSV)

⁶⁰ The phrases of a creedal type in Rev 1:5* also refer to baptism: “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood” (τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ). Cf. Eduard Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, NTD 11 (Göttingen: ²1966), 16; and Peter von der Osten-Sacken, “Christologie, Homologie, Taufe—Ein Beitrag zu Ape Joh 1:5f*,” *ZNW* 58 (1967): 255–66.

⁶¹ E.g., Acts 5:31*; 10:43*; 13:38*; 26:18*; also Mt 26:28*; Lk 1:77*; 24:47*; Heb 9:22*; 10:18*.

⁶² There is certainly no allusion to the Jewish Day of Atonement as Lohmeyer, 43–46; 52f, would like to find. Cf. below pp. 45f. This thought plays an important role in the epistle to the Hebrews, but not in this passage, where the concepts “redemption” and “forgiveness of sins” were taken from the primitive Christian tradition.

⁶³ Käsemann, *Essays*, 158–67, prefers to see the whole context, vss 12–20*, as a baptismal liturgy. Karl-Gottfried Eckart, “Exegetische Beobachtungen zu Kol. 1:9–20*,” *Theologia Viatorum* 7 (1959–60): 87–106, also wishes to incorporate vss 9–11* into the baptismal liturgy, which then consists of three parts: the exhortation (1:9–11*), the responsory which is the adjunct confession of the one baptized (1:13f*), and the Christ-hymn (1:15–20*). It is, however, difficult to speak of a liturgy. Vss 9–12* express the intercession of the apostle. Vss 12–14* deal with the event of baptism—and also take up traditional phrases—but they do not form any continuous liturgical context. Cf. also Leonhard Fendt, *ThLZ* 76 (1951): 532; Dibelius-Greeven, 11; Bornkamm, *Aufsätze* 2, 196, n. 19a; Eduard Schweizer, *Neotestamentica: deutsche und englische Aufsätze 1951–1963; German and English Essays 1951–1963* (Zürich: 1963), 293, n. 1; Reinhard Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen*

fronted by the assertion that nothing can surpass nor supplement the forgiveness of sins. This is so because the sovereign rule of Christ is present where there is forgiveness of sins; and with forgiveness of sins everything, life and blessings everlasting, has in fact been granted.

The Christ-hymn:

1:15–20*

Christenheit: Untersuchungen zu Form, Sprache und Stil der frühchristlichen Hymnen, Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments 5 (Göttingen: 1967), 78–82. Bornkamm notes correctly that “One must be satisfied with the statement that the content of 1:12–14* is the event of baptism and that 1:15–20* is allied with it.” Although Käsemann asserts “The writer of the letter evidently found vv 13–14* already connected with the hymn” (*Essays*, altered by *trans.* p. 153), it is quite uncertain whether this connection already existed in the oral tradition. For there is a difference in the concepts and terminology used by the two passages, and also a change in style (v 13* has a relative clause in the style of a confession; vss 15–20* lack the word “we” introducing the community as speaking, and the “you” by which it is addressed). It is more probable that the author of the letter joined various pieces of tradition together and, by means of the entire context he produced, indicated how the Christ-hymn ought to be understood.

* ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;

¹⁶ for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.

¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.

¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

²⁰ and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Colossians 1:15–20 (NRSV)

The quotation of a hymnic unit begins in v 15* and extends to v 20*.⁶⁴ By inserting the hymn into the

*¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;

Colossians 1:15 (NRSV)

*²⁰ and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Colossians 1:20 (NRSV)

⁶⁴ Since the quotation begins with a relative clause, at least one brief line must have preceded this clause in the original hymn. It could have been something like “blessed be the Son of God” etc. (cf. above p. 38, n. 45). Hans-Jakob Gabathuler has provided a critical report of the research on the exegesis of 1:15–20* in his *Jesus Christus, Haupt der Kirche—Haupt der Welt: Der Christushymnus Colosser 1:15–20* in der theologischen Forschung der letzten 130 Jahre*, *ATHANT* 45 (Zürich: 1965). In addition to the commentaries, the following investigations of the hymn must be especially noted:

Eduard E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos, Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte religiöser Rede* (Leipzig: 1913= Darmstadt: ⁴1956), 250–54.

Günther Harder, *Paulus und das Gebet*, *Neutestamentliche Forschung* 10 (Gütersloh: 1936), 46–51.

Max Adolf Wagenführer, *Die Bedeutung Christi für Welt und Kirche: Studien zum Kolosser—und Epheserbrief* (Leipzig: 1941).

Ernst Percy, *Probleme*, 68–78.

Charles Masson, “L’hymne christologique de l’épître aux Colossiens I, 15–20,” *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* NS 36 (1948): 138–42.

Ernst Käsemann, “A primitive Christian baptismal liturgy,” *Essays*, 149–68.

E. Unger, *Christus und der Kosmos: Exegetisch—religionsgeschichtliche Studie zu Kol 1, 15ff.* Unpub. Diss. (Vienna: 1953).

Lucien Cerfaux, *Le Christ dans la théologie de saint Paul*, *Lectio Divina* 6 (Paris: ² 1954), 298–301; = *Christus in der Paulinischen Theologie* (Düsseldorf: 1964), 245–47.

Christian Maurer, “Die Begründung der Herrschaft Christi über die Mächte nach Kolosser 1, 15–20,” *Wort und Dienst* NF 4 (1955): 79–93.

James M. Robinson, “A Formal Analysis of Colossians 1:15–20,” *JBL* 76 (1957): 270–87.

Eduard Lohse, “Image Dei bei Paulus” in *Libertas Christiana: Festschrift für F. Delekat*, Beiträge zur *EvTh* 26 (Munich: 1957) pp. 126–30 *idem*, “Christologie und Ethik,” 160–64.

letter's train of thought a certain tension arises regarding its present context. The previous vss 13–14* preserve the style of a confession (“us,” “we”); vss 15–20*, however, make no mention of the confessing community, but instead only demonstrate the world-wide validity and effect of the Christ-event. What follows is an explanation which interprets the hymn and applies it to the community with the words: “he has reconciled you” (1:21–23*). The reconciliation is thereby no longer understood in a cosmic context; rather it is related to the community which is addressed by the word of reconciliation.

Jacob Jervell, *Image Dei: Gen 1, 26f im Spätjudentum, in der Gnosis und in den paulinischen Briefen*, FRLANT 58 (Göttingen: 1960), 197–226.

Karl—Gottfried Eckart, “Exegetische Beobachtungen,” 87–106.

Ernst Bammel, “Versuch zu Col 1:15–20,” *ZNW* 52 (1961): 88–95.

Harald Hegermann, *Die Vorstellung vom Schöpfungs-mittler im hellenistischen Judentum und Urchristentum*. TU 82 (Berlin: 1961), 88–157.

Eduard Schweizer, “Die Kirche als Leib Christi in den paulinischen Antilegomena,” *ThLZ* 86 (1961): 241–56= *Neotestamentica*, 293–316. Eduard Schweizer, “The Church as the Missionary Body of Christ,” *NTS* 8 (1961–62): 1–11= *Neotestamentica*, 317–29.

P. Ellingsworth, “Colossians 1:15–20* and its Context” *ExpT* 73 (1961–62): 252f.

Gottfried Schille, *Frühchristliche Hymnen* (Berlin: 1962; ² 1965), 81f.

Johannes Schattenmann, *Studien zum neutestamentlichen Prosahymnus* (Munich: 1965), 16–18.

André Feuillet, *Le Christ sagesse de Dieu d'après les épîtres Pauliniennes*, Études bibliques (Paris: 1966), 163–273.

Nikolaus Kehl, *Der Christushymnus Kol 1, 12–20*, Stuttgarter Biblische Monographien 1 (Stuttgart: 1967).

Richard Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit: Untersuchungen zu Form, Sprache und Stil der frühchristlichen, Hymnen*, Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments 5 (Göttingen: 1967), 143–55.

K. Wengst, *Christologische Formeln und Lieder des Urchristentums*, Unpub, Diss. (Bonn: 1967), 163–74.

* ¹³ He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son,

¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:13–14 (NRSV)

* ²¹ And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,

Style and language identify vss 15–20* as a hymnic section which has been appropriated from the tradition. Christological statements about exaltation are introduced twice by a relative clause (ὅς ἐστὶν 1:15*, 18b*),⁶⁵ and each in turn is followed by a causal clause beginning with ὅτι (1:16*, 19*). Vss 17* and 18* respectively are joined to the preceding by a καὶ αὐτός (“and he...”), and v 20* is attached by καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ (“and through him”). The hymn is concluded by the pleonastic phrase, “making peace by the blood of his cross, through him, whether on earth or in the heavens” (εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ, δι’ αὐτοῦ εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς). The verses of the hymn contain an impressive number of terms which either do not appear at all elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, or are used otherwise with a different meaning. Verse 15* has “image of God” (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ) which is used again only in 2 Cor 4:4* as a Christological predicate in the formula-sentence: “who is the image of God” (ὅς ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ).⁶⁶ In the whole New Testament, ὁρατός (1:16* “visible”) appears only here, and while ἀόρατος (1:15f* “invisible”) appears a few times (Rom 1:20*; 1 Tim 1:17*; Heb 11:27*) it is

²² he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him—

²³ provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.

Colossians 1:21–23 (NRSV)

* ¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.

Colossians 1:18 (NRSV)

⁶⁵ For the use of relative clauses at the opening of a hymnic quote, cf. Phil 2:6*; 1 Tim 3:16*; 1 Pt 2:22*; Heb 1:3*.

* ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

Colossians 1:19 (NRSV)

* ¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Colossians 1:17 (NRSV)

* ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

2 Corinthians 4:4 (NRSV)

⁶⁶ 1 Cor 11:7* says of man that he is the “image and glory of God” (εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ).

* ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;

never used elsewhere as a contrast to ὀρατός (“visible”). The Pauline letters do not mention θρόνοι (“thrones”) elsewhere, and only Eph 1:21* uses κυριότης (1:16* “dominion”). The intransitive form συνεστηκέναι (1:17* “to be established”) is otherwise not used by Paul. In a Christological context Paul speaks of Christ as ἀπαρχή (1 Cor 15:20* “first fruits”), but never as ἀρχή (1:18* “beginning”).⁶⁷ The words πρωτεύειν (“to be the first”) and εἰρηνοποιεῖν (“to make peace”) are hapaxlegomena in the New Testament. The word κατοικεῖν (1:19* “to dwell”) reoccurs in Col 2:9*, but this verse refers back to the

¹⁶ for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.

Colossians 1:15–16 (NRSV)

* ²⁰ Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse;

Romans 1:20 (NRSV)

* ¹⁷ To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

1 Timothy 1:17 (NRSV)

* ²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, unafraid of the king’s anger; for he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible.

Hebrews 11:27 (NRSV)

* ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.

Ephesians 1:21 (NRSV)

* ²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.

1 Corinthians 15:20 (NRSV)

⁶⁷ The word ἀρχή with the meaning “beginning” appears in the *Corpus Paulinum* only in Phil 4:15* and 2 Thess 2:13*, but as a variant reading: ἀπαρχήν (B G 33 al f vg sy^h) or ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς (Ⲛ Ψ A D pm it sy^p). (Cf. the RSV footnote ad loc. [trans.]). With the meaning “principality” it appears in 1 Cor 15:24*; Rom 8:38*; Col 2:10*, 15*; Eph 1:21*; 3:10*; 6:12*. In Tit 3:1* the civil authorities are called ἀρχαί.

* ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,

Colossians 2:9 (NRSV)

hymn, and again in Eph 3:17*. Eph 2:16* contains the only other use of ἀποκαταλλάσσειν (“to reconcile”). The blood of Christ is mentioned by Paul only in connection with traditional primitive Christian phrases which have to do with the vicarious death of Christ,⁶⁸ and the combination αἷμα τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ (1:20* “blood of his cross”) is without parallel.

These observations exclude the possibility that the author of this letter could have composed these verses himself by using traditional phrases.⁶⁹ Rather, this is a quotation from a primitive Christian song which celebrates the unique dignity of the exalted Lord and which contains two strophes, each introduced by the Greek relative clause ὅς ἐστιν (“He [who] is ...” 1:15*, 18b*),⁷⁰ The first strophe states that all things were created in him, through him, and for him, so that the second strophe deals with reconciliation which is established as cosmic peace by the bearer of the divine fullness. Thus creation and reconciliation, cosmology and soteriology are dealt with in order to praise Christ as the Lord of the cosmos, who is the head of the body and whose reign encompasses all things.

It is clear, moreover, that the author of the letter did not incorporate the hymn without alterations; rather, he inserted short interpretive additions and thus accentuated it in certain ways. Above all, it is curious that at the end of the first, cosmologically oriented strophe, Christ is suddenly referred to as the

*¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

Ephesians 3:17 (NRSV)

*¹⁶ and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

Ephesians 2:16 (NRSV)

⁶⁸ Rom 3:25*; 1 Cor 10:16*; 11:25*, 27*; cf. also Eph 1:7*; 2:13*. Also, cf. Lohse, *Märtyrer und Gottesknecht*, 138–41.

⁶⁹ Thus Dibelius-Greeven, p. 10: “The situation has caused Paul to speak of things which otherwise... he only touches upon with allusions.” [Trans.] Also, Maurer, “Die Begründung der Herrschaft Christi,” 84; H. C. G. Moule, *Colossian Studies, Lessons in Faith and Holiness from St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1926), 58–62; Kümmel, *Introduction*, 242. Feuillet, *Le Christ sagesse*, 246–73, maintains that the author of Col took up a hymn which he had composed at an earlier date: “Col 1:1–15* may well be regarded as the summit of Pauline Christology” [Trans].

⁷⁰ An analysis of the hymn must begin with the parallel structure of these two relative clauses. Attempts to demonstrate another division of the hymn ignore its strophic structure. Lohmeyer, ad loc., wants to reconstruct the two strophes, each with seven lines, which begin at 1:15* and 1:18*; each strophe would be preceded by a unit of three lines (1:3f*; 1:16c*, 17*). For a critique of this analysis, see especially Käsemann, *Essays*, 149–51. Dibelius-Greeven, ad loc., place the beginning of the first strophe at 1:15* and the second at 1:18a*: “He is the head...” (καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ κτλ). Masson ad loc. proceeds in an altogether different manner: by leaving out 1:18a*, he constructs five strophes of four cola each. These four cola are built according to the rule of *parallelismus membrorum*: 1:15–16a*; 16b–c*; 17–18b*; 19–20a*; 20b–c*. For a critical discussion of this, cf. Ellingsworth, “Colossians 1:15–20,” 252f, and Gabathuler, *Jesus Christus, Haupt der Kirche*, 42–49, 61–66.

“head of the body, the church” (1:18a* κεφαλή τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας). Considering its content, this statement would have to be connected with the second strophe which is characterized by soteriological statements. The structure of the hymn, however, places it in the first strophe. The difficulty in the arrangement of 1:18a* is solved when the words τῆς ἐκκλησίας (“of the church”) are taken as an interpretive addition, as Ernst Käsemann has argued convincingly.⁷¹ Originally, then, the reference was to Christ as the head of the body, i.e., of the cosmos. However, inserting “of the church” (τῆς ἐκκλησίας), the author of the letter gave the term “body” (σῶμα) a new interpretation which corresponds to his understanding of the church as the body of Christ (cf. 1:24*).⁷² It is also clear that there is a secondary expansion at the end of strophe two. The text says that he has made peace “through the blood of his cross, through him” (διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ, δι’ αὐτοῦ). This double “through” (διὰ) has continuously given rise to critical reflection, so that several copyists deleted the “through him” (δι’ αὐτοῦ) in order to achieve a smoother text (e.g.: BD * G I al latt Or). It is hardly possible that “through him” was subsequently added to the text. The words “through the blood of his cross” (διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ) indicate, rather, an addition⁷³ which follows the thrust of Pauline theology and points to the cross as the place where reconciliation was accomplished. By means of these two glosses the hymn’s statements receive solid historical reference. The reconciliation which relates to the whole world originated in the vicarious death of Christ; the rule of Christ, however, is a present reality in his body, the church.

It is difficult to determine whether the original form of the hymn has been rediscovered after these two additions have been removed, or whether the text contains further secondary supplements. As concerns the structure of both strophes, not only is the first one (vss 15–18a*) a good bit longer than the sec-

⁷¹ Cf. Käsemann, *Essays*, 150–53. Wagenführer, *Die Bedeutung Christi*, 62f, recognized the problem, but he considered “of the church” (τῆς ἐκκλησίας) as a later gloss inserted into the text of Col.

* ²⁴ I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.

[Colossians 1:24 \(NRSV\)](#)

⁷² Contrary to Käsemann (*Essays*, 151–53), the words “the church” are not due to an earlier Christian re-editing of a pre-Christian hymn, but rather stem from the author of Col—as the comparison with 1:24* shows.

⁷³ Convincingly established by Käsemann, *Essays*, 151–53.

* ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;

¹⁶ for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.

¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.

[Colossians 1:15–18 \(NRSV\)](#)

ond (vss 18b–20*), but there is no exact formal correlation between the individual lines. Thus, one must examine whether it is possible to reconstruct a more properly balanced structure of the original hymn.

The enumeration “whether thrones or dominions, powers or principalities” as well as the phrase “whether on earth or in the heavens” (εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι v 16*; εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς v 20*), were described by Eduard Norden as “superfluous ornamental trimming” which is “foreign to the nature of the Semitic, but quite acceptable to that of the Hellenistic mind”; they were therefore, he judged, added secondarily.⁷⁴ Indeed, many exegetes have agreed with this view and have asserted that the author of the letter inserted these words in order to be able to polemicize against the worship of cosmic powers—a practice with which he must come to grips in chapter two.⁷⁵ But it must be noted that “thrones or dominions” (θρόνοι καὶ κυριότητες) are not mentioned again either in Col or in the Pauline *corpus*.⁷⁶ It is difficult to ascribe the coupling of these two terms to the vocabulary of the author or of his opponents without further ado.⁷⁷ This only leaves one to suppose that such an addition could already have been made in the oral tradition. Concerning the concluding phrase, “whether on earth or in the heavens” (εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς), it must be said that it recalls the beginning of the hymn⁷⁸ and, as a reference to the cosmic dimensions of the reconciliation, it achieves an appropriate conclusion. Since the second strophe lacks an exact counterpart for the two clauses which start with καὶ αὐτός (“He” or “and he” in tr. of vss 17*, 18a*),⁷⁹ several exegetes have called vss 17* and

*¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.

¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

²⁰ and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Colossians 1:18–20 (NRSV)

⁷⁴ Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 261; cf. Hegermann, *Schöpfungsmittler*, 91.

⁷⁵ Cf. Robinson, “A Formal Analysis,” 282f, who also reckons “the visible and the invisible” (τὰ ὄρατα καὶ ἀόρατα) to be an insert, and takes the view that both phrases were necessitated by the controversy with the Colossian heresy. So also Hegermann, *Schöpfungsmittler*, 91f; Schweizer, *Neotestamentica*, 293f; Hans-Martin Schenke, “Der Widerstreit gnostischer und kirchlicher Christologie im Spiegel des Kolosserbriefs,” *ZThK* 61 (1964): 401. Eckart, “Exegetische Beobachtungen,” 104–06, omits only the phrase in v 16*, but not that in v 20*, like Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus*, 146f.

⁷⁶ The word κυριότης (dominion) appears again only in Eph 1:21*. Cf. above p. 42.

⁷⁷ The words ἀρχαὶ and ἐξουσίαι (principalities and powers) are resumed in 2:10* and 15* in the explanation and application of the hymn.

⁷⁸ Cf. Käsemann, *Essays*, 151–53.

⁷⁹ But cf. v 20*, “and through him” (καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ).

18a* an insertion⁸⁰ which stands out syntactically and narrows the cosmological horizon of the two parallel strophes of vss 15f* and 18b–20*.⁸¹ Actually, however, the two clauses serve to underscore in pleonastic phrases the words “all things” (τά πάντα) which are repeatedly used; thus it is out of the question that they narrow the cosmic perspective. Furthermore, the formal structure of vss 17* and 18a* is explained by their position in the context of the hymn, in which they serve as a summary that brings the first strophe to a conclusion.⁸²

An exactly parallel structure for the strophes can only be achieved through deletions and transpositions. For reasons of form, Eduard Bammel and Eduard Schweizer view v 18c* as an addition made by the author of the letter because the result clause (“in order that” ἵνα) does not fit the structure of the whole.⁸³ Yet the verb πρωτεύειν (to be first) is a hapaxlegomenon in the New Testament and thus may scarcely be claimed for Pauline vocabulary. James M. Robinson transposes v 18a* to the close of the hymn and connects it with the result clause (“in order that”) of v 18c*, which has no formal counterpart in the first strophe.⁸⁴ Thus the hymn would end in this manner: “and he is the head of the body in order that he might be the first in all things” (καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλή τοῦ σώματος, ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν πρωτεύων).⁸⁵ These alterations, however, meddle too much with the given text and do not give evidence sufficient to make probable the hypothesis of two strophes of exactly parallel structures.⁸⁶ It is hardly

⁸⁰ Maurer, “Die Begründung der Herrschaft Christi,” 82f; Schweizer, *Neotestamentica*, 295; cf. also, Gabathuler, *Jesus Christus, Haupt der Kirche*, 128f.

⁸¹ Thus Bornkamm, *Aufsätze* 2, 197, n. 20.

⁸² Hegermann, *Schöpfungsmittler*, 92f, who would like to achieve two equally long strophes, excludes “all things were created through him and for him” (τά πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται v 16c*) and also “and he is before all things” (καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων v 17*) as being repetitious of “the first born” (πρωτότοκος v 15*).

⁸³ Ernst Bammel, “Versuch zu Col 1:15–20,” *ZNW* 52 (1961): 94; and Schweizer, *Neotestamentica*, 294.

⁸⁴ Robinson, “A Formal Analysis,” 280–82. Robinson’s reconstruction is not free of arbitrary meddling with the text. Instead of 1:19*, he has assigned 2:9* to the second strophe, and has deleted “making peace” (εἰρηνοποιήσας) in v 20* in favor of “he has reconciled” (ἀποκατήλλαξε) which he inserts as the predicate.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 285 Robinson asserts that the Christ-hymn in Phil ends with a result clause (ἵνα), cf. Phil 2:10f*.

⁸⁶ Bammel has attempted to establish a chiasmic structure for the hymn, but this principle of division does violence to the hymn when it is carried out. If it is not even evident to what degree vss 15a* and 16c* as well as vss 18a* and 20a* are supposed to correspond to each other in chiasmic arrangement, then it is altogether impossible to demonstrate the chiasm in its particulars. The phrases “whether thrones or dominions, principalities or powers” (εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι), according to Bammel, are said to correspond to each other as b’ a’ a’ b’. Yet if “thrones” (θρόνοι) and “powers” (ἐξουσίαι) can be set in relation to each other, they can no longer be understood in an angelological sense. Finally, in order for this schema to hold, v 18c*, “in order that he may be the first in all things” (ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων) must be omitted as an addition while the gloss in v 20* must be retained).

probable that a primitive Christian hymn would have consisted of regularly constructed verses and strophes; rather, the individual strophes probably differed in structure and were composed in the free rhythm of hymnic prose.⁸⁷ For this reason the attempt to discover the original form of the hymn must proceed with caution.⁸⁸ Aside from the two glosses in vss 18a* and 20*, which clearly reveal the theology of the author of the epistle, all the other phrases which are considered to be additions to an originally shorter hymn are actually statements which draw out further the lines already plotted in the hymn. Thus there is no valid reason for reckoning with further interpretive additions. The two strophes do not correspond to each other in all details, yet there are the marked beginnings “he (who) is” (ὅς ἐστίν) of vss 15* and 18*, and the two following predications of Christ. There are the two ὅτι clauses (“for in him,” vss 16* and 19*), and also the two conclusions considering the cosmic dimension of Christ’s rule which round out the strophes (vss 16b*, 20b*). Thus the structure of these two strophes can be presented in this manner:

*He is the image of the invisible God,
The first-born before all creation,
For in him all things were created
In the heavens and on earth,
The visible and the invisible,
Whether thrones or dominions, principalities or powers;
All things are created through him and for him;
And he is before all things
And in him all things are established
And he is the head of the body, [the church].
He is the beginning,
The first—born from the dead,
In order that he might be the first in all things,
For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell
And through him to reconcile all things toward him,
Making peace [through the blood of his cross] through him*

*Whether on earth or in the heavens.
ὅς ἐστίν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου,
πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως,
ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα
ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,
τὰ ὄρατα καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα,
εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε
ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι·
τὰ πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται·
καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων
καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν,
καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος [τῆς ἐκκλησίας]·
ὅς ἐστίν ἀρχή,*

⁸⁷ Cf. Ernst Haenchen, “Probleme des johanneischen ‘Prologs’ ,” *ZThK* 60 (1963): 309; reprinted in Ernst Haenchen, *Gott und Mensch, Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Tübingen: 1965), 118.

⁸⁸ In order to obtain two parts of 151 syllables each, Schattenmann, *Prosahymnus*, 16–18, places v 13f* before v 18b–20* so that a Christ-hymn (vss 13*, 18b–20*) follows a Logos-hymn pertaining to God (vss 12*, 15–18a*). For a critique of this arbitrary procedure cf. the review by Gottfried Schille, *ThLZ* 92 (1967):36.

πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν,
 ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων,
 ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι
 καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν
 εἰρηνοποιήσας [διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ] δι' αὐτοῦ
 εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

Where did this hymn come from, and what conditions, known from the history of religions, determined its characteristics? Ernst Käsemann thought that once the two additions “of the church” (τῆς ἐκκλησίας v 18a*) and “through the blood of his cross” (διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ v 20*) were removed, a hymn remained that no longer displayed any specifically Christian characteristics. Thus he viewed it as a pre-Christian Gnostic text which deals with the supra-historical, metaphysical drama of the Gnostic redeemer. Creation and redemption are related constituents in the myth of the primeval man and redeemer who breaks into the sphere of death as the pathfinder and leader of those who belong to him.⁸⁹ Yet this thesis is hardly convincing. First of all, the Christian character of the phrase “first-born from the dead” certainly can not be doubted.⁹⁰ Furthermore, it must be pointed out that the words of v 19* speak of God’s decree of election with the Old Testament term “to be pleased” (εὐδοκεῖν)—a phrase that wants to be understood as a statement about the unique event of divine revelation in Christ, quite comparable to the sentences in the prologue of the Gospel of John.⁹¹ In contrast to the non-historical myth of Gnosticism, this refers to God’s definite and defining act. Finally, the repeated references to the divine creation correspond to Old Testament and Jewish tradition, even though the formulation is expressed in Hellenistic language, and the words “in him” (ἐν αὐτῷ), “through him” (δι’ αὐτοῦ), and “for him” (εἰς αὐτόν), recall Stoic phrases. These observations lead to the conclusion that the history of religions background of the conceptions in this hymn is to be sought in Hellenistic Judaism.⁹²

This definition of the background is to be differentiated from Ernst Lohmeyer’s exposition of the history of religions presuppositions.⁹³ Using the concept of reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) mentioned in v 20* as a starting point, Lohmeyer maintains that the whole hymn can be unraveled by means of this catchword, and should be understood against the background of the Jewish Day of Atonement (*Versöhnung*).⁹⁴ On the Day of Atonement, Israel receives the pronouncement of the forgiveness of sins; the Creator and Lord of the whole world turns to his people, so that creation and reconciliation are brought close to one

⁸⁹ Käsemann, *Essays*, 154–56. Ulrich Wilckens follows him in his *Weisheit und Torheit; Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu 1 Kor 1 und 2*, BHT 26 (Tübingen: 1959), 200–02.

⁹⁰ Cf. Ernst Percy, “Zu den Problemen des Kolosser-und Epheserbriefes,” *ZNW* 43 (1950–51): 184; Schweizer, *Neotestamentica*, 297, n. 11; Schweizer, *Erniedrigung und Erhöhung bei Jesus und seinem Nachfolgern*, *ATHANT* 28 (Zürich: ¹1955), 103, n. 465.

⁹¹ Cf. Lohse, “Christologie und Ethik,” 162f.

⁹² Concerning the cosmological conceptions as developed in Hellenistic Judaism, cf. Hans-Friedrich Weiss, *Untersuchungen zur Kosmologie des hellenistischen und palästinischen Judentums*, TU 97 (Berlin: 1966).

⁹³ Lohmeyer, pp. 43–47.

⁹⁴ Stanislas Lyonnet, “L’ hymne christologique de l’ Epître aux Colossiens et la fête juive du Nouvel An,” *RechSR* 48 (1960): 92–100, began with Lohmeyer’s statements and attempted to demonstrate that v 20* presents allusions to the Jewish liturgy for the New Year’s festival.

another. According to Lohmeyer, the statements of this hymn similarly revolve around the two foci of creation and reconciliation. The Jewish institutions, however, are said to have been abolished in Christ, for he is not only the essence and fulfillment of the Law, but also of Jewish rites.⁹⁵ “Just as the existence of the world rests trustingly in the rite of atonement, so it also rests in this particular figure of Christ, who ‘reconciles all things’ ”.⁹⁶ The picture of Christ, however, is drawn here in accordance with the “myth of the primeval man, or in Jewish terms, the eschatological Son of Man, which is closely connected with a new cosmological view of Adam.”⁹⁷ Yet the term “to reconcile” (ἀποκαταλλάξαι v 20*) does not allude, even remotely, to a connection with Jewish conceptions of sacrifices and of the great Day of Atonement; moreover, the synagogue did not connect the Day of Atonement with the concept of creation.⁹⁸ Finally, the myth of the primeval man or the expectation of the Son of Man presents a motif that is completely separate from the concepts which were related to the Day of Atonement. Thus this motif likewise does not help to explain the hymn.⁹⁹

The exalted Christ is called “the image of God, the first-born of all creation” (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ, πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως), and he is also called “the beginning” (ἀρχή). With these designations the hymn relates to the characterizations which Hellenistic synagogues gave to Wisdom. They praised Wisdom (σοφία) as created before all creatures, as the first-born of God, the primordial beginning—in view of creation as well as of the redemption she grants as the mediatrix of salvation. In the Jewish Diaspora, moreover, there was much borrowing from the concepts of popular Hellenistic philosophy, and there was certainly no total ban against influences from the syncretistic milieu. However, the Christian communities, which in many cases arose directly from the circles of Hellenistic Judaism, expressed their confession of Christ as the Kyrios with the aid of the terminology developed in the synagogue, which itself had assimilated its Old Testament inheritance with oriental concepts and Greek thought. The words “all,” “all things” (πᾶν, πάντα) appear repeatedly from the beginning to the end of the hymn as the leading keynote which is joined with another recurrent expression, “in him” (ἐν αὐτῷ), in order to praise the rule of the exalted Christ which encompasses all things.

This hymn was clearly familiar to Christians in Asia Minor,¹⁰⁰ and the author of Col takes it as the point of departure for his argumentation. This is done in order to demonstrate to the community that

⁹⁵ Lohmeyer, p. 45.

⁹⁶ Lohmeyer, p. 46.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Cf. Gabathuler, *Jesus Christus, Haupt der Kirche*, 36.

⁹⁹ Cf. Käsemann’s pertinent critique of Lohmeyer: “... while, from the angle of the comparative study of religion [his interpretation] tries without exception to reach an understanding of the passage on the basis of Jewish premises, he does not draw the conclusion that would be to the point, i.e., an approach in strictly historical categories. Instead he remains in a phenomenological orientation which gets no further than the uncovering of suprahistorical-metaphysical ‘facts’ and his thought therefore does not actually commence from Judaism but from Hellenism.” (Trans. from *Aufsätze* 1, p. 39, n. 21; cf. *Essays*, p. 155, n. 1).

¹⁰⁰ Certainly the hymn was known and sung by more than one community—not by the Colossians alone. It was doubtless the common property of communities in Asia Minor, so that one can neither speak of a “Colossian” hymn nor of a “heretical” one—not to mention that, at this period, the sharp distinction between orthodoxy and heresy did not yet exist, but became established only later. Cf. Walter Bauer,

Christ holds in his hands dominion over all the world, and that he is the head of his body, the church. Whoever belongs to this Lord and has received the forgiveness of sins has thus also been wrested from the enslaving dominion of the cosmic powers and raised with Christ to new life.

■ **15*** Christ is the “image of the invisible God” (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου)—thus the hymn begins. This title of sovereignty, as well as the following phrase “first-born before all creation” (πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως), recall the story of creation: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1*); he created man “in his own image, in the image of God he created him” (Gen 1:27*). Yet even though the term “image” (εἰκὼν) suggests Gen 1:27*, it is out of the question to interpret it as a direct reference to the biblical account of creation.¹⁰¹ When

Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum, BHT 10 (Tübingen: 1934); 2d edition, 1964, ed. Georg Strecker.

* ¹ In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth,

[Genesis 1:1 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ²⁷ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

[Genesis 1:27 \(NRSV\)](#)

¹⁰¹This explanation was advocated above all by C. F. Burney, “Christ as the ‘APXH of Creation (Prov. VIII 22, Col. I 15–18, Rev. III 14)” *JTS* 27 (1926): 160–77. Paul supposedly gave a meditative exposition of the first words of the Bible (In the beginning) in Col 1:15–18*, exegeting Gen 1:1* via Pr 8:22* as follows:

B [*erêshîth*] = ‘in *rêshîth*, —

ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα

B [*erêshîth*] = ‘by *rêshîth*, —

πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἔκτισται

B [*erêshîth*] = ‘into *rêshîth*, —

πάντα εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται

Rêshîth = ‘Beginning’ —

αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων

Rêshîth = ‘Sum-total’ —

τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν

Rêshîth = ‘Head’ —

αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος

the word εἰκών is defined as the “image” of the invisible God, the Hellenistic understanding of this term is to be assumed. God is invisible,¹⁰² but he allows himself to be known wherever he wills to be known, i.e. he is revealed in his “image.”¹⁰³

Plato had already called the cosmos the visible image of God (*Tim.* 92c); likewise, in the Hellenistic age the world was considered God’s “image.” The cosmos was created by God “in his image” (κατ’ εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ *Corp. Herm.* 8.2)¹⁰⁴ so that “The Aeon then is an image of God; the cosmos is an image of the Aeon” (ἐστὶ τοίνυν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ αἰών, τοῦ δὲ αἰῶνος ὁ κόσμος *Corp. Herm.* 11.15) and the whole cosmos can be called “... a great God, and an image of Him who is greater ...” (ὁ μέγας θεὸς καὶ τοῦ μείζονος εἰκὼν *Corp. Herm.* 12.15).¹⁰⁵ In the beginning was the eternal God, then came the world, and then came man “who has been made in the image of the cosmos” (κατ’ εἰκόνα τοῦ κόσμου γενόμενος *Corp. Herm.* 8.5). Man, then, is to render “praise and thanks in full measure to God, and revering God’s image (the Cosmos), not unaware that he himself is a second image of God. For there are two images of God; the Cosmos is one, and man is another ...” (*laudes gratesque maximas agens deo, eius imaginem venerans, non ignarus se etiam secundam esse imaginem dei, cuius sunt imagines duae mundus et homo.* Pseud. Apul. [*Asclepius*] 10). This understanding of the term “image,” which uses this term to

Rêshîth = ‘First-fruits’—

ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχή, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν

Some exegetes have agreed with this thesis: W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (London: S.P.C.K., 1948, ²1955), 150–52; Moule, ad loc.; Edvin Larsson, *Christus als Vorbild: Eine Untersuchung zu den paulinischen Tauf- und Eikontexten*, ASNU 23 (Uppsala: 1962), 190–96. This thesis would presuppose that the passage was an exegesis of the Hebrew text, but the insight that 1:15–20* is a citation of a Hellenistic Christian hymn does away with this assumption. Moreover, it cannot be carried through in particulars without the aid of artificial explanations, and it is not sufficient for comprehension of the whole context—for this would be necessary if ἀρχή (beginning) from the second strophe is to be included. For a critique, cf. Jervell, *Imago Dei*, p. 200, n. 107; Gabathuler, *Jesus Christus, Haupt der Kirche*, 26–29; Feuillet, *Le Christ sagesse*, 189–91.

¹⁰² For this theme, cf. Rom 1:20*; 1 Tim 1:17*; Acts 14:17*; 15:23–28*; Heb 11:27*; Jn 1:18*. Furthermore, cf. Rudolf Bultmann, “Untersuchungen zum Johannesevangelium: B. Φεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε,” *ZNW* 29 (1930): 169–82; reprinted in Rudolf Bultmann, *Exegetica: Aufsätze zur Erforschung des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen: 1967), 174–92; also Erich Fascher, *Deus invisibilis: Eine Studie zur biblischen Gottesvorstellung*, Marburger Theologische Studien 1 (Marburg: 1931), 41–77.

¹⁰³ For the concept εἰκών (image), cf. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard von Rad, Hermann Kleinknecht, *TDNT* 2, 381–97; Friedrich-Wilhelm Eltester, *Eikon im Neuen Testament*, BZNT 23 (Berlin: 1958); Jervell, *Imago Dei*, esp. 214–26; and Hans Wildberger, “Das Abbild Gottes,” *ThZ* 21 (1965): 245–59, 481–501.

¹⁰⁴ Translations for *Corp. Herm.* based on text of *Corpus Hermeticum* by A. D. Nock and A.-J. Festugière (Paris: 1945) and with help of *Hermetica* by Walter Scott (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1924). (Trans.)

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Hermann Kleinknecht, *TDNT* 2, 388f.

refer to the divine revelation,¹⁰⁶ was taken over by Hellenistic Judaism and transferred to “Wisdom.”¹⁰⁷ She was already praised by Pr 8:22*, which states that Yahweh created her at the beginning of his work as the first of his acts of old, before the creation of the world. In Wisd Sol 7:26* she is called an “image of his [God’s] goodness” (εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ), which makes known the goodness of God. Philo describes Wisdom as “ ‘beginning’ and ‘image’ and ‘vision of God’ ” (ἀρχὴν καὶ εἰκόνα καὶ ὄρασιν θεοῦ *Leg. All.* 1.43), in that he grants to her the same dignity as to the Logos, which itself is called “ ‘the Beginning’ and the Name of God and His Word and the Man after His image and ‘he that sees,’ that is Israel” (ἀρχὴ καὶ ὄνομα θεοῦ καὶ λόγος καὶ ὁ κατ’ εἰκόνα ἄνθρωπος καὶ ὁ ὄρων, Ἰσραήλ, προσαγορεύεται *Conf. Ling.* 146).¹⁰⁸ Philo describes “Wisdom” (σοφία), as well as the Logos, as “the perfect way ... which leads to God” (τελείαν ὁδὸν τὴν πρὸς θεὸν ἄγουσαν *Deus Imm.* 142f; *Migr. Abr.* 175). Wisdom was present at the beginning of creation but found no dwelling-place on the earth and returned to heaven (1 En 42:1f).¹⁰⁹ According to apocalyptic expectations she will reappear in the last times when her spirit will dwell in the Son of Man; he will act in the power of Wisdom and he will execute judgment (1 En 49:1–4). Thus Wisdom is not only the mediatrix of creation but also of salvation, and cosmology and soteriology are related to one another in the myth of Wisdom.

¹⁰⁶ In the Hellenistic ruler-cult it was said that the appearance of the ruler was the event of the deity’s epiphany. Cf. the inscription on the Rosetta Stone, where it is stated that Ptolemaeus Epiphanes was the “living image of Zeus, the son of the sun” (εἰκόνας ζώσης τοῦ Διός, υἱὸς τοῦ Ἡλίου *Ditt. Or.* 90.3; [Trans.]. Hans Wildberger, “Das Abbild Gottes,” 496–501, rightly reminds us that the Egyptian view of the king as the image of God entered Hellenistic syncretism and must have had some significance for the development of speculations about Wisdom in Egyptian Judaism.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Weiss, *Untersuchungen zur Kosmologie*, 189–210; 265–75.

* ²² The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.

[Proverbs 8:22 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ²⁶ For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness.

[Wisdom of Solomon 7:26 \(NRSV\)](#)

¹⁰⁸ Concerning the designation of Logos as “image,” cf. also Philo, *Conf. Ling.* 97, 147; *Fug.* 101; *Som.* 1.115, 239; 2.45. Philo also employed the concept “image” in his anthropology, in that he relates Gen 1:27* to the ideal primeval man who was created according to God’s image, and yet relates Gen 2:7* to the earthly man (*Leg. All.* 1.31; *Op. Mund.* 134).

¹⁰⁹ According to other traditions, Wisdom found her dwelling-place in Israel, the people of the Law (Sir 24:7*, 11*).

The Christian community applied the concept “image” to Christ so as to praise him as the one in whom God reveals himself.¹¹⁰ As the “image” of the invisible God, he does not belong to what was created, but stands with the creator who, in Christ, is acting upon the world and with the world.¹¹¹ He is absolutely superior to the cosmos, i.e., the whole creation on earth and in heaven.¹¹² Therefore the first title of majesty is followed by the second, “first-born before all creation” (πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως).

The characterization of the pre-existent Christ as the first-born before all creation likewise accords with Jewish speculation about Wisdom.¹¹³ In the beginning of his work, Yahweh created Wisdom (Pr 8:22*), and, created before all things (Sir 1:4*), she rejoices: “From eternity, in the beginning, he created me” (πρὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς ἔκτισέν με Sir 24:9*).¹¹⁴ She is present with God (Wisd Sol 9:9*) and has possession of his throne (Wisd Sol 9:4*). She is the “first-

¹¹⁰ The problem disputed in the ancient church, whether the image of the invisible God was visible or not (cf. Lightfoot, ad loc.), thus comes to nothing. Cf. also Eltester, *Eikon im NT*, 148f; Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 219.

¹¹¹ In a later writing, the *Epistula Apostolorum*, Christ says to his disciples, “I am wholly in the Father and the Father in me after his image and after his from and after his power and after his perfection and after his light, and I am his perfect word.” Trans. from H. Duensing in Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher tr. ed. R. McL. Wilson, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 201. Cf. Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 255, n. 201.

¹¹² Cf. Maurer, “Die Begründung der Herrschaft Christi,” 86.

¹¹³ Concerning “first-born” (πρωτότοκος), cf. Edward Augustine Cerny, *Firstborn of Every Creature* (Col. 1:15*), Unpub. Diss. (Baltimore: 1938); B. R. Brinkman, *The Prototokos Title and the Beginnings of its Exegesis*, Unpub. Diss. Gregoriana (Rome: 1954); Wilhelm Michaelis, “Der Beitrag der Septuaginta zur Bedeutungsgeschichte von πρωτότοκος,” in *Sprachgeschichte und Wortbedeutung, Festschrift für Albert Debrunner* (Bern: 1954), 313–20; Wilhelm Michaelis, “Die biblische Vorstellung von Christus als dem Erstgeborenen,” *ZStH* 23 (1954): 137–57; Wilhelm Michaelis, *TDNT* 6, 871–81; A. W. Argyle, “Πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως (Colossians 1:15*),” *Exp T* 66 (1954–55): 61f; A. W. Argyle, “Colossians 1:15*,” *ibid.*, 318f; T. W. Buckley, *The Phrase “Firstborn of Every Creature” (Colossians 1:15*) in the Light of its Hellenistic and Jewish Background*, Unpub. Diss. Angelicum (Rome: 1962); Alfred Hockel, *Christus der Erstgeborene: Zur Geschichte der Exegese von Kol.1, 15* (Düsseldorf: 1965).

* ⁴ Wisdom was created before all other things, and prudent understanding from eternity.

Sirach 1:4 (NRSV)

* ⁹ Before the ages, in the beginning, he created me, and for all the ages I shall not cease to be.

Sirach 24:9 (NRSV)

¹¹⁴ Cf. T. Francis Glasson, “Colossians 1:18*, 15* and Sirach 24,” *JBL* 86 (1967): 214–16.

* ⁹ With you is wisdom, she who knows your works and was present when you made the world; she understands what is pleasing in your sight and what is right according to your commandments.

born mother of all things” (*primogenita mater universorum*, Philo, *Quaest. in Gen.* 4:97). Thus it can be said of her that “she exists before heaven and earth” (πρὸ οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς αὐτὴν ὑπάρχειν Aristobulus, in Eus., *Prep. Ev.* 7.14.1). Philo also calls the Logos, as well as Wisdom, the “first-born son” (πρωτόγονος υἱός *Conf. Ling.* 146; *Agric.* 51; *Som.* 1.215).

The description of the pre-existent Christ as the “first-born before all creation” (πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως) is not intended to mean that he was created first and thereby began the succession of created beings. Rather, it refers instead to his uniqueness,¹¹⁵ by which he is distinguished from all creation (cf. Heb 1:6*).¹¹⁶ The point is not a temporal advantage but rather the superiority which is due to him as the agent of creation who is before all creation.¹¹⁷ As the first-born he stands over against creation as Lord.¹¹⁸

■ **16*** This statement about the unique position of the pre-existent Christ now receives more explicit proof: “in him all things were created.” The use of the passive form, “were created” (ἐκτίσθη) signifies that God is the creator. The clause “in him all things were created” (ἐν αὐτῷ

Wisdom of Solomon 9:9 (NRSV)

* ⁴ give me the wisdom that sits by your throne, and do not reject me from among your servants.

Wisdom of Solomon 9:4 (NRSV)

¹¹⁵ The first-born is installed in kingly power by God, LXX Ps 88:28* “And I shall make him the firstborn, higher than the kings of earth” (κάγὼ πρωτότοκον θήσομαι αὐτόν, ὑψηλὸν παρὰ τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν τῆς γῆς). In Judaism, not only the messianic king, but also Israel, the Patriarchs and the Torah are given this title of distinction. Examples are given by Wilhelm Michaelis, *TDNT* 6, 873–76, and Billerbeck 3, 256–58, 626. Since the Col passage uses this designation in the context of the idea of creation’s agent, it is surely related to the Jewish speculation about Wisdom.

* ⁶ And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him.”

Hebrews 1:6 (NRSV)

¹¹⁶ Cf. Justin, *Dial.* 100.2 “the first-born of God and before all creatures” (πρωτότοκον μὲν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πρὸ πάντων τῶν κτισμάτων [Trans.]). Cf. also *Dial.* 84.2; 85.2; 138.2. Theodoret, ad loc. “not as having the creation for a sister, but as having been born before all creatures” (οὐχ ὡς ἀδελφὴν ἔχων τὴν κτίσιν, ἀλλ’ ὡς πρὸ πάσης κτίσεως γεννηθεῖς [Trans.]). Theodore of Mopsuestia, ad loc. “not concerning time alone, but concerning first honor also ... honored above every creature” (οὐκ ἐπὶ χρόνου ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ προτιμήσεως ... παρὰ πᾶσαν κτίσιν τιμώμενος [Trans.]).

¹¹⁷ Cf. Wilhelm Michaelis, *TDNT* 6, 877–80; Maurer, “Die Begründung der Herrschaft Christi,” 85; Eltester, *Eikon im NT*, 138f; Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 225.

¹¹⁸ Concerning the exegesis of the early Church on this passage, cf. Lightfoot, ad loc. When Isidore of Pelusium (*Epist.* 3. 31) accentuates πρωτότοκος he gives the word an active meaning, i.e., “to (have been) born first, that is, to have made the creation” (πρῶτον τετοκέναί, τουτέστι, πεποιηκέναί τὴν κτίσιν [Trans.]). Cf. Lightfoot, Abbott, ad loc.

ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα) is taken up again by the words “all things are created through him and for him” (τὰ πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται). There the aorist form is replaced by the perfect form of the verb in order to express the creation’s continuing existence. All of this in turn connects with the sentence, “And he is before all things and in him all things are established” καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν v 17*). In these phrases reminiscences of Stoic formulations are clearly evident:¹¹⁹ Marcus Aurelius states, “O Nature ... all things come from you, subsist in you, go back to you” (ὦ φύσις, ἐκ σοῦ πάντα, ἐν σοὶ πάντα, εἰς σὲ πάντα M. Ant. 4.23.2 [adapted from Loeb trans.]. Nature, which is pervaded by divine powers, is origin, continuation and goal.¹²⁰ The final unity of all that exists is expressed by this succession of prepositions, which appears almost a play on words.¹²¹ God and nature are viewed together and are one. This view which was widely spread by Hellenistic popular philosophy¹²²

¹¹⁹ Cf. Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 249f, 347f.

Loeb The Loeb Classical Library, founded by James Loeb, ed. E. H. Warmington (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press and Heinemann, 1912ff.)

¹²⁰ Cf. (Pseudo) Aristotle, *Mund.* 6(397b), “It is indeed an ancient idea, traditional among all mankind, that all things are from God and are established ... through God” (ἀρχαῖος μὲν οὖν τις λόγος καὶ πάτριός ἐστι πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις ὡς ἐκ θεοῦ πάντα καὶ διὰ θεοῦ συνέστηκεν). Pseudo Apuleius (Asclepius) 34; “For God is all things: from him are all things and all things are dependent on his will ... from God and in God and through God are all things...” (*omnia enim deus et ab eo omnia et eius omnia voluntatis ... omnia enim ab eo et in ipso et per ipsum.* [Trans.]). *Corp. Herm.* 5.10 states “all things are in Thee ... all things are from Thee” (πάντα δὲ ἐν σοί, πάντα ἀπὸ σοῦ [Trans.]). The Paris magical papyrus 4.2838 has “for all things are from Thee, and in Thee, Eternal One, all things come to their end” (ἐκ σέο γὰρ πάντ’ ἐστὶ καὶ εἰς <σ’>, αἰών[ι]ε, πάντα τελευτᾷ Preis, *Zaub.* 1,162). Further formulas from magical texts are in M. Berthelot, *Collection des Anciens Alchimistes Grecs* (Paris: 1888), 84, 143, 169, 442.

¹²¹ Cf. Seneca, *Epist.* 65.8, “Accordingly, there are five causes, as Plato says: the one ‘from which’ (material), the one ‘by which’ (agent), the one ‘in which’ (formal), the one ‘according to which’ (exemplary), and the one ‘for which’ (final). Last comes the result of all these. Just as in the case of the statue... the one ‘from which’ is the bronze, the one ‘by which’ is the artist, the one ‘in which’ is the form which is adapted to it, the one ‘according to which’ is the pattern imitated by the maker, the one ‘for which’ is the purpose in the maker’s mind, and, finally, the result of all this is the statue itself.” (*Quinque ergo causae sunt, ut Plato dicit: id ex quo, id a quo, id in quo, id ad quod, id propter quod, novissime id quod ex his est. Tamquam in statua ... id ex quo aes est, id a quo artifex est, id in quo forma est, quae aptatur illi, id ad quod exemplar est, quod imitatur is, qui facit, id propter quod facientis propositum est, id quod ex istis est, ipsa statua est.* [Loeb trans. adapted].)

¹²² Cf. Philo, *Cher.* 125, “for to bring anything into being needs all these conjointly, the ‘by which,’ the ‘from which,’ the ‘through which,’ and the ‘for which,’ and the first of these is the cause, the second the material, the third the tool or instrument, and the fourth the end or object.” (πρὸς γὰρ τὴν τινος γένεσιν πολλὰ δεῖ συνελθεῖν, τὸ ὑφ’ οὗ, τὸ ἐξ οὗ, τὸ δι’ οὗ, τὸ δι’ ὅ καὶ ἔστι τὸ μὲν ὑφ’ οὗ τὸ αἴτιον, ἐξ οὗ δὲ ἡ

was subject to a particular diffraction in Hellenistic Judaism. It was impossible to identify the God of Israel with nature, and the faith of Israel could not be dissolved into a pantheistic world view.¹²³ The breadth of creation, therefore, which was called into existence by God's act can well be described in Stoic terms. God, however, remains Lord of creation; he does indeed act creatively in nature, but also stands against it as its ruler.¹²⁴

From the Hellenistic synagogue, this confession of God the creator, formulated in Stoic phrases, was appropriated by the Christian community and joined together with its confession of Christ. Thus 1 Cor 8:6* reads "Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (ἡμῖν εἷς ὁ θεὸς ὁ πατήρ, ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν, καὶ εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς δι' αὐτοῦ). The community praises God "For from him and through him and to him are all things" (ὅτι ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτόν τὰ πάντα Rom 11:36*). It praises Christ as the agent of creation in whom, through whom and for whom all things were created.¹²⁵

Through Wisdom Yahweh founded the earth, as it is already stated in Pr 3:9*. Wisdom narates: "when he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in

ύλη, δι' οὗ δὲ τὸ ἐργαλεῖον, δι' ὃ δὲ ἡ αἰτία). Cf. Weiss, *Untersuchungen zur Kosmologie*, 269–72, for further examples.

¹²³ Cf. Conzelmann, ad loc.

¹²⁴ Philo, *Cher.* 125, "Because God is the cause, not the instrument, and that which comes into being is brought into being *through* an instrument, but *by* a cause." (ὅτι ὁ θεὸς αἴτιον, οὐκ ὄργανον, τὸ δὲ γινόμενον δι' ὄργανου μὲν ὑπὸ δὲ αἰτίου πάντως γίνονται).

* ⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

1 Corinthians 8:6 (NRSV)

* ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

Romans 11:36 (NRSV)

¹²⁵ It should be noted that the prepositions ἐν (in), διά (through), and εἰς (for) are used, but not ἐκ (from). "From whom are all things" (ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα) is said of God in 1 Cor 8:6*. He is and remains the creator, but the pre-existent Christ is the mediator of creation.

* ⁹ Honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce;

Proverbs 3:9 (NRSV)

the sons of men” (Pr 8:27–31*). It is “Wisdom,” according to Philo, “through whom the universe came into existence” (δι’ ἧς τὰ ὅλα ἦλθεν εἰς γένεσιν *Fug.* 109), for God created heaven and earth through Wisdom.¹²⁶ The Christian confession appropriates this view of Wisdom’s role as the agent of creation and transfers it to Christ in order to express the universal validity of the Christ-event (cf. 1 Cor 8:6*). All creation owes its existence to the pre-existent Christ.¹²⁷ “All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made” (πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν ὃ γέγονεν Jn 1:3*). “He is the radiance, the glory of God and the very stamp of his essence, upholding the universe by his word of power” (ὁς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ Heb 1:3*).¹²⁸

* ²⁷ When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,

²⁸ when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep,

²⁹ when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth,

³⁰ then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always,

³¹ rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

Proverbs 8:27–31 (NRSV)

¹²⁶ Cf. the Targum Neofiti 1 for Gen 1:1*. Cf. also Siegfried Schulz, *Komposition und Herkunft der Johanneischen Reden*, BWANT 5, 1 (Stuttgart: 1960), p. 31, n. 137 (cf. also his pp. 58–62). When the Qumran texts say in various ways that God has created all things in his wisdom (1 QH I.7 .14f, 19, etc.), this does not presuppose any hypostasization of Wisdom, but rather it is the description of the manner and way of divine action.

¹²⁷ Cf. Eduard Schweizer, *Erniedrigung*, 103.

* ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being

John 1:3 (NRSV)

* ³ He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

Hebrews 1:3 (NRSV)

¹²⁸ Cf. also Heb 2:10* “for whom and by whom all things exist” (δι’ ὃν τὰ πάντα καὶ δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα), and Barn 12:7 “the glory of Jesus, for all things are in him and for him” (τὴν δόξαν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ πάντα καὶ εἰς αὐτόν).

All things have been created in him, that is, through him.¹²⁹ The fullness of what “all things” (τὰ πάντα) means is depicted more exactly by the addition: everything that is in the heavens and on earth.¹³⁰ There are no exceptions here,¹³¹ all things visible and invisible¹³² are included. Even the cosmic powers and principalities were created in him. “Thrones” (θρόνοι) and “dominions” (κυριότητες) (cf. 1 Cor 8:5*) were occasionally specified in Judaism among the heavenly hosts

¹²⁹ The phrase “in him” (ἐν αὐτῷ) is therefore to be understood in an instrumental sense, as is shown by the religious background, i.e., Jewish speculations about Wisdom. To understand the phrase as referring to location is only possible on the basis of quite different history of religions backgrounds: in the Platonic understanding, the Ideas have their “place” in the Logos or in Sophia; cf. Philo, *Op Mund.* 20 “the universe that consisted of ideas would have no other location than the divine reason” (οὐδ’ ὁ ἐκ τῶν ἰδεῶν κόσμος ἄλλον ἂν ἔχει τόπον ἢ τὸν θεὸν λόγον). But this understanding is not applicable [to Col] because “all things” (τὰ πάντα) cannot be interpreted as the world of ideas since “the visible things” (ὄρατά) in v 16* are part of “all things” (Eltester, *Eikon im NT*, 140, n. 74). Another approach postulates the Gnostic myth of the primal man as the history of religions background of the hymn. Then the “in him” would have to be interpreted to mean that all things have their place “in him (locally);” thus Käsemann, *Essays*, 156–58; Dibelius-Greeven, ad loc.; Eltester, *Eikon im NT*, 140, n. 74; Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 226; Fred B. Carddock, “ ‘All things in Him,’ a Critical Note on Col. 1:15–20*” *NTS* 12 (1965–66): 78–80. It is in fact not impossible, albeit not at all certain (cf. Hegermann, *Schöpfungsmittler*, 70 and *passim*), that concepts from the myth of the primal man have influenced Jewish Wisdom speculations. In these speculations, however, Wisdom is always viewed as the master builder through whom creation is [being] done. Since the statements about the mediation of creation by Christ are certainly shaped by these concepts (cf. Hegermann, *Schöpfungsmittler*, 96; André Feuillet, “La Creation de l’Univers ‘dans le Christ’ d’après l’Épître aux Colossiens (I.16a)” *NTS* 12 (1965–66): 1–9; André Feuillet, in *Le Christ sagesse*, 202–10), the phrase “in him” is to be taken in an instrumental sense, not one of location. Not only does the following phrase “through him” (δι’ αὐτοῦ) argue for this interpretation, but also the parallel statements from 1 Cor 8:6* and Jn 1:3* assert this.

¹³⁰ Cf. Sir 24:5f*. Wisdom says “Alone I have made the circuit of the vault of heaven and have walked in the depths of the abyss. Over the waves of the sea, over the whole earth, and over every people and nation I have established my role” [Trans.] Wisd Sol 18:6* says of the Logos, “The Logos ... touched the heavens and strode along the earth” [Trans.]

¹³¹ The mss A (C) and **A** pl insert τὰ before ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (to read “the things in the heavens”), and A C **A** D and G pl supply this article before ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (to read “the things on the earth”).

¹³² Cf. Plato, *Phaed.* 79a “ ‘Now,’ said he, ‘shall we assume two kinds of existences, one visible, the other invisible?’ ” (θῶμεν οὖν βούλει, ἔφη, δύο εἶδη τῶν ὄντων, τὸ μὲν ὄρατόν τὸ δὲ αἰδέες).

* ⁵ Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—

of angels;¹³³ “principalities” (ἀρχαί) and “powers” (ἐξουσίαι) are often named as being supermundane beings and powers.¹³⁴ In such enumerations it does not matter whether the list is complete or whether the angelic powers are arranged in the order of their particular classes.¹³⁵ The emphasis is rather that all things that exist in the cosmos were created in Christ. Thus he is Lord of the powers and principalities (cf. 2:10*, 15*; Eph 1:21*; 1 Pt 3:22*).

All things were created “through him and for him” (δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτόν).¹³⁶ This clause continues the statements made about Christ’s mediation of creation. “Through him” (δι’ αὐτοῦ) takes up the preceding “in him” (ἐν αὐτῷ), and “for him” (εἰς αὐτόν) completes the line. Whereas in Stoic praise of nature the self-contained harmony of all things is described with the

¹³³ Cf. 2 En 20:1. Enoch reports “and I saw there (i.e. in the seventh heaven) a very great light and fiery troops of great archangels, incorporeal forces, and dominions and orders and governments, cherubim and seraphim, thrones and many—eyed ones, nine (ten) regiments ...” Cf. Gottlieb Nathanael Bonwetsch, *Die Bücher der Geheimnisse Henochs: Das sogenannte slawische Henochbuch*, TU 44. 2 (Berlin: 1922), 18f; A. Vaillant, *Le Livre des Secrets d’Henoch* (Paris:1952), 22f. According to Test Levi 3:8, in heaven “there are thrones and dominions in which they always offer praise to God” (εἰσι θρόνοι, ἐξουσίαι, ἐν ᾧ ὕμνοι τῷ θεῷ προσφέρονται).

¹³⁴ Cf. 1 Cor 15:24*; Rom 8:38*; Eph 1:21*; 6:12*. Cf. En 61:10, “... all the host of the heavens, and all the holy ones above, and the host of God, the Cherubin, Seraphin and Ophannin, and all the angels of power, and all the angels of principalities, and the Elect One, and the other powers on the earth (and) over the water ...” Further examples in Billerbeck 3, 583; cf. also G. H. C. Macgregor, “Principalities and Powers: the Cosmic Background of Paul’s Thought,” *NTS* 1 (1954–55): 17–28.

¹³⁵ For “whether-or” (εἴτε – εἴτε) as the formal means of composing such enumerations cf. 1 Cor 3:21–23*: “For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s” (πάντα γὰρ ὑμῶν ἐστίν, εἴτε Παῦλος εἴτε Ἀπολλῶς εἴτε Κηφᾶς, εἴτε κόσμος εἴτε ζωὴ εἴτε θάνατος, εἴτε ἐνεστώτα εἴτε μέλλοντα, πάντα ὑμῶν, ὑμεῖς δὲ Χριστοῦ, Χριστὸς δὲ θεοῦ). In 1 Cor 12:13* the dissolution of all earthly opposites into the membership of Christ’s body is shown by “whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free” (εἴτε Ἰουδαῖοι εἴτε Ἕλληνες, εἴτε δοῦλοι εἴτε ἐλεύθεροι).

* ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

[Colossians 2:15 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

[1 Peter 3:22 \(NRSV\)](#)

¹³⁶ The ms ^p⁴⁶ begins this clause with “for” (ὅτι); cf. v 16a*.

words εἰς σὲ πάντα,¹³⁷ the phrase εἰς αὐτόν (“toward/ to him”) which refers to Christ¹³⁸ receives a different meaning; all things are created “toward” him.¹³⁹ In this way not only the statements about the origin of creation are summarized, but also the goal of creation is indicated: creation finds its goal in no one save Christ alone.¹⁴⁰

■ 17* He is “before all things” (πρὸ πάντων), which means that as the pre-existent one¹⁴¹ he is Lord over the universe.¹⁴² This refers back to the designation “first-born before all creation” (πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως) and it emphasizes once again the unique position of Christ as Lord over the cosmos.¹⁴³ Not only is the universe created in him and by him, but it is also established permanently in him alone. In Platonic and Stoic philosophy the verb συνεστηκέναι (to be established, to continue, exist, endure) was used to denote the wonderful unity of the entire world.¹⁴⁴ This conviction is most ancient and was shared by all men “that all things are from God and are constituted ... by God” (ὡς ἐκ θεοῦ πάντα καὶ διὰ θεὸν συνέστηκεν Pseudo Aristotle, *Mund.* 6

¹³⁷ Also in M. Ant. 4.23.2 “All things come from you, in M. Ant. 4.23.2 “All things come from you, subsist in you, go back to you” (ἐκ σοῦ πάντα, ἐν σοὶ πάντα, εἰς σὲ πάντα). The Paris magical papyrus has “for all things are from you, and in you, Eternal One, all things come to their end” (ἐκ σέο γὰρ πάντ’ ἐστὶ καὶ εἰς <σ’>, αἰών[ι]ε, πάντα τελευτᾷ). Cf. p. 49, n. 120. For further parallels see Eltester, *Eikon im NT*, 145f.

¹³⁸ In Jewish speculations about Wisdom there are no parallels for εἰς αὐτόν (“toward/to him”). Cf. Eltester, *Eikon im NT*, 142f; Schweizer, *Neotestamentica*, 296.

¹³⁹ Cf. R. Jochanan (d. 279 A.D.), who said the world was only created “for the sake of the Messiah” (*b San.* 98b). Cf. Billerbeck 3, 626.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Käsemann, *Essays*, 157f, the words “created toward him” (εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται v 16*) “anticipate this eschatological orientation which then receives concrete expression in the soteriological statements of the second stanza.” Cf. also Eltester, *Eikon im NT*, 146; Schweizer, *Neotestamentica*, 296.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Jn 8:58* “before Abraham was, I am” (πρὶν Ἀβραάμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί).

¹⁴² The word πάντων is clearly to be taken as neuter, not masculine. Cf. Tertullian, *Marc.* 5.19 “For how is He before all beings, if He is not before *all things*? Again, how is He before all things, if He is not ‘the first-born of creation’?” (*Quomodo enim ante omnes, si non ante omnia? Quomodo ante omnia, si non primogenitus conditionis?*).

¹⁴³ Cf. Basil’s *Adv. Eunom.* 4 (MPG 29, 701), “When the apostle says ‘All things were created through him and for him,’ he must (also) say ‘he became before all things.’ By saying ‘he is before all things’ he pointed out that the eternal one ‘is,’ but the creation ‘became.’” (ὁ ἀπόστολος εἰπὼν, πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτόν ἔκτισται, ὠφείλεν εἰπεῖν καὶ αὐτὸς ἐγένετο πρὸ πάντων. Εἰπὼν δέ, καὶ αὐτός ἐστι πρὸ πάντων, ἔδειξε τὸν μὲν αἰεὶ ὄντα, τὴν δὲ κτίσιν γενομένην [Trans.]).

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Plato, *Republic* 530a, “... that the artisan of heaven fashioned it and all that it contains” (οὕτω συνεστάναι τῷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ δημιουργῷ αὐτόν τε καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ). [Note the many various English equivalents for this verb, as given in Liddell-Scott.]

[p. 397b)].¹⁴⁵ Hellenistic Judaism used the same words to express the belief that God’s creation is firmly established. Philo speaks of the four “first principles” (ἀρχαί) and “potentialities” (δυνάμεις), “from which the world has been established (ἐξ ὧν συνέστηκεν ὁ κόσμος *Rer. Div. Her.* 281); or of the opposites in the structure of the world, “of which the whole world is composed” (ἐξ ὧν ἅπασ ὁ κόσμος συνέστηκε *Rer. Div. Her.* 311).¹⁴⁶ The divine Logos, indeed God himself, is the unifying bond which includes all things and holds them together:¹⁴⁷ “And by his word all things hold together” (ἐν λόγῳ αὐτοῦ σύγκειται τὰ πάντα *Sir* 43:26*).¹⁴⁸ Just as the concept of the mediation of creation was applied to Christ by the Christian community, so too this latter concept was likewise applied. Christ upholds the universe “by his word of power” (τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ). Everything that is, is established in him alone, for he is the Lord, the head of the body.

■ **18*** If the words “the church” (τῆς ἐκκλησίας) are taken as a gloss—as was argued above on page 42f—then the concept “body” (σῶμα) in the context of the first strophe is to be understood in the cosmological sense.¹⁴⁹ The view that the whole cosmos can be compared to a body and that macrocosm and microcosm correspond to each other in their relationships is attested very early in ancient times; it appeared in manifold variations. Plato conceives of the cosmos as a living being with a soul and pervaded with reason (*Tim.* 31b; 32a, c; 39e; *passim*). The cosmos as a body is directed by the divine soul which it follows as it is led (*Tim.* 47c–48b).¹⁵⁰ In the syncre-

¹⁴⁵ This conviction is transferred to Isis in *P. Oxy.* 11, 1380, 183–85: “you became the discoverer of all things wet and dry and cold of which all things are composed” (πάντων ὑγρῶν καὶ ξηρῶν καὶ ψ[υχ]ρῶν ἐξ ὧν ἅπαντα συνέστηκεν). For further examples see Josef Gewiss, *Christus und das Heil nach dem Kolosserbrief*, Unpub. Diss. (Breslau:1932), 46.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Hegermann, *Schöpfungsmittler*, 95.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Philo, *Rer. Div. Her.* 23, “he is the bond of all things, the one who holds them together indissolubly and binds them fast, when in themselves they are dissoluble” (τῶν ὅλων δεσμός ἐστι συνέχων αὐτὰ ἅλута καὶ σφίγγων διαλυτὰ ὄντα ἐξ ἑαυτῶν). Cf. also *Fug.* 108ff.

* ²⁶ Because of him each of his messengers succeeds, and by his word all things hold together.

[Sirach 43:26](#) (NRSV)

¹⁴⁸ What is true for the macrocosm pertains also to the microcosm, for only through God’s care is man’s body preserved. He would disintegrate if God did not hold his hand over him and protect him. Cf. Philo, *Rer. Div. Her.* 58, “... for this mass of clay and blood, which in itself is dissoluble and dead, holds together and is quickened as into flame by the providence of God who is its protecting arm and shield ...” (ὁ ἔναιμος ὄγκος ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ διαλυτὸς ὢν καὶ νεκρὸς συνέστηκε καὶ ζωπυρεῖται προνοίᾳ θεοῦ τοῦ τὴν χεῖρα ὑπερέχοντος καὶ ὑπερασπίζοντος).

¹⁴⁹ Concerning the concept “body” (σῶμα), cf. Eduard Schweizer, *TWNT* 7, 1024–91. On p. 1024f there is a complete survey of the literature to which discussion of the concept of “body” should be referred.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Schweizer, *TWNT* 7, 1029; further examples are found there.

tism of late antiquity Iranian concepts were connected with these Greek concepts. As the Pahlavi literature illustrates, the supreme God became pregnant and brought forth the entire creation: “And when it had been created, he bore it in his body. ... he increased and everything became better and then one by one he created them out of his own body. First he created the sky out of his head ... He created the earth from his feet, ... He created water out of his tears. ... He created plants out of his hair ... He created fire out of his mind.”¹⁵¹ The cosmos is viewed as the body of the deity but the elements of the universe are viewed as the various parts of his body. In an Orphic fragment, Zeus is named as the deity who is the “head” (κεφαλή) of the cosmos and is the one who with his power pervades the universe, which rests in the body of the great deity (Fragment 168).¹⁵² Other texts similarly describe the heaven as the head of the Pantocrator, the air as his body and the earth as his feet,¹⁵³ or again the heavenly world as the head of the All-Deity, the sea as his belly and the earth as his feet.¹⁵⁴ The Stoic view of nature takes this idea of the body of

¹⁵¹ The Pahlavi *Riāvyat of the Dātāstan ī dēnīk*, ch. 46.3–5, 11, 13, 28. The lines are cited in Geo Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans*, *Die Religionen der Menschheit* 14 (Stuttgart: 1965), 9. The English translation is from H. W. Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth-Century Books*, Ratanbai Katrak Lectures (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1943), 121. In Widengren, p. 10, the Indian All-Deity is described: “The fire is my mouth, the earth my feet, the sun and moon my eyes, the heaven my head, the firmament and the regions of the heaven my ears. The waters have originated from my perspiration. Space with its four world regions is my body, the wind is in my mind” (Mahabharata 3, 1296ff [Trans.]). For the connection of the Hellenistic concepts with those from Iran, cf. also Hegermann, *Schöpfungsmittler*, 60f.

¹⁵² *Orphicorum Fragmenta* (ed. O. Kern, 1922), 201f. “Zeus was the first, Zeus last, the lightning’s Lord, Zeus head, Zeus center, all things are from Zeus ... For in Zeus’ mighty body these all lie ... Such his immortal head, and such his thought. His radiant body, boundless, undisturbed, fearless in strength of mighty limbs was formed thus ...” (Ζεὺς πρῶτος ἐγένετο, Ζεὺς ὕστατος ἀγρικέραυτος, Ζεὺς κεφαλή, Ζεὺς μέσσα, Διὸς δ’ ἐκ πάντα τέτυκται ... πάντα γὰρ ἐν Ζηνὸς μεγάλῳ τάδε σώματι κεῖται ... ὧδε μὲν ἀθανάτην κεφαλὴν ἔχει ἢ δὲ νόημα: σῶμα δὲ οἱ περιφεγγές, ἀπείριτον, ἀστυφέλικτον, ἄτρομον, ὀβριμόγυιον, ὑπερμενὲς ὧδε τέτυκται Translation from Eusebius, *Evangelicae Praeparationis*, ed. and tr. by E. H. Gifford [Oxford: University Press, 1903], vol. 3, p. 109). Cf. also Heinrich Schlier, *TDNT* 3, 676; Dibelius-Greeven, p. 109, supplement 1. This Orphic fragment was known to the Hellenistic synagogue and transmitted by it. Cf. the presentation of the connections by Nikolaus Walter, *Der Thoragusleger Aristobulus: Untersuchungen zu seinen Fragmenten und zu pseudepigraphischen Resten der jüdischhellenistischen Literatur*, TU 86 (Berlin: 1964), 103–15, 202–61.

¹⁵³ Magic Papyrus 12, 243 (equals Preis, *Zaub.* vol. 2, p. 74, cf. P. Leid. 2, p. 141); cf. also Magic Papyrus 13, 770ff (equals Preis, *Zaub.* vol. 2, p. 122); Magic Papyrus 21, 6ff (equals vol. 2, p. 146).

¹⁵⁴ Macrob. *Sat.* 1.21.17: Serapis oracle concerning King Nicocreon of Cyprus, “Learn that the nature of my Godhead is such as I may tell thee: the firmament of heaven is my head; my belly the sea; the earth my feet”; (εἰμὶ θεὸς τοιόσδε μαθεῖν, οἷόν κ’ ἐγὼ εἶπω οὐράνιος κόσμος κεφαλή, γαστήρ δὲ θάλασσα, γαῖα δὲ μοι πόδες εἰσί Translation from *The Oxford Book of Greek Verse*, ed. Gilbert Murray et al. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930], no. 482). Cf. Schlier, *TDNT* 3, 676.

the All-Divinity and conceives of the whole cosmos as being filled by the deity. Men, however, are members of this world-encompassing body which binds all things together.¹⁵⁵ These conceptions also found entrance into Hellenistic Judaism¹⁵⁶ so that Philo of Alexandria speaks of the world of the heavens as a uniform body over which the Logos is set as the head (*Som.* 1.128).¹⁵⁷ The Logos encompasses all things, he fills and defines them to their extremities (*Quaest. in Ex.* 2.68).¹⁵⁸ Just as the body of man needs the direction and guidance given by the head (*Spec. Leg.* 3.184), so also the “body” (σῶμα) of the cosmos needs the eternal Logos of the eternal God, which is the head of the universe (*Quaest. in Ex.* 2.117)¹⁵⁹ and directs the whole body.¹⁶⁰ As the

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Seneca. *Epist.* 92.30, “All this universe which encompasses us is one, and it is God; we are associates of God; we are his members.” (*Totum hoc, quo continemur, et unum et deus: et socii sumus eius et membra*). For further examples see Hegermann, *Schöpfungsmittler*, pp. 63f; Schweizer, *TWNT* 7, 1036f.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. (Pseudo) Philo, *De deo*, “Now the earth and water are like feet, the foundation of the world; and the air and the sky are its countenance, like a face. The forces of being are like their limbs extended from one end of the world to the other, and the forces of being protect the feet of the universe, its lower parts (which are the earth and water), and its face (that is, the air and sky) which includes those natures that tend to higher things, so that these be better preserved” (*Mundi vero basis sicut pedes sunt terra et aqua, facies autem quasi vultus, aer et caelum. Entis autem virtutes velut crura eorum ab orbe in orbem extensa; et universi pedes, inferiores nempe ipsius materiae partes, terram at aquam atque vultum, aera nimirum et caelum ad superiora tendentes naturas includentem ad melius conservandum protegunt.* [Trans.]). Cf. Hegermann, *Schöpfungsmittler*, 59.

¹⁵⁷ In *Vit. Mos.* 2.117–35, Philo deals with the cosmic vesture of the high priest which is an image of the universe: the air, water, earth, fire, the heavens, the two hemispheres, and the zodiac. The “reason seat” (λογεῖον) of the high priest is an image of the divine Reason “which holds together and administers all things” (τοῦ συνέχοντος καὶ διοικοῦντος τὰ σύμπαντα 134). The priest, consecrated to the Father, must appear before him vested in the allegory of the world (133f). Concerning the cosmic vesture of the high priest, cf. also *Wisd Sol* 18:24*.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Hegermann, *Schöpfungsmittler*, 59; further examples are found there, 59–67. Cf. also Weiss, *Untersuchungen zur Kosmologie*, 257–65.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Hegermann, *Schöpfungsmittler*, 58f; Carsten Colpe, “Zur Leib-Christi-Vorstellung im Epheserbrief,” in *Judentum—Urchristentum—Kirche: Festschrift für Joachim Jeremias*, BZNW 26 (Berlin: 1960, ²1964), pp. 180f.

¹⁶⁰ Philo’s statements about the cosmos as a “body” (σῶμα) and the Logos as its “head” (κεφαλή) are to be distinguished from the Gnostic myth of the primeval man and must not be confused with it. Cf. Colpe, “Zur Leib-Christi-Vorstellung,” 179–82; Hegermann, *Schöpfungsmittler*, 59–67; Schweizer, *TWNT* 7, 1051f; contra Heinrich Schlier, *TDNT* 3, 676–78.

body is ruled by its head, so the cosmos is subject to the guidance of the divine Logos and thereby is directly under God's care.¹⁶¹

The statements of the Christian confession are summarized by the hymn in the words that Christ is the head of the body.¹⁶² This mythological manner of conceptualization in which the cosmos appears as a body governed by its head provides the answer to man's search—man who is beset by worry and fear of the powers in the world and who asks how the world can be brought to its proper order: Christ is the "head" (κεφαλή) that governs the "body" (σῶμα) of the cosmos; the cosmos is ruled and held together by this head. The universe is founded and established through him alone, i.e. in him alone is salvation.¹⁶³

The author of Col, however, proceeds to interpret this mythological statement in such a way that the concept "body" is defined by the "church" (ἐκκλησία) and is thereby understood as a historical entity.¹⁶⁴ Here and now the exalted Lord exercises his rule over all the world as the head of his body which is the church.¹⁶⁵ This definition, "his body, that is, the church," differs clearly from the comparison which was taken over from Stoic tradition and which is employed

¹⁶¹ In this way Philo answers the question which so greatly engaged late antiquity, that is, where and how is the universal body brought under its head and held together by it? Cf. Curtius Rufus, *Historiae Alexandri Magni Macedonensis* 10.9.1–4. In this work the empire of Alexander the Great is compared with a body (*corpus*) which, after his death, disintegrated into several members (*membra*). The application of this metaphor to the situation in the Roman Empire is then introduced: a new ruler sits on the throne and now the members which otherwise would tremble with discord are brought under their head (*cum sine capite membra trepidarent*). On this cf. Franz Mussner, *Christus, das All und die Kirche: Studien zur Theologie des Epheserbriefs*, Trierer Theologische Studien 5 (Trier: 1955), 155f; and Schweizer, TWNT 7, 1037, n. 185.

¹⁶² In the OT, the word "head" (κεφαλή / שֵׂרָף) often designates the head of a community or tribe, or a ruler. E.g. Deut 28:13*; Judg 10:18*; 11:8f*, 11*, etc.; also Test Zeb 9:4; for further examples see Heinrich Schlier, TDNT 3, 675f. For Paul, "head" (κεφαλή) denotes the one to whom rule has been transferred (e.g., 1 Cor 11:3*; also Col 2:10*, 19*; Eph 1:22*; 4:15*; 5:23*). Cf. Stephen Bedale, "The Meaning of κεφαλή in the Pauline Epistles," JTS, NS 5 (1954): 211–15. Neither in the OT nor in the chief Pauline letters, however, is there any treatment of the relationship between the "head" and the "body." The statement of Col 1:18* is therefore to be explained from the Hellenistic conception concerning the cosmic body and its head cited above, and not from the OT.

¹⁶³ Cf. Schweizer, *Neotestamentica*, 296, "Christ is therefore the answer to the quest for the principle which rules the world and thereby binds it together in unity. For the Hellenists, this quest is the quest for salvation." Cf. also Schweizer, TWNT 7, 1072f.

¹⁶⁴ Theodoret ad loc. characterizes the transition completed by the words "the church" (τῆς ἐκκλησίας) by saying, "he crosses over from knowledge of God into the economy of salvation" (ἀπὸ τῆς θεολογίας εἰς τὴν οἰκονομίαν μετέβη [Trans.]).

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Lohse, "Christusherrschaft und Kirche," 205f.

by Paul in Rom 12 and 1 Cor 12 in order to illustrate the many functions and services of the members.¹⁶⁶ One is rather reminded of the words about the one body into which we have all been baptized (1 Cor 12:13*), in which we are all bound together as partakers of the Lord's supper (1 Cor 10:17*), and which in its unity may not be divided (1 Cor 1:13*). Even in these sentences of 1 Cor, however, the cosmic dimension is lacking and nothing is said of a head which is set over the body. Thus it is not sufficient to state that in its statements about the church Col goes beyond the chief Pauline letters; the understanding of the church in Col cannot be explained as a simple evolution from earlier beginnings within Pauline theology.¹⁶⁷ Rather, the understanding of the church expressed in Col must be determined by considering the religious presuppositions visible in the Hellenistic conception of the cosmic body. The author of the letter gives this cosmological train of thought a new direction by designating the church as the place where in the present Christ exercises his rule over the cosmos.¹⁶⁸ Christ is Lord over the universe (cf. 2:10*, 19*), his body, however, is the church. For this reason the worldwide rule of the Kyrios is pro-

¹⁶⁶ In this comparison the "head" is not contrasted with the "body" but is rather cited as one member among the others which all belong to this one body. Cf. 1 Cor 12:21*.

* ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:13 (NRSV)

* ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

1 Corinthians 10:17 (NRSV)

* ¹³ Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

1 Corinthians 1:13 (NRSV)

¹⁶⁷ Isak Johannes du Plessis, *Christus as hoof van kerk en kosmos: 'N eksegeties-teologiese studie van Christus se hoofskap veral in Efesiërs en Kolossense* (Groningen: 1962), has again tried to relate the statements of Col and Paul in this way. Cf. the review by Georg Bertram in *ThLZ* 90 (1965): 116–18.

¹⁶⁸ In doing so the author makes himself known as a Pauline theologian. A new concept, however, has been formulated by the connection of the notion of the "church" (ἐκκλησία) with the traditional cosmological statement: Christ is the head of the body. (The complicated hypothesis, that a cosmological misunderstanding of the talk about the body of Christ had arisen in the hymn and that this was "re-Paulinized" by the author of Col, is superfluous. Contra Gabathuler, *Jesus Christus, Haupt der Kirche*, p. 141, n. 809.)

* ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God.

Colossians 2:19 (NRSV)

claimed everywhere in the preaching of Christ among the nations (1:27*), in the exhortation of every man and in the instruction of every man in all wisdom so that all may be presented as perfect in Christ (1:28*).¹⁶⁹

The second strophe, like the first one, begins with two predications for Christ. He is “the beginning” (ἀρχή)¹⁷⁰ and the “firstborn from the dead” (πρωτότοκος ἐκ¹⁷¹ τῶν νεκρῶν). In Judaism both Wisdom and Logos were called “the beginning” (ἀρχή). Wisdom commends herself “In the beginning, before the ages, he established me” (πρὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος ἐθεμελίωσέν με ἐν ἀρχῇ LXX Pr 8:23*). Philo characterizes Wisdom (σοφία) as “‘beginning’ and ‘image’ and ‘vision of God’ ” (ἀρχὴν καὶ εἰκόνα καὶ ὄρασιν θεοῦ *Leg. All.* 1.43).¹⁷² However, when it is said of Christ that he is the “beginning,” this does not mean that he is the “beginning of God’s creation” (ἀρχή

* ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Colossians 1:27 (NRSV)

* ²⁸ It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Colossians 1:28 (NRSV)

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Käsemann, *Essays*, 168 (adapted from ET), “The introduction of τῆς ἐκκλησίας in v 18* has dogmatic significance. It illustrates the condition of being ‘translated’ into the kingdom of the Son and changes the cosmological statement into an eschatological one. Christ is also the head of the powers and authorities. But they are not his body in the strict sense. They are ‘in him,’ inasmuch as he is their creator and has authority over them. The community is his body, inasmuch as it lives from the resurrection of the dead and wanders towards the resurrection of the dead. But that means, in the here and now, that it stands within the forgiveness of sins. It neither means, nor indeed can it mean, anything else at all. Because it stands within forgiveness, it is new creation, the cosmic powers have nothing more to say to it, to give to it, or to ask of it. There is no way to the creation other than the way which passes through, and continues in, forgiveness. Every immediate attempt to break through, every attempt, that is, which does not derive from eschatology, turns into cosmology, into apostasy from forgiveness, into renewed slavery to the cosmic tyrants, who then take on the aspect of demonic powers.”

¹⁷⁰ The mss p⁴⁶ B 1739 pc supply the article to read ἡ ἀρχή (*the* beginning).

¹⁷¹ The mss p⁴⁶ B* Ir delete ἐκ (from) to read “of the dead.”

* ²³ Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

Proverbs 8:23 (NRSV)

¹⁷² God’s “first-born” (πρωτόγονος), “beginning” (ἀρχή), and “image” (εἰκῶν) are names also for the Logos, cf. Philo, *Conf. Ling.* 146. Cf. above, p. 47.

τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ Rev 3:14*). Rather, he is the “beginning” as the one who is the “first-born from the dead” (πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν) through whom the eschatological event has been initiated.¹⁷³ As the first one who has arisen from those who have fallen asleep, he is the first fruit (ἀπαρχή) who guarantees the future resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:20*, 23*). Thus he is the “Originator of Life” (ἀρχηγὸς τῆς ζωῆς Acts 3:15*), the “first to rise from the dead” (πρῶτος ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν Acts 26:33*) and the “firstborn of the dead and ruler of the kings on earth” (ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς Rev 1:5*).¹⁷⁴

Since Christ is the beginning and the first-born, he is therefore the first one in all things. In the purpose clause (ἵνα), the words “in all” (ἐν πᾶσιν) relate to the oft-repeated “all things” (τὰ πάντα) and thus these words of v 18* are to be taken as “in all things” in the neuter gender.¹⁷⁵

* ¹⁴ “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God’s creation:

[Revelation 3:14 \(NRSV\)](#)

¹⁷³ The words “first-born” and “beginning” occasionally appear together in order to describe the first-born as the founder of a people. Cf. LXX Gen 49:3* “Ruben, you are my first-born, my strength and the beginning of my children” (Ρουβην, πρωτότοκός μου σύ, ἰσχύς μου καὶ ἀρχὴ τῶν τέκνων μου). Cf. also LXX Deut 21:17*.

* ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

[1 Corinthians 15:23 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.

[Acts 3:15 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ²³ that the Messiah must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

[Acts 26:23 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood,

[Revelation 1:5 \(NRSV\)](#)

¹⁷⁴ The phrase “first-born from the dead” cannot be explained as coming from the Gnostic redeemer-myth. Cf. above, p. 45.

¹⁷⁵ The gender is not masculine as a continuation of the preceding νεκροί (the dead); thus Heinrich Schlier, *Christus und die Kirche im Epheserbrief*, BHTh 6 (Tübingen: 1930), 55f, n. 1. Cf. Hegermann, *Schöpfungsmittler*, 103, “The words ‘in all things’ (ἐν πᾶσιν) accordingly are not to be explained from ‘the dead’ (νεκροί) but from the formula ‘all things’ (πάντα).”

The words “be the first” (πρωτεύειν)¹⁷⁶ resume the twice-mentioned “first-born” (πρωτότοκος vss 15*, 18b*), and also the phrase of v 17a*, “and he is before all things” (καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων). The first place in the universe is properly his alone.¹⁷⁷

■ 19* The reason for this follows, “for in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell” (ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι).¹⁷⁸ First of all, concerning the construction of the sentence, the Greek text permits that “God” (ὁ θεός) could be supplied as the subject; “all the fullness ... to dwell” (πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι) in this case would have to be taken as an accusative with the infinitive: “God was pleased to let all the fullness dwell in him.” This would achieve a smooth connection to the following participle “he (i.e. God) was making peace” (εἰρηνοποιήσας).¹⁷⁹ It is, however, also possible to take “all the fullness” (πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα) as the subject to which the “making peace” (εἰρηνοποιήσας) is joined in a *constructio ad sensum*. Since this solution works without the addition of an unstated subject it is to be given preference over the other possibility.¹⁸⁰ The words “all the fullness” (πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα) mean nothing else than the divine fullness in its totality and therefore in the following commentary on the hymn they are elucidated in 2:9* as “the whole fullness of deity” (πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος).

¹⁷⁶ The verb πρωτεύειν is a hapaxlegomenon in the NT; it also is rare in the LXX, e.g. Esth 5:11*; 2 Macc 6:18*, 13:15*. But cf. Iamblichus, *Vit. Pyth.* 8.43 τῶν ἐν ἐκάστῳ τῷ γένει πεπρωτευκότων, which means “of the respective best in every generation” [Trans.]. Plutarch, *Lib. Educ.* 13 (9b): the fathers “in their eagerness that their children may the sooner rank first in everything” (σπεύδοντες γὰρ τοὺς παῖδας ἐν πᾶσι τάχιον πρωτεῦσαι). *P. Lips.* I, 40, 2, 16; 3, 6 has πρωτεύων meaning “head,” “director.” *P. Oxy.* XVI, 1983, 3. Further examples are in Wilhelm Michaelis, *TDNT* 6, 881f.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Chrysostom, ad loc. (before v 18*), “For everywhere he is first; above first; in the Church first, for he is the Head; in the Resurrection first” (πανταχοῦ γὰρ ἐστι πρῶτος ἄνω πρῶτος, ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ πρῶτος κεφαλὴ γὰρ ἐστιν ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει πρῶτος).

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Gerhard Munderlein, “Die Erwählung durch das Pleroma, Bemerkungen zu Kol. I.19” *NTS* 8 (1961–62): 264–76.

¹⁷⁹ For this reason many exegetes have favored this solution: Lightfoot; Erich Haupt, *Die Gefangenschaftsbriefe*, KEK 8–9 (Göttingen: 1902); Lohmeyer, ad loc.; Gottlob Schrenk, *TDNT* 2, 741; Gerhard Delling, *TDNT* 6, 303f; Mussner, *Christus, das All*, 58, n. 89; Feuillet, “La Création,” 228f.

¹⁸⁰ Thus Abbott; H. von Soden, *Die Briefe an die Kolosser, Epheser, Philemon: die Pastoralbriefe in Hand-Commentar zum Neuen Testament* 3, 1 (Freiburg i.B. and Leipzig: ²1893); P. Ewald, *Die Briefe des Paulus an die Epheser, Kolosser und Philemon in Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* 10 (Leipzig: 1910); Masson; Dibelius-Greeven, ad loc.; Percy, *Probleme*, 76, n. 22; Käsemann, *Essays*, 157–59; Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 222, n. 191; Gerhard Munderlein, “Die Erwählung durch das Pleroma, Bemerkungen zu Kol. I.19,” *NTS* 8 (1961–62): 266; Schweizer, *Neotestamentica*, 294, n. 3.

The concept “fullness”¹⁸¹ or “pleroma” played a great role in the Christian Gnosticism of the second century.¹⁸² The Valentinians meant by “pleroma” the fullness of the emanations which came forth from God. God himself is distinguished from these as “alone unbegotten, not subject to place or time” (μόνος ἀγέννητος, οὐ τόπον ἔχων, οὐ χρόνον Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.29.5). In contrast to the “emptiness” of the divine (κένωμα Epiphanius, *Haer.* 31.16.1), “Pleroma” signifies the uppermost pneumatic world in immediate proximity to God which in turn is separated from the cosmos by a boundary. There exists “peace and harmony between all the Aeons within the Pleroma” (εἰρήνη καὶ συμφωνία πάντων τῶν ἐντὸς πληρώματος αἰώνων Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.32.1 [trans. from ANF 5, 87]). The mature fruit of the “pleroma” which has been brought forth by all the Aeons together is Jesus (*Ref.* 6.32. 1f; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.2.6), who descended from the divine fullness as the redeemer (*Ref.* 6.32.4). But the goal of the work of redemption is that all things which are of pneumatic origin be reassembled in the “pleroma,” “in order that the Pleroma might be formed into an aggregate, according to a perfect number” (ἵν’ ἢ τὸ πλήρωμα ἐν ἀριθμῷ τελείῳ συνηθροισμένον *Ref.* 6.34.2 [trans. from ANF 5, 88]). Since, according to Valentinian teaching, the “pleroma” is indeed the heavenly fullness to which, however, God does not belong, this understanding of the word “pleroma” cannot contribute anything to the explanation of Col 1:19*—for there can be no doubt that in the Christ-hymn, God himself is called “pleroma.”

In the linguistic usages of the syncretism of late antiquity the concept “pleroma” was variously employed.¹⁸³ On the one hand God and the cosmos are distinguished, “for the cosmos is [the] pleroma of evil, but God is the pleroma of good” (ὁ γὰρ κόσμος πλήρωμά ἐστι τῆς κακίας, ὁ δὲ θεὸς τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ *Corp. Herm.* 6.4 [Trans.]) the cosmos, however, which is united intimately with God “is a pleroma of life” (πλήρωμά ἐστι τῆς ζωῆς *Corp. Herm.* 12.15 [Trans.]). On the other hand, thus the *Corpus Hermeticum* calls God “the Master and Maker and Father and Encompasser of All, and the One is all things and all things are the One,” and then continues “for

¹⁸¹ Cf. Gerhard Delling, *TDNT* 6, 297–304 (with a thorough survey of the literature on p. 297). In addition, the following should be especially noted: Josef Gewies, “Die Begriffe πληροῦν and πλήρωμα im Kolosser- und Epheserbrief,” in *Vom Wort des Lebens, Festschrift für Max Meinertz*, NTAbh Suppl. 1 (Münster: 1951), 128–41; Sverre Aalen “Begrepet pleroma i Kolosser- og Efeserbrevet,” *TTK* 23 (1952): 49–67; Moule, ad loc. Concerning the concept of “pleroma” in Eph, special reference must be made to Mussner, *Christus das All*, 46–64, and Heinrich Schlier, *Der Brief an die Epheser* (Düsseldorf: 1965), 96–99 (who has further listings of literature).

¹⁸² Cf. the examples given in Lightfoot’s excursus on the concept “pleroma” (pp. 257–73), as well as Delling, *TDNT* 6, 299f.

ANF *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885–97; reprinted by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1951–56).

¹⁸³ Cf. Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 221f.

the pleroma of all things is one and in one, and one is not two but both are one being.”¹⁸⁴ Since the All-One is not dual but rather is one and remains one, the All is thus not a second element alongside the One, so that God himself is thereby the “pleroma.”¹⁸⁵ The term “pleroma” thus indicates the one God pervading the whole universe. “For he is incorrupt, the fullness of the aeons and their father” (*Od.Sol.* 7.11[13]).¹⁸⁶

The Christian community took up the word “pleroma” from the Hellenistic milieu¹⁸⁷ in order to speak of the fullness of God which decided to dwell in this One.¹⁸⁸ This, however, transferred the term from the context of cosmology into that of soteriology. The Greek verb εὐδοκεῖν (to be pleased) appears often in the LXX as an expression for the good pleasure of God. He takes pleasure in right actions and conduct, but not in evil or bad works (LXX Ps 43:4*; 146:11*;

¹⁸⁴ τῶν ὅλων δεσπότην καὶ ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα καὶ περίβολον, καὶ πάντα ὄντα τὸν ἕνα, καὶ ἕνα ὄντα τὸν πάντα ... τῶν πάντων γὰρ τὸ πλήρωμα ἓν ἐστὶ καὶ ἐν ἐνί, οὐ δευτεροῦντος τοῦ ἐνός, ἀλλ’ ἀμφοτέρων ἐνός ὄντος *Corp. Herm.* 16.3 [Trans.].

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Gerhard Delling, *TDNT* 6, 300: “Here the word is clearly meant to define a concept of God in which God and the world merge into one another.”

¹⁸⁶ Translated from the German of Walter Bauer, in Hennecke-Schneemelcher 2, 585 (German ed.); cf. J. Rendel Harris, *The Odes and Psalms of Solomon*, (Cambridge: The University Press, ²1911) for 7.13 on p. 99. Cf. also Rendel Harris and Alphonse Mingana, *The Odes and Psalms of Solomon* (Manchester: University Press; London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1920), vol. 2, The Translation, for 7.11 and 17.7, 19.5, 36.6, 41.13f. In the *Gospel of Truth* the dwelling place of the Father is described as the pleroma (16.35, 41.1, 43.15f); the same place can also be called the “rest of the Father” (23.29). Cf. Hans-Martin Schenke, *Die Herkunft des sogenannten Evangelium Veritatis* (Göttingen: 1959), 15f.

¹⁸⁷ Aalen, “Begrepet,” 57f, wants to understand “pleroma” to mean the same as שְׁכִינָה (abode). What misled him to this interpretation is the verb κατοικῆσαι (to dwell) which, however, does not correspond to the term “pleroma.” Münderlein, “Die Erwählung,” 275, is inclined to agree with this meaning. Against this Gerhard Delling makes the pertinent remark, “The statements in Col go much further than the Jewish statements” *TDNT* 6, 303. Cf. also the critical comments of Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 222, n. 191.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Schweizer, *Neotestamentica*, 294, n. 3, “thus it may be supposed that ‘pleroma’ was originally understood in the sense of the Hellenistic idea of the world-soul, but then for the community it meant the God who pervades the whole universe. Perhaps the Wisdom terminology which is otherwise present in the hymn is likewise in the background here, since it is the Sophia of God which pervades all things and penetrates them all (Wisd Sol 7.24*; cf. 1.7* which for its part is dependent, of course, upon the Greek conceptions of the world-soul).” Yet this appealing supposition cannot be proven, for in the LXX, “pleroma” is found only with a spatial meaning (cf. Delling, *TDNT* 6, 299), and in Jewish Wisdom speculations the term is lacking.

* ³ for not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm give them victory; but your right hand, and your arm, and the light of your countenance, for you delighted in them.

149:4*).¹⁸⁹ This verb is also used to designate divine election, and of those whom God has not chosen it is said that “the Lord took no pleasure in them” (οὐκ εὐδόκησεν ἐν αὐτοῖς κύριος LXX Ps 151:5*). But God’s voice rings out over the Chosen One with “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased” (σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸν μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα) Mk 1:11*; par.). A connection between God’s choosing and his dwelling place is also expressed repeatedly. Zion is “the mountain on which it pleased God to dwell” (τὸ ὄρος, ὃ εὐδόκησεν ὁ θεὸς κατοικεῖν ἐν αὐτῷ LXX Ps 67:17*). Similarly LXX Ps 131:13f*: “for the Lord has elected Zion, he has chosen her for his dwelling. ‘This is my resting place forever, here I will dwell for I have chosen her’ ” (ὅτι ἐξελέξατο κύριος τὴν Σιών, ἠρετίσατο αὐτὴν εἰς κατοικίαν αὐτῷ. Αὕτη ἡ κατάπαυσις μου εἰς αἰῶνα αἰῶνος, ὧδε κατοικήσω, ὅτι ἠρετισάμην αὐτήν). The verb ἐκλέγεσθαι (to elect) has here replaced εὐδοκεῖν (cf. also LXX Isa 8:18*; 49:20*).¹⁹⁰ In Deuteronomy and in the Deuter-

[Psalm 44:3 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹¹ but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

[Psalm 147:11 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ⁴ For the Lord takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with victory.

[Psalm 149:4 \(NRSV\)](#)

¹⁸⁹ Further examples in Gottlob Schrenk, *TDNT* 2, 738.

* ⁵ My brothers were handsome and tall, but the Lord was not pleased with them.

[Additional Psalm 151:5 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹⁶ Why do you look with envy, O many-peaked mountain, at the mount that God desired for his abode, where the Lord will reside forever?

[Psalm 68:16 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹³ For the Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his habitation:

¹⁴ “This is my resting place forever; here I will reside, for I have desired it.

[Psalm 132:13–14 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ¹⁸ See, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.

[Isaiah 8:18 \(NRSV\)](#)

* ²⁰ The children born in the time of your bereavement will yet say in your hearing: “The place is too crowded for me; make room for me to settle.”

[Isaiah 49:20 \(NRSV\)](#)

onomic theology the sentence appears again and again that the God of Israel has chosen a place for himself where he wants his name to dwell.¹⁹¹ This thought is also repeated in later writings: God has chosen a dwelling-place for himself in Israel; “since your good pleasure was in your glory amongst your people Israel, you sanctified this place” (εὐδοκήσας τὴν δόξαν σου ἐν τῷ λαῷ σου Ἰσραὴλ ἡγίασαν τὸν τόπον τοῦτον 3 Macc 2:16*¹⁹²).

As the hymn speaks of God’s electing decree, it makes use of biblical language.¹⁹³ No reference is contained in this statement to any particular event, e.g., the incarnation,¹⁹⁴ the baptism or the transfiguration of Jesus,¹⁹⁵ rather, it relates to the Christ-event as a whole. “In him all the fullness was pleased to dwell,” which means just that: “in him all the fullness of deity dwells (κατοικεῖ—present tense!) bodily” (2:9*). In him and through him God accomplishes the work of reconciliation.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁰ Hegermann, in *Schöpfungsmittler*, 107, goes too far with his supposition: “It can be assumed that the hymn makes a direct allusion to this passage.”

¹⁹¹ E.g., LXX Deut 12:5*, 11*; 14:23*; 16:2*, 6*, 11*; 26:2*; 3 Kg 6:13*; 8:27*; etc. Cf. here also the paraphrase in the Targum on 1 Kings 8:27*, “Has it really pleased the Lord to cause his Sh^ekina to dwell among men who live on the earth?” Similarly in the Targum on Ps 68:17*, “It pleased the word of the Lord to let his Sh^ekina dwell on it [Sinai].” Cf. Aalen, “Begrepet,” 58; Munderlein, “Die Erwählung,” 270; Feillet, “La Création,” 236–38.

* ¹⁶ But because you graciously bestowed your glory on your people Israel, you sanctified this place.

3 Maccabees 2:16 (NRSV)

¹⁹² Cf. also 2 Macc 14:35*; Test Zeb 8:2; Test Joseph 10:2f; and Test Benj 6:4.

¹⁹³ The words “in him” (ἐν αὐτῷ) which are given emphatic prominence must be connected with “to dwell” (κατοικῆσαι) and not with “was pleased” (εὐδόκησεν). Munderlein, who advocates this connection, seeks to support his interpretation with the unfounded supposition that one can assume a Semitic linguistic basis (“Die Erwählung,” 268–70). In Col. 2:9* the sentence of 1:19* is taken up by “in him the whole fullness of the deity dwells bodily” (ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς). Thus “in him” (ἐν αὐτῷ) is to be connected with “to dwell” (κατοικῆσαι).

¹⁹⁴ This thought could be suggested by the comparable statement of the Johannine prologue, Jn 1:14*.

¹⁹⁵ Thus Munderlein, “Die Erwählung,” 271, with reference to the heavenly voice’s words “I am well pleased” (εὐδόκησα) in the stories of the baptism and transfiguration.

¹⁹⁶ Genuine early Christian kerygma appears in this sentence. Cf. Augustine’s words concerning the prologue of John: he had indeed also read in the books of the Neoplatonists that ‘in the beginning was the Logos, and through the Logos all things were made.’ “But that the Logos was made flesh and dwelt among us, I did not read there.” (*Sed quia verbum caro factum est et habitaverit in nobis, non ibi legi. Conf. 7.9 [Trans.]*).

■ 20* The last verse of the hymn deals with this work of reconciliation.¹⁹⁷ Although there has been no previous mention of it, it is presupposed here that unity and harmony of the cosmos have suffered a considerable disturbance, even a rupture. In order to restore the cosmic order reconciliation became necessary and was accomplished by the Christ-event. Through Christ, God himself achieved this reconciling.¹⁹⁸ The universe has been reconciled in that heaven and earth have been brought back into their divinely created and determined order¹⁹⁹ through the resurrection and exaltation of Christ.²⁰⁰ Now the universe is again under its head²⁰¹ and thereby cosmic peace has returned.²⁰² This peace which God has established through Christ²⁰³ binds the whole uni-

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Johann Michl, "Die 'Versöhnung' (Kol 1, 20)" *ThQ* 128 (1948): 442–62; B. N. Wambacq, "‘per eum reconciliare ... quae in caelis sunt’ (Col 1, 20)," *RB* 55 (1948): 35–42; Wilhelm Michaelis, *Die Versöhnung des Alls* (Bern: 1950), 24f; Mussner, *Christus, das All*, 69–71; Lyonnet, "L'hymne christologique." Michl presents the history of the exegesis of this passage and gives v 20* the meaning of the renewed subordination of the angels under Christ after his *kenosis*. Wambacq understands "to reconcile" (ἀποκαταλλάξαι) as referring to the reconciliation of the angels of the Law which had been dethroned according to 2:15*. Lyonnet wonders whether the Jewish New Year's festival should be recalled in connection with v 20* as well as in connection with Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 2.192. Cf. above p. 45, n. 94.

¹⁹⁸ The verb ἀποκαταλλάσσειν (to reconcile) only appears in Christian literature. Cf. Friedrich Büchsel, *TDNT* 1, 258; Bauer, s.v. Paul uses καταλλάσσειν (to reconcile) in Rom 5:10*; 1 Cor 7:11*; and 2 Cor 5:18ff*. The verb ἀποκαταλλάσσειν appears again only in Col 1:22* and Eph 2:16*.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Ernst Käsemann, "Erwägungen zum Stichwort 'Versöhnungslehre im Neuen Testament' " in *Zeit und Geschichte, Festschrift für Rudolf Bultmann* (Tübingen: 1964), 48f, "We are dealing here with a tradition which originally was of a hymnic-liturgical character and which therefore derives from the 'doxologia' of the Hellenistic communities." [Trans.]

²⁰⁰ The second strophe is given its heading by the christological titles "the beginning" (ἀρχή) and "first-born from the dead" (πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν). Cf. Schweizer, *Neotestamentica*, 298.

²⁰¹ The words εἰς αὐτον (in him) are not to be read as εἰς αὐτόν (toward himself, i.e. to God) and thus be related to God (thus Moule, ad loc. with reference to 2 Cor 5:19*). Rather, they correspond to the εἰς αὐτόν (in him, i.e. toward Christ) of v 16* and in connection with ἀποκαταλλάξαι (to reconcile) they signify "the conquering of the cosmic enmity through the rulership of Christ" (Dibelius-Greeven, ad loc.).

²⁰² V 20* must not be interpreted by 1:22* in terms of the reconciliation of the world of men (thus Friedrich Büchsel, *TDNT* 1, 258), but rather, in pronouncing the word of reconciliation to the community, in 1:22* the author of Col utilizes the concept of a reconciliation which encompasses the whole of the universe.

²⁰³ The verb εἰρηνοποιεῖν (to make peace) is not used often, cf. Werner Foerster, *TDNT* 2, 418–20, and Bauer, s.v. In the LXX it occurs only in Pr 10:10*. Isa 27:5* in the LXX reads ποιήσωμεν εἰρήνην (let us make peace); Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion translate it with εἰρηνοποιήσει ("he shall make peace" in one Greek term). In the NT the word is used only here, yet cf. Mt 5:9* μακάριοι οἱ εἰρηνοποιοί (blessed are the peacemakers).

verse together again into unity and underlines that the restored creation is reconciled with God.²⁰⁴ Contrary to apocalyptic expectations, peace is not something which will come only at the end of time; rather, it has already appeared in all things and the cosmic work of redemption has been done (cf. Phil. 2:10f*²⁰⁵). As the one who reconciled the cosmos, Christ has entered his kingly rule. Because he is the mediator of reconciliation,²⁰⁶ he is therefore also praised as the mediator of creation,²⁰⁷ as Lord over the universe, over powers and principalities.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ Concerning cosmic peace, cf. Asc Isa 11:23 “And I saw him and he was in the firmament ... and all angels of the firmament and the Satan saw him and they worshipped him.” In Jewish prayers the petition for peace “in his (God’s) heights and among us and for all Israel” appears repeatedly (Qaddish prayer, cf. Willy Staerck, *Altjüdische liturgische Gebete*, KIT 58 [Berlin: ²1930], 29–32 [Trans.]). According to *b. Ber.* 16b, R. Saphra (ca. 300) used to pray, “May it be your will, Yahweh our God, that you grant peace to the upper family (world of angels) and to the lower family (Israel) and to the students who busy themselves with your Torah.” [Trans.] Cf. Billerbeck 1, 420.

* ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:10–11 (NRSV)

²⁰⁵ This conception of the cosmic reconciliation is to be clearly distinguished from Gnostic concepts, because the reconciliation of heaven and earth would be unthinkable for Gnosticism. Cf. Eduard Schweizer, *Neotestamentica*, 304, and also his article in *TWNT* 7, 1072, n. 474, “The reconciliation of the material world with the heavens would be the exact opposite of Gnostic hope.” [Trans.]

²⁰⁶ For the interpretation of Lohmeyer, who would like to understand the reconciliation as well as the reference to the blood of the cross of Christ against the background of the Jewish Day of Atonement (Lohmeyer, 66–68), see the critical discussion of his thesis above, p. 45f. Cf. also Gabathuler, *Jesus Christus, Haupt der Kirche*, 132f.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Maurer, “Die Begründung der Herrschaft Christi,” 89, “Thus the starting point for the connection of the Christ with creation is to be found in the understanding of the redeemer as the goal of all history. For Paul, Christ is the goal of all the ways and plans of God. Since, however, all things aim toward him, there is also, then, the disclosure which comes from him that, as the hidden goal, he was always there, even from the beginning of the ways.” [Trans.]

²⁰⁸ The train of thought of the hymn aims at this: whoever belongs to this Lord is free from the enslaving (cosmic) powers and from the compelling force of fate. Cf. Tatian, *Or. Graec.* 9.2, “But we are superior to fate, and instead of the erring demons we have come to know one unerring master, and since we are not led by fate we reject the decrees of it.” (ἡμεῖς δὲ καὶ εἰμαρμένης ἐσμὲν ἀνώτεροι καὶ ἀντὶ πλανητῶν δαιμόνων ἕνα τὸν ἀπλανῆ δεσπότην μεμαθήκαμεν καὶ οὐ καθ’ εἰμαρμένην ἀγόμενοι τοῦς ταύτης νομοθέτας παρητήμεθα [Trans.]). Cf. also Eduard Schweizer, “Das hellenistische Weltbild as Produkt der Weltangst,” in *Neotestamentica*, 15–27.

At this point the author of the epistle to the Colossians has added an interpretive phrase: through the blood of his cross (διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ);²⁰⁹ this gives a new direction to the train of thought.²¹⁰ A “theology of glory,” which might view the consummation as already achieved, is corrected by the “theology of the cross” (cf. 2:14f*).²¹¹ Peace has not been established in an other-worldly drama but rather in the death of Jesus Christ. In agreement with the direction of Pauline theology, this points to the cross as the place where the reconciliation occurred, which is proclaimed in the “word of the cross” (λόγος ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ 1 Cor 1:18*) or

²⁰⁹ Cf. above, p. 43. By this formulation, the author joins with the common Christian parlance of the blood of Christ as a reference to the vicarious death of Christ, yet he gives it a Pauline interpretation by the addition of the phrase “of his cross” (τοῦ σταυροῦ).

²¹⁰ Cf. the Pauline gloss at the end of the first strophe of the hymn of Phil 2:6–11*: “even death on the cross” (θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ 2:8*).

* ¹⁴ erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross.

¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

Colossians 2:14–15 (NRSV)

²¹¹ This correction arrests all attempts to utilize the hymn for the purposes of a natural or cosmic theology; this must also be asserted over against a newly advocated “ecumenical” theology: Joseph Sittler, “Called to Unity,” *The Ecumenical Review* 14 (1961–62): 177–87, does indeed establish first that “Against that error (i.e., among the Colossians) which, had it persisted, would have trapped Christ within terms of a purely moral and spiritual power and hope, Paul sets off a kind of chain-reaction from the central atom, and the staccato ring of *ta panta* is the sounding of its reverberations into the farthest reaches of the human fact, event and thought. All is claimed for God, and all is Christic” (p. 178). But subsequently Sittler directly contradicts the theology of Col: “Creation is a work of God, who is light. And the light of the Creator-God falls upon and inheres within his creation. The world of nature can be the place of this light that ‘came’ by Jesus Christ because, despite the world’s hostility to that light, it was never without the light of God” (p. 180). Otto Alexander Dilschneider, *Christus Pantokrator* (Berlin: 1962) develops his “fragments” of an ecumenical theology on the basis of the peculiar presupposition that the epistle to the Colossians is a case of “late Paulinism” (27f, *passim*) whose mythological terminology must be related and applied to the forms of the appearance of myth today by means of a “transmythical interpretation” (p. 57). For a critique of Sittler and Dilschneider, cf. also Gabathuler, *Jesus Christus, Haupt der Kirche*, 152–67, 177–81. Concerning the question of a cosmic Christology, cf. also Wilhelm Andersen, *Jesus Christus und der Kosmos* (Bad Salzflun: 1963); Horst Bürkle, “Die Frage nach dem ‘kosmischen Christus’ als Beispiel einer ökumenisch orientierten Theologie” *KD* 11 (1965): 103–115.

* ¹⁸ For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

in the “word of reconciliation” (λόγος τῆς καταλλαγῆς 2 Cor 5:19*). Since the Christ-event pertains to the whole world, the crucified and resurrected One must be heralded as the Lord in all lands (cf. 1:24–29*). Whoever belongs to this Lord is “new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.” (καινὴ κτίσις τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρῆλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονεν καινὰ 2 Cor 5:17*).

To be sure, the hymn emphasizes the universal significance of the Christ-event by exhibiting its cosmic dimensions and by speaking of salvation for the whole world, including the whole creation. This, however, does not ascribe any special dignity or eminence to the powers and principalities—as though salvation were their only aim from the beginning.²¹² Rather, the reference to the powers and principalities is made in order to proclaim the message of Christ who has been installed as Head and Lord over all things. This means, however, that the right understanding of the cosmological statements of the first part of the hymn is disclosed only by the soteriological statements of the second strophe. The great drama, wherein the principalities are stripped of their power and the reconciliation of all things has taken place, is for the sake of man alone. To him

1 Corinthians 1:18 (NRSV)

* ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

2 Corinthians 5:19 (NRSV)

* ²⁴ I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.

²⁵ I became its servant according to God’s commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,

²⁶ the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints.

²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

²⁸ It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

²⁹ For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me.

Colossians 1:24–29 (NRSV)

* ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NRSV)

²¹² Cf. Lohse, “Christusherrschaft und Kirche,” 216.

comes the word of peace wrought by Christ. This peace now holds sway in the realm in which Christ rules, here and now, as the beloved Son of the Father—in the Church, in his body over which he is the Head.²¹³

²¹³ By the previous vss 13* and 14*, and by the following application of vss 21–23*, the author of Col indicates in what sense he understands the hymn and in what sense he wants to utilize it in his argumentation with the “philosophy” (φιλοσοφία). In this connection it must be noted that the cosmological statements are not developed further. Rather, the concepts “head” (κεφαλή v 18*; 2:10*, 19*), “body” (σῶμα v 18*; 1:24*; 2:9*, 17*, 19*; 3:15*) and “to reconcile” (ἀποκαταλλάσσειν v 20*, 21f*) are taken up again in order to describe the reconciliation as the reality which shapes the “church” (ἐκκλησία) which is the body under its head. The theme of “all”/“all things” (πᾶν / πάντα), going through the whole hymn, sounds continuously throughout the letter: “Christ is all and in all” (πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν Χριστός 3:11*).