Christ the Lord in Creation and Redemption (1:15–20) [1]

Bibliography

The following is a select list of works chosen from the vast amount of secondary literature written on verses 15–20. Further bibliographical references will be found in these and other works noted at the relevant exegetical points. Commentaries which have not been included are listed.
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AnBib Analecta biblica (Rome: PBI)

ed. edited, edition(s), editor

SJLA Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity (Leiden: Brill)

SPCK Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge

WMANT Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament (Neukirchen: Neukirchener)

JTS Journal of Theological Studies

BU Biblische Untersuchungen

ATANT Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments

NovTSup Supplement(s) to *Novum Testamentum*

TU TU Texte und Untersuchungen

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FRLANT Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck)

SBM Stuttgarter biblische Monographien

RSR Recherches de science religieuse

EvQ The Evangelical Quarterly

TQ Theologische Quartalschrift

NTS New Testament Studies

RTR Reformed Theological Review

ZNW Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft

SNTSMS Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series

EKKNT Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament

TLZ Theologische Literaturzeitung

ThBer Theologische Berichte

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Translation

15. *He is the image of the invisible God,*
The firstborn *over all creation,*
16. For *in him all things were created,*
In heaven and on earth,
Things visible and invisible,
Whether thrones or dominions, principalities or powers,
All things were created through him and for him;
17. And he *is before all things,*
And in him all things hold together.
18. And he *is the head of the body, the church.*
He is the beginning,
The firstborn *from the dead,*
In order that he might be pre-eminent in everything,
19. For *in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell,*
20. *And through him to reconcile all things to him,*
Whether things on earth or in heaven,
By making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

Form/Structure/Setting
1. Literary Form

The weight of NT scholarly opinion today considers that Colossians 1:15–20 is a pre-Pauline "hymn" inserted into the letter's train of thought by the author. The preceding verses (12–14) are said to preserve the style of a confession (see above 19, 20) with its first person plurals ("we" and "us"), while the hymn itself makes no reference to the confessing community (all personal references are absent). Instead it asserts in exalted language the supremacy of Christ in creation and redemption. The immediately following words (vv 21–23) use the language of direct speech to apply themes from the hymn, especially that of reconciliation, to the Colossian community.

In describing the passage in this way it should be noted that the term "hymn" is not employed in the modern sense of what we understand by congregational hymns with metrical verses. Nor are we to think in terms of Greek poetic form. The category is used broadly, similar to that of "creed," and includes dogmatic, confessional, liturgical, polemical or doxological material (cf. Schweizer, 51, following Benoit, *Christianity*, 230, 231). The criteria are twofold: *(a) stylistic—*

CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly

SNT Studien zum Neuen Testament

NT New Testament

cf. *confer,* compare

"a certain rhythmical lilt ascertainable when the passage is read aloud, a correspondence between words and phrases which are placed in the sentences in an obviously carefully selected position … the use of *parallelismus membrorum* (i.e. an arrangement into couplets); and traces of a rudimentary metre and the employment of rhetorical devices such as *homoeoteleuton*, alliteration, antithesis and *chiasmus*" (R. P. Martin, *Carmen Christi. Philippians ii. 5–11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* SNTSMS 4; Cambridge: University Press, 1967) 12, 13, and *(b) linguistic*—an unusual vocabulary, particularly the presence of theological terms, which is different from the language of the surrounding context (see R. P. Martin, "Aspects of Worship in the New Testament Church," *Vox Evangelica* 2 [1963] 6–32, especially 16–21, following the tests suggested by Stauffer; cf. Sanders, *Hymns*, 1–5).

So the presence of introductory relative clauses (ὅς ἐστιν, vv 15, 18), the positioning of words in such a way that lines and strophes may be arranged, chiasmus and *inclusio*, and unusual terms (which either do not appear elsewhere in the Pauline corpus or are used with a different meaning), are considered by the majority view as grounds for regarding this as a traditional hymnic piece.

Norden (*Agnostos Theos*, 25–54; cf. Gabathuler, *Jesus Christus*, 21–26) was the first scholar in recent times to subject the paragraph to a comprehensive form critical analysis and he sought to find in these verses "undoubtedly old traditional material" which he considered came originally from Jewish circles influenced by Greek ideas. Evidence of the latter was a Stoic "all"-formula (cf. 1:16, 17) and in a Platonic-type division of the cosmos into "things seen and things unseen." He noted two strophes or stanzas of unequal length (vv 15–18*a* and 18*b*–20). The first, beginning with "who is" (ὅς ἐστιν) of verse 15, treats the theme of Christ and creation, while the second, commencing with the same striking relative clause "who is" in verse 18, refers to Christ and the church. The term "firstborn" (πρωτότοκος) occurs in both stanzas (vv 15 and 18).

Since Norden's time continental scholars, in particular, have sought to determine the precise structure of this so-called hymnic paragraph. So, for example, Lohmeyer (40–68; cf. Gabathuler, *Jesus Christus*, 29–39), who described verses 13–29 as "the order of a primitive Christian worship service," which opened with a thanksgiving prayer (v 12), saw the hymn consisting of two strophes, each in seven lines (1:15–16*a*, 1:18–20) which were connected by a section of three lines (1:16*f*–17).

Käsemann (*Essays*, 149–68; cf. Gabathuler, *Jesus Christus*, 49–61) thought that the passage consisted of two strophes each with six lines (1:15–16, 1:18*b*–20), which were connected by 1:17–18*a*. But he, like many others since (see the lists in Benoit, *Christianity*, 238) regarded the words "the church" (τῆϛ ἐκκλησίας) of verse 18*a* together with those of verse 20*b*, "through the blood of his cross" (διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ), as interpolations (for an assessment of Käsemann's presentation with special reference to his proposed origin of the hymn see 37, 38). According to Masson (104–107; cf. Gabathuler, *Jesus Christus*, 42–49) the parallelism was more Semitic than Greek and he sought to arrange the text in five strophes of four lines each on a supposed metrical basis (vv 15–16*b*, 16*c–f*, 17–18, 19–20*b*, 20*c–f*).

J. M. Robinson ("A Formal Analysis of Colossians 1:15–20, " *JBL* 76 [1957] 270–87; cf. Gabathuler, *Jesus Christus*, 80–88; R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, *Pre-Existence, Wisdom and the Son of Man* [SNTSMS 21; Cambridge: University Press, 1973] 168–74) saw a close correspondence

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i.e. *id est*, that is

between the two stanzas with matching phrases and terms. However, to achieve this symmetry he has to delete from the existing text a number of phrases (the last clause of v 18 has been moved to the end of the second strophe, the first clause of the same verse loses its reference to the church, and the list of heavenly powers in v 16 is dropped). Robinson then reconstructs a hypothetical first draft of the hymn which the author of the epistle has taken over and supplemented, at the same time reinterpreting the meaning of the words.

E. Bammel ("Versuch zu Col 1:15–20, " *ZNW* 52 [1961] 88–95; cf. Gabathuler, *Jesus Christus*, 118–21) contended that the hymn consisted of two strophes, each containing an elaborate chiastic parallelism and being introduced by "who is" (ὅς ἐστιν). However, his interpretation does not give sufficient emphasis to the parallel occurrence of "he is" (αὐτός ἐστιν) in verses 17 and 18. In addition, verses 17, 18*a* and 20 which contain teaching vital to the hymn are left unattached to the main structure (cf. Martin, NCB, 64).

Important and influential contributions to this ongoing debate (it is not possible in the brief compass of this note to examine all recent works on vv 15–20) have been made by Schweizer (note the bibliographical references to his writings in his recent commentary, 44–74). Observing the formal parallelism between verses 15 and 18 ("he is," ὅς ἐστιν, and "firstborn," πρωτότοκος), the repetition of "because in him" (ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ, vv 16 and 19) and "all things through him" (τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ, vv 16 and 20), Schweizer arranged the hymn into two strophes (vv 15, 16 and 18*b*–20) between which stood a middle strophe (*Zwischenstrophe*) or stanza (vv 17–18*a*) that acted as a bridge (cf. Lähnemann, *Kolosserbrief*, 38). The first stanza consisted of three lines in which the cosmic Christ is praised as the Lord of creation, the One who brought the universe into existence and who directs its destiny. The middle stanza partly repeats the thought of Christ's preexistent activity and then proceeds to assert that he is the unifying principle which holds the universe together. The final strophe praises this cosmic Lord who embodies the divine "fullness" (πλήρωμα). As the risen One, he is God's agent in bringing the universe into harmony with God's purposes through reconciliation.

To secure an original hymn of perfect symmetry, with each stanza consisting of three lines and having a discernible rhythmical pattern, Schweizer omitted four phrases. These comments (v 16, "thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities"; v 18, "the church"; v 18, "that in everything he may be pre-eminent"; and v 20, "making peace by the blood of his cross") which exceed the rhythmical order and parallelism of the original hymn are, according to Schweizer, the author's own additions to a composition that was already in circulation prior to his writing the letter. He has thus corrected the theology of the hymn, for, with the exception of the first, these additions disagree with the theological conceptions of the original composition: at verse 16 "thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities" is a clarification of the statement, "all things in heaven and on earth," relating it to a special issue the letter addresses itself to, namely the subordination of all heavenly powers to Christ. The additional words of verse 18, "the church," reinterpret the hymn so as to rebut the false idea that Christ's body is to be identified with the world or that redemption was a merely physical or super-physical event. The third comment, "that in everything he might be pre-eminent," verse 18, is another reinterpretation in a Pauline sense, while in verse 20 the notion of reconciliation is corrected to that of making peace, i.e. pacification in the sense Roman emperors understood it. Finally, into a theology that focused

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NCB New Century Bible [Commentary] (new ed.)

exclusively on resurrection and exaltation the author introduces the Pauline stress on the cross as the reconciling act of Christ (v 20).

In spite of the increasing acceptance within certain circles of this reconstruction there seem to be considerable difficulties in the opinion of the present writer. If the author of Colossians made corrections to the hymn, as Schweizer has suggested, then why did he allow certain elements which were different from his own theology to remain? If reconciliation and pacification (v 20), to take but one example, are essentially different, why did he not remove the idea which did not fit in with his own view, especially as the formal structure of the hymn had been "ruined" anyway? To remove the so-called intruding elements ought not to have been difficult for the author of Colossians. Further, why is it necessary to consider "reconciliation" and "making peace" (including the notion of pacification) as essentially different (cf. Schweizer, *Neotestamentica*, 326)? In our judgment a more adequate exegesis can be given (see 55–57). But these questions only serve to raise the more general issue as to whether one can reasonably attempt to discover the original form of the hymn anyway. Lohse, 44, for example, has criticized the reconstructions of Robinson, Bammel and Schweizer on the grounds that: *(a)* their alterations meddle too much with the given text; *(b)* they have not provided sufficient evidence to make probable the hypothesis of two stanzas of exactly parallel structures (Schweizer's division of a middle strophe has been criticized on the grounds that v 16*c* with its ἔκτισται belongs to the preceding strophe as part of an *inclusio;* so Kehl, *Christushymnus*, 43, 44, and cf. Schnackenburg, EKKNT Vorarbeiten 1, 35); while *(c)* most of the phrases which are considered to be additions to an earlier shorter hymn are in fact statements which expand the meaning of the lines already plotted (cf. Pöhlmann's comments, *ZNW* 64 [1973] 53–74, with reference to the "all"-formula). Gabathuler (*Jesus Christus*, 125–31), at the end of his study on the history of research into chapter 1:15–20, concluded that there was still considerable uncertainty about the stylistic criteria. For example, when criteria of form and content differ, which take precedence? Or when different formal criteria lead to different results, which stylistic tests are to be followed?

In spite of the considerable amount of scholarly work carried out since Gabathuler's researches were published (1965), no consensus has been reached about the number and content of the stanzas in verses 15–20, or about possible Pauline or post-Pauline additions (cf. M. Wolter, *Rechtfertigung und zukünftiges Heil. Untersuchungen zu Röm* 5, 1–11, [BNZW 43; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1978] 49; note the variations, and these do not include all possibilities, listed by Benoit, *Christianity*, 238). Even Lohse's conservative reconstruction (44, 45) with its two stanzas of unequal length which do not correspond to each other in all their details suggests, on stylistic grounds, that the latter strophe begins with the words of verse 18*b*, "He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead" (ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχή, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν), so paralleling the opening statements of verse 15, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (ὅς ἐστιν εἰκών …, πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως). On this view the assertion of verse 18*a*, "He is the head of the body," forms a fitting climax to the first part of the poem (or at least the middle stanza) and refers to Christ's headship over the entire cosmos. But as the text stands this statement is a soteriological one. It is not certain that the words, "the church" (τῆς ἐκκλησίας), belonged to the original hymn; and although most recent writers regard the words as a redactional addition Kehl (*Christushymnus*, 93, 97), Hegermann (*Schöpfungsmittler*, 106) and Gibbs (*Creation*, 105; cf. Feuillet, *Christ*, 217–28) have argued that they are essential to the meaning of verse 18*a*.

No single reconstruction is completely convincing. Kümmel's comment (*Introduction*, 343) is worth quoting at length:

… the numerous reconstructions of the hymn expanded by the author that have been undertaken since Lohmeyer's analysis have scarcely led to a really convincing result. Indeed, the assumption is not yet proved that a *hymn constructed according to a strict scheme* has been used and that accordingly every fragment of a sentence beyond the scheme must stem from the author of Col. What is far more likely is that the author of Col himself [whom Kümmel regards as Paul] has formed the hymn, utilizing traditional material …

(This is essentially the position of Dibelius-Greeven, Moule, Maurer and Feuillet, etc)

It seems, therefore, better to speak of certain parallels, observed originally by Norden (note the subsequent treatments by Kehl, *Christushymnus*, 30–34, and Zeilinger, *Der Erstgeborene*, 39–43). So ὅς ἐστιν εἰκών ("he is the image," v 15) corresponds to ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχή ("he is the beginning," v 18); πρωτότοκοσπάσης κτίσεως ("firstborn of all creation," v 15) is parallel to πρωτότοκος ἐκτῶν νεκρῶν ("firstborn from the dead," v 18), while each of the relative clauses in turn is followed by a causal clause beginning with ὅτι ("because"): ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐτίσθη ("because in him all things were created," v 16) and ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν ("because in him … was pleased," v 19). The cosmic dimensions of Christ's rule round out verse 16, εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι ("whether thrones or dominions, principalities or powers"), and verse 20, εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς ("whether things on earth or in the heavens"). One may note the frequent use of πᾶς ("all") and the formal chiasmus in verses 16c and 20:

a τὰ πάντα ("all things")   *b* καί δῖ αὐτοῦ ("and through him")
b δῖ αὐτοῦ καί ("through him   *a* τὰ πάντα ("all things").
and")

In verse 16 two examples of chiasmus occur. In the first, two lines are constructed chiastically in synonymous parallelism:

ὅτι ἐ αἰτῷ ἐκτίση τά πάντα
τὰ πάντα δῖ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται
"For in him all things were created
All things were created through him and for him."

In the second instance τὰ πάντα ("all things") is expanded and made more explicit with the words:

ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς
τὰ ὁρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα
"In the heavens and on earth,
things visible and invisible."

It has also been suggested that the repeated τὰ πάντα ("all things") and the verb ἔκτισται ("created") of the concluding line is an example of *inclusio* which binds the second chiasmus together.

Finally, the formal correspondence between verses 17 and 18 needs to be noted:

17   καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων
18   καὶ αἰτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλή
            "And he is before all things …

And he is the head …"

2. BACKGROUND

The possible backgrounds to these verses suggested by scholars have been remarkably varied. The following suggestions have been the most influential (cf. R. P. Martin, *Colossians: The Church's Lord and the Christian's Liberty* [Exeter: Grand Rapids, MI: 1972]; 1982 reprint, Palm Springs, CA 40–44):

(a) Käsemann (*Essays*, 149–68) thought that once the additions "the church" (τῆς ἐκκλησίας, v 18) and "through the blood of his cross" (διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐοῦ, v 20), a mere eight words out of 112, were removed the hymn no longer displayed any specifically Christian characteristics. Originally it was a *pre-Christian Gnostic text* which dealt with the metaphysical and supra-historical drama of the Gnostic Redeemer. The hymn was taken over in Christian usage in a baptismal liturgical reinterpretation (integral to Käsemann's argument is the view that vv 12–14 were known in a pre-Pauline baptismal context and served as an "introit" to the hymn; for a critique of this see 19, 20) and finally cited by the author of Colossians in a refutation (!) of the Gnostic counter-movement at Colossae. For Käsemann creation and redemption were related constituents in the myth of the primeval man and Redeemer. He broke into the sphere of death as the pathfinder for those who belong to him. The purpose of the Redeemer's incarnation was to achieve an objective reconciliation—a reconciliation of the whole universe, i.e. of all the aeons that make up the cosmos. Such pacification (v 20) is neither personal nor moral. Instead, it constitutes a recognition on the part of these cosmic forces that the one aeon is Lord. The conflicting elements are pacified and the Redeemer announces universal peace.

Yet Käsemann's thesis is unconvincing for the following reasons: first, apart from his treatment of the strophes on stylistic grounds which is doubtful (note Gabathuler's criticisms, *Jesus Christus*, 52) even if it could be argued satisfactorily that the phrases in verses 18 and 20 were additions, there is the complex issue as to whether a Gnostic redemption saga has any bearing on our understanding of the New Testament message, and the legitimacy of appealing to second century documents for support. Second, several terms in the paragraph have an Old Testament ring about them, for example, the repeated references to the divine creation (vv 15, 16) and the verb εὐδοκέω ("be pleased," v 19) used in the OT of God's electing decree (Lohse, 45; see the exegesis below). Third, Schweizer and Lohse have correctly pointed out that the Christian character of the phrase πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν ("the firstborn from among the dead," v 18) cannot be doubted. Indeed, the former contends that Käsemann's thesis of a pre-Christian hymn is "wrecked" by this phrase (Schweizer, *Neotestamentica*, 297, who is followed by Lohse, 45, and Pöhlmann, *ZNW* 64 [1973] 54; note especially the treatment of Kehl, *Christushymnus*, 88–93). The fourth and perhaps main criticism leveled against Käsemann's theory concerns the teaching about reconciliation. It is doubtful whether there is any non-Christian parallel to the Redeemer who comes to earth and unites God and man. Schweizer (*Neotestamentica*, 297) and others (cf. Pöhlmann, *ZNW* 64 [1973] 54, who consider that the attempt to find a pre-Christian original form of the hymn has now been given up by scholars) regard this as a distinctively Christian motif (the references in Codex *V* of the Nag Hammadi texts and the *Apoc Adam* which are thought to present an example of a redemption myth unaffected by the Christian story of Jesus are dis-

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OT Old Testament

V Vulgate

puted as to their significance, cf. R. McL. Wilson, *Gnosis and the New Testament* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1968] 138, 139; American edition [Philadelphia: Fortress]).

(b) The second approach is to understand the hymn's religious message against the background of *Rabbinic Judaism*. Burney (*JTS* 27 [1926] 160–77) and W. D. Davies (*Paul and Rabbinic Judaism. Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*. 2nd ed. London: SPCK, 1955, 150–52; 4th American edition [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980] have been the chief exponents of this view. The former drew attention to the many similarities between the hymn and OT passages, particularly Proverbs 8 and Genesis 1 as interpreted by the rabbis with reference to Wisdom. Paul is thought to have given a meditative exposition on the opening words of the Bible (*bᵉrēšît*), in which every possible meaning the rabbis were used to extracting from Genesis 1:1 ("in the beginning God created") and Proverbs 8:22 ("the Lord begat me in the beginning [*rēšît*] of his way") was said to apply to the church's Lord. Thus, the need to call in extraneous, Hellenistic sources to explain the passage would be reduced if Burney's thesis is correct.

Although this approach has been criticized for assuming that Paul's opposition at Colossae sprang *solely* from a Jewish source (cf. Gabathuler, *Jesus Christus*, 28, 29) and that the theory is too ingenious (would a predominantly Gentile church have understood rabbinic methods of interpretation?), several positive points emerge. First, Burney and Davies are right in underlining the importance of the OT statements about creation as a background to the hymnic piece. Second, the significance attached to the Wisdom tradition in which Wisdom's function in creation is understood in Colossians 1:15–18 as being transferred to Christ is a point accepted by exegetes who have preferred to seek the background to the paragraph in Hellenistic Judaism (Pöhlmann, *ZNW* 64 [1973] 73, has shown that although the "all"-formula was frequently used in many prayer texts of the ancient world it did not appear often in the prayer traditions of early Rabbinic Judaism). So although Burney's detailed argument may be open to question, his drawing attention to OT parallels which clearly lie close at hand—rather than some uncertain parallels which have been claimed in Gnosticism, Stoicism and elsewhere—is commendable.

(c) The third general approach considers the background to Colossians 1:15–20 is to be sought in *Hellenistic Judaism*. This is the view of many continental scholars, especially Schweizer whose writings on this theme have been influential (cf. the references in his *commentary*, 44–74). The approach seeks to take seriously the character of the church as predominantly Gentile Christian and recognizes that the Jewish elements in the heresy which troubled the Colossians stemmed from the Dispersion. Schweizer considers that Colossians 1:15–20 may be part of a wider indebtedness of NT Christology to a type of Hellenistic Jewish speculation in which a central place was given to the Wisdom of God. The theology of the Christian group that created the hymn can be clearly seen from the many parallels to it found in the Wisdom literature. Christ is depicted as the pre-existent Mediator of creation and the One who holds together the cosmos, preserving the world from dissolution. The new point, made by the group which created the hymn, is that: "In Christ heaven and earth are reconciled again" (*Neotestamentica*, 325).

According to Schweizer the author of Colossians *corrected* the theology of the hymn in two ways: first, by inserting into the passage four additional comments (noted above in the section dealing with the literary form); second, in his commentary which follows (1:21–23) the author stressed that it is mankind, not nature, that is reconciled—and this through Christ's death on the cross.

We have already drawn attention to some of the considerable problems associated with Schweizer's suggestions about the author's "corrections" to the hymn (note Schnackenburg's pertinent question about additions or corrections, EKKNT Vorarbeiten 1, 37). It seems very un-

usual that the writer should allow certain elements which were different from his own theology to remain after he had corrected the hymn. Further, it is not at all certain that the author has varied the hymn's theology in the commentary immediately following the passage (1:21–23). In our judgment a more adequate explanation is possible (see the exegesis below). But Schweizer's point regarding the indebtedness of NT Christology to a general "Wisdom" background in Hellenistic Judaism may be correct, provided we keep in mind the following points: (i) a sharp distinction between Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism, later reflected in the early church, can hardly be sustained in the light of recent research. Although this distinction has been axiomatic in some NT scholarly circles it has been rightly questioned by I. H. Marshall ("Palestinian and Hellenistic Christianity: Some Critical Comments," *NTS* 19 [1972–73] 271–87) and M. Hengel (in his magisterial work, *Judaism and Hellenism. Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, Tr J. Bowden [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974]).

(ii) While the predicates of and activities ascribed to Wisdom in Hellenistic Judaism are akin to several of the statements made about Christ in Colossians 1:15–20 (see the detailed exegetical comments below) the differences ought not to be overlooked. There is, for example, no parallel in Jewish Wisdom literature (or in the rest of the extant Jewish materials for that matter) to the statement about Christ as the goal of creation: "all things have been created through him and *for him* (εἰς αὐτόν)," verse 16.

(iii) Further, while the statements about Wisdom—as the "image," "firstborn," etc, and the one through whom the universe was created—are understood in a quasi-personal way within the framework of Hellenistic Judaism, the one spoken of in our paragraph of Colossians is the living person, Jesus Christ, whom Paul had met face to face on the Damascus road. To the early Christians, as to Paul, Jesus Christ was the incarnate Wisdom of God.

If we suppose that the passage (along with several others in the NT: cf. Heb 1:1–4; John 1:1–18) gives evidence of an indebtedness to a general Wisdom background in the OT and Judaism, we still have to bear in mind that these predicates and activities ascribed to Wisdom came to be applied to Jesus of Nazareth, recently crucified and risen from the dead. How did this come about? The early Christians may have had the thought-forms provided by this Wisdom background but the application of these to Jesus Christ is still not explained by the background itself.

3. AUTHORSHIP

From what has already been written above, it is clear that the majority of recent writers think that the hymnic passage of chapter 1:15–20 is non-Pauline. (A minority including Lohmeyer, Percy, Dibelius, Maurer, Moule, Bruce, Feuillet, Kümmel and Caird take the paragraph to be Pauline.)

Two main arguments are advanced against the Pauline authorship of the hymn: first, a significant number of terms which do not appear elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, or which are used with a different meaning, turn up in the hymn (Lohse, 42, and Deichgräber, *Gottteshymnus*, 152, 153). So the Christological predicate εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ ("image of God," v 15) occurs only in a formula-type sentence in 2 Corinthians 4:4. ὁρατός ("visible," v 16) is used only here in the NT while ὀόρατος ("invisible," vv 15, 16) is unusual (Rom 1:20; 1 Tim 1:17; Heb 11:27) and is never employed in contrast to ὁρατός ("visible"). θρόνοι ("thrones," v 16) appears nowhere else in Paul while κυριότης ("dominion," v 16) turns up only once more (Eph 1:21). The intransitive form of συνίστημι ("be established," v 17) is otherwise not used by Paul. In a Christological context Paul refers to Christ as ἀπαραχή ("firstfruits," 1 Cor 15:20) but never as ἀρχή ("beginning," v 18). πρωτεύω ("preeminent," v 18) and εἰρηνοποιέω ("make peace," v 20) are *hapax legomena* in the NT. The verb κατοικέω ("dwell," v 19) appears again only in Colossians 2:9

(which refers back to the hymn) and Ephesians 3:17, while ἀποκαταλλάσσω ("reconcile," v 20) only in Ephesians 2:16. Paul mentions the "blood of Christ" (v 20) only where he takes over traditional Christian expressions (Rom 3:25; 5:9; 1 Cor 10:16; 11:25, 27; cf. also Eph 1:7; 2:13), while the combination αἷμα τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ ("blood of his cross," v 20) is without parallel.

But these observations do not present a convincing case against the Pauline authorship of verses 15–20 (note the critique of Kim, *Paul's Gospel*, 183–87). That the Christological predicate εἰκών τοῦ θεοῦ ("image of God") appears only in a formulalike sentence in 2 Corinthians 4:4 proves nothing (against Jervell's circular argument, *Imago*, 196, 197, 209; and Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus*, 152, 153, who by asserting that εἰκών and πρωτότοκος are pre-Pauline and pre-Christian fails to ask who applied them to Christ for the first time: Paul or someone else before him? No one denies that εἰκών τοῦ θεοῦ, for example, is a predicate of Wisdom or appears in Gen 1:27). It was possible for Paul to have composed the confession that Jesus Christ is the εἰκών τοῦ θεοῦ ("image of God") and used it both in 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:15 (see below). Further, what does the observation about rare words—ὁρατός, ἀόρατος, θρόνοι, κυριότητες, συνίστημι, κατοικέω, πρωτεύω and εἰρηνοποιέω—prove? Was Paul incapable of using these words if the subject matter so demanded? Were there better or more natural terms at the writer's disposal if he needed to introduce these particular motifs (cf. Moule, 61, 62)? ὁρατος ("visible") and ἀόρατος ("invisible") are not strange words for one who uses the latter for the invisible nature of God in Romans 1:20. θρόνοι ("thrones") and κυριότητες ("dominions") are perfectly intelligible terms to have used if Paul, with special reference to the Colossian heresy, emphasizes that even the cosmic principalities and powers were created in Christ. The derivatives of the stem καταλλαγ—("reconcile")—occur only in Paul in the NT (Percy, *Probleme*, 86). The noun ἀρχή ("beginning") rather than ἀπαρχή ("first-fruits") is entirely fitting in a passage where the supremacy of Christ is emphasized and where the first creation and the new creation are paralleled, particularly as Christ is designated as the beginning of the new creation and the One who has initiated it by his resurrection. Again it is doubtful whether all the passages mentioning the blood of Christ are pre-Pauline (cf. Rom 5:9). But even if this were the case, Paul would presumably have made it his own and therefore could still have used it as such in the paragraph of verses 15–20. As in Romans 5:1–11 the motifs of reconciliation and peace are tied in with the blood of Christ for it is the means of atonement (cf. Rom 3:25).

The second argument against the Pauline authorship of Colossians 1:15–20 is based on structural grounds so that an original hymn, reconstructed according to rhythm, parallelism and strophic arrangement, has been taken over and reworked by the author of Colossians. But if our arguments above—about the uncertainty of the stylistic criteria, the number and content of the stanzas in verses 15–20, the possible Pauline additions, and thus the question of whether a hymn was constructed according to a strict scheme at all—are correct, then this argument too is not proven.

In other words, the case against the Pauline authorship is considerably more flimsy than its more ardent advocates would have us believe. We may thus ask: Is it impossible to imagine that Paul was using a hymn which he had earlier composed (so Feuillet, *Christ*, 246–73) with interpretative additions or expansions here and there (but not corrections or contradictions) in view of the situation of his readers, or expressing in an exalted hymnic style his beliefs about Christ in view of the situation of his readers and making use of some of their language? In our view one or other of these alternatives is more likely than that the hymn is pre-Pauline.

Recently Kim (*Paul's Gospel*, 173–339, especially 173–79) has argued that it was Paul who initiated the "identification" of Jesus with the divine Wisdom in the early church, and this as

early as the first half of the '30s. He has pointed out that the designation of Christ as the εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ ("image of God," 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; cf. the almost synonymous μορφὴ θεοῦ, "form of God," Phil 2:6; Martin, *Carmen Christi*, 99–133, especially 107–120, and Kim, *Paul's Gospel*, 247–60) and the theme of Christians being conformed or transformed to the image of Christ appear explicitly only in Paul's letters of the NT (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; cf. v 52; cf. Col 3:9; 10; Eph 4:24). In John (cf. the λόγος in chapter 1:1–18 becoming incarnate and revealing the Father: 12:45; 14:9; note too the statement that the children of God "shall be like him when he appears, for we shall see him as he is," 1 John 3:2) and Hebrews (note the Wisdom Christology of Heb 1:3 [cf. Wisd 7:26] where the Son is the "radiance [ἀπαύγασμα] of God's glory" and the "exact representation [χαρακτήρ] of God's nature"; cf. also the theme of Christians sharing the salvation, perfection and glorification pioneered by the Son: 2:10, 11; cf. 5:9; 6:20; 10:14; 12:2) the conceptual thought forms are similar to those of Paul, but the latter's actual expressions of Christ as the "image of God" and of the Christian's being conformed or transformed into that image are different.

Kim goes on to argue that Paul saw the exalted Christ in glory as the "image of God" and as the Son of God on the road to Damascus. This perception led him to conceive of Christ in terms of the personified Wisdom of God. Paul's Wisdom Christology was rooted in the Damascus revelation. The OT and Jewish backgrounds provided him with certain categories and thought-forms with which he could interpret the Damascus experience and produce his theology. (A similar argument has been used by Kim, *Paul's Gospel*, 392–97, to show that " 'reconciliation' is a distinctive Pauline theologoumenon to describe the purpose of the atonement God has wrought in Christ" [392], and more recently by R. P. Martin, *Reconciliation. A Study of Paul's Theology*. London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott. Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1981.)

If these arguments are convincing so that Paul was the first to identify Christ with the εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ, and the Wisdom of God according to an OT and Jewish background, then the case for the Pauline authorship of the hymn is considerably strengthened. In fact, the only other alternative possible, if Kim's arguments are correct, is that the hymn is *post-Pauline* (a point that critical scholars do not accept) and has been utilized by the post-Pauline author of Colossians for his own purposes in writing the letter. (See the introduction for our discussion of the authorship of Colossians.)

Comment

15. ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου. The magnificent hymn in praise of Christ begins by asserting that he, the beloved Son, is "the image (εἰκών) of the invisible God." The very nature and character of God have been perfectly revealed in him; in him the invisible has become visible. Both Old and New Testaments make it plain that "no one has ever seen God." The Fourth Evangelist, however, adds that "the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has made him known" (John 1:18). A similar statement is made elsewhere by Paul who, probably with the Damascus road experience in mind, asserts that "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ)" had dawned upon him. The God whose creative Word in the beginning called light to shine forth from the darkness had now shone in his heart "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:4, 6; cf. 3:18). The same point is made in another way by the writer to the Hebrews that Christ is the "radiance (ἀπαύγασμα) of God's glory and the very impress of his being" (Heb 1:3).

εἰκών ("image") is employed by Paul on a number of occasions not only with reference to Christ as the image of God (here and 2 Cor 4:4), but also regarding the corollary of the increasing transformation of the people of Christ into that same image by the power of the indwelling

Spirit (2 Cor 3:18; cf. Col 3:10; Eph 4:24), so that at the end nothing remains of the earthly image in those who finally show forth the image of the heavenly man (1 Cor 15:49; Rom 8:29; cf. Bruce, *Paul*, 123; see above, where it is pointed out that linguistically, though not conceptually, Paul's use of "image" in this twofold way is unique in the NT).

Regarding Colossians 1:15, we are reminded of the OT where it is stated that man was made in God's image (Gen 1:26, 27) and for his glory (Isa 43:7). He is, the apostle states, "the image and glory of God" (1 Cor 11:7). Some have suggested it is difficult to separate Paul's depicting of the risen Christ as the second man, the last Adam, from his view of Christ as the image of God and the revealer of his glory (Bruce, *Paul*, 123). These two strands may well coalesce.

But Genesis 1 alone does not adequately explain the background to our phrase in Colossians 1:15 as Burney (*JTS* 27 [1926] 160–77) and others thought. On the other hand, attempts to understand the meaning of Paul's statement against an exclusively Greek background are not convincing either (see Feuillet, *Christ*, 166–75, for references). For although Plato had already called the cosmos the visible image of God (*Tim* 92c) and this notion was taken up elsewhere (cf. Lohse, 47), it does not explain the meaning of Paul's use of εἰκών here. Rather, as many scholars have argued, the Hellenistic-Jewish texts of Proverbs 8:22 and Wisdom 7:25 (cf. Kehl, *Christushymnus*, 52–81, especially 61–67, and Gibbs, *Creation*, 102, for references) provide a more convincing background to the meaning of "image." This term, used to refer to the divine revelation, was taken over in Hellenistic Judaism and transferred to "Wisdom." According to Proverbs 8:22, Wisdom was with the Lord at the beginning of his work, the creation of the world, while in Wisdom 7:25 the divine Wisdom which is personified, is described as the "image" (εἰκών) of God's goodness, i.e. the one who reveals the goodness of God.

Paul, in common with other NT writers (John 1:4; Heb 1:3), identified Christ with the Wisdom of God (see further Kim, *Paul's Gospel*, 173–339), ascribing to him certain activities which are predicated of personified Wisdom in the OT and Jewish literature.

As the first title of majesty, "image" emphasizes Christ's relation to God. The term points to his revealing of the Father on the one hand and his pre-existence on the other—it is both functional and ontological.

πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως. If "image" (εἰκών) emphasizes Christ's relation to God, then the second title, "firstborn of all creation" (on the omission of the article before "creation" see Robertson, *Grammar*, 772, and BDF para. 275[3]) designates his relationship to the creation. Stripped from its context and from other Pauline statements about Christ this phrase might be understood to include him among created things (as simply the "eldest" of the "family": at Rom 8:29 πρωτότοκος appears to be used in this inclusive sense).

But the context makes it plain that the title cannot refer to him as the first of all created beings since the immediately following words, which provide a commentary on the title (ὅτι), emphasize the point that he is the one by whom the whole creation came into being. Further, apart from the incompatibility of this thought with the teaching of Paul in general about the person and work of Christ, such an understanding is not required by the word πρωτότοκος ("firstborn") itself.

BDF F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (University of Chicago/University of Cambridge, 1961)

The term "firstborn" was frequently used in the LXX (130 times), mostly in genealogies and historical narratives, to indicate temporal priority and sovereignty of rank. Frequently "firstborn" was employed to denote one who had a special place in the father's love. So Israel is called "my beloved son" (υἱὸς πρωτότοκός μου, Exod 4:22), a phrase that expresses the particularly close relation between God and Israel. In Judaism the messianic king, as well as Israel, the patriarchs and the Torah are given this title of distinction (for references see Str-B 3, 256–58, 626; Michaelis, *TDNT* 6, 873–76).

Within the NT "firstborn" (πρωτότοκος), which occurs in the plural at Hebrews 11:28 and 12:23, always refers in the singular to Jesus Christ. In most of these contexts while priority of time is in view (Rom 8:29; cf. the parallel expressions in 1 Cor 15:20 and Acts 26:23; Rev 1:5) the notion of supremacy or priority of rank tends to dominate.

The title "firstborn," used of Christ here and in verse 18, echoes the wording of Psalm 89:27, where God says of the Davidic king: "I also will make him my firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth." But as many have noted this title belongs to Jesus Christ not only as the Messiah of David's line, but also as the Wisdom of God (so Bruce, 194, 195, and Lohse, 48), a background we observed in connection with him as the "image of the invisible God." (For further references to Wisdom see Wilckens and Fohrer, *TDNT* 7, 465–526.)

While Jewish writers speculated about Wisdom by giving to it a quasipersonal status (it was present with God from all eternity, Wisd 9:9; sharing the divine throne, Wisd 9:4; existing before heaven and earth, and according to Philo was the "firstborn son," πρωτόγονος υἱός: ConfLing 146; Agric 51; Som 1.215; the instrument "through whom the universe came into existence," *Fug* 109), the NT writers know that "whether they speak of this Wisdom expressly or only by allusion they are speaking of a living person, one whom some of them had met face to face. To them all, as to Paul, Jesus Christ was the incarnate Wisdom of God" (Bruce, 195).

As πρωτότοκος Christ is unique, being distinguished from all creation (cf. Heb 1:6). He is both prior to and supreme over that creation since he is its Lord.

16. ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα. The statement about Christ's unique position as "firstborn of all creation" is now given more explicit proof in the words: "*because* (ὅτι) in him all things were created." The passive form "were created" (ἐκτίσθη) indicates that God is the Creator, a point that is reiterated later in the verse when the clause is taken up again with the statement "all things were created [*sc*. by God] (ἔκτισται)through him and for him." In the first clause the aorist tense is employed to draw attention to the historical act, while the second reference uses the perfect to focus on creation's continuing existence. And the historical act of God "in him" establishes that Christ is (and "continues to be," so Schweizer, *Beiträge*, 123) the "firstborn of all creation."

The phrase "in him" (ἐν αὐτῷ) has occasioned some difficulty. Many commentators take the words in an instrumental sense. So Lohse (50) contends, for the following reasons, that they

mean all things have been created "through him" (= δι' αὐτοῦ): first, the religious background, i.e. Jewish speculations about Wisdom, require that the phrase be regarded in this way. To treat it as referring to location, he claims, is possible only on the basis of a different history of religions background. Second, the parallel clause at the end of the verse with its phrase "through him" (δι' αὐτοῦ) is said to argue for this interpretation; while, third, the parallel statements from 1 Corinthians 8:6 ("through whom are all things," δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα) and John 1:3 ("all things were made through him," πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο) are thought to support it.

Quite clearly the point about Christ as the Mediator of creation includes the notion of instrumentality. But is the phrase stating something more than this, going beyond even 1 Corinthians 8:6 and John 1:3? We agree with Haupt (30, 31; cf. Percy, *Probleme*, 69, 70) and Bruce (197) who suggest that the preposition "in" (ἐν) points to Christ as the "sphere" (cf. "in him" of v 19) within which the work of creation takes place. According to Haupt the phrase "in him" has the same force as in Ephesians 1:4; God's creation, like his election, takes place "in Christ" and not apart from him. On Christ depended (causally, so Meyer, 281) the act of creation so that it was not done independently of him (cf. Schweizer, *Beiträge*, 123–25).

Commentators have drawn attention to the affinities between Paul's language and Stoic terminology, notably the use of "all" (πᾶς) and the play on prepositions (ἐκ—εἰς—ἐν) by which the final unity of all that exists is expressed (Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 240–50, 347, 348; see Lohse, 49, 50; and Schweizer, 61, for further references). So Norden and others have cited the statement of Marcus Aurelius, "O Nature … all things come from you, subsist in you, go back to you" (M. Aurelius, *Meditations* 4.23). Now it is one thing to note the linguistic affinities, another to argue that the meaning is the same or that Paul's thought is derived from Stoicism (Pöhlmann, *ZNW* 64 [1973] 53–74, has argued that the "all"-formula was used in many other traditions besides Stoicism, especially in Jewish ones; Bruce, 199, claims that to derive the "all" and prepositional constructions from Stoic formulations is to "pay more attention to the form of words than to their substance"). His ideas are very different from Stoic notions; for it is impossible in Paul to identify God with nature or some pantheistically conceived world-soul (cf. Kehl, *Christushymnus*, 103). And although it might have been possible for Paul, by using Stoic terms, to describe the creation as being called into existence through God's act—so providing a point of contact with those who had previously come from such a milieu—there is some difficulty with this because of the late dating of the linguistic parallels (Schweizer, 60, 61).

Rather, Paul's language is derived from Genesis 1 and the OT Wisdom literature (cf. Kehl, *Christushymnus*, 104–108), where Wisdom is styled the Creator's "master-workman" (Prov 8:30). For Paul, however, that "master-workman" is no longer a figure of speech, but the personal, heavenly Christ who had confronted him on the Damascus road.

ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, τὰ ὁρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα. The expression "all things" (τὰ πάντα) is expanded and depicted more clearly by two lines which are constructed chiastically in synonymous parallelism:

> ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς
> τὰ ὁρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα
> "in heaven and on earth,
> things visible and invisible."

"Heaven" and "invisible" correspond as do "earth" and "visible." The expressions in the parallel lines embrace everything for there are no exceptions (Pöhlmann, *ZNW* 64 [1973] 58, 59, rightly points out that here is an example of *inclusio:* that is, the words τὰ πάντα are repeated in

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the concluding line so binding the chiastic structure together). All things have been brought into existence by the creative act of God in Christ.

εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι. Probably with special reference to the Colossian heresy Paul now emphasizes that even the cosmic powers and principalities, which apparently received some prominence in that heresy, were created in Christ. Good or bad, all are subject to him as Creator. No doubt it is the hostile rather than the friendly powers Paul has particularly in view (although H. Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament* [Questiones Disputatae 3; Freiburg: Herder, 1961] 14, 15, is of the opinion they are all wicked, hostile to God and Christ), as he endeavors to show the Colossians their proper place in relation to Christ (Bruce, 198). And the argument he develops in chapter 2 is that they were vanquished through that same Lord. None needs to be placated. They derive their existence from him, and they owe their obedience to him through whom they have been conquered (2:10, 15).

Here four classes of angelic powers are listed: "thrones" (θρόνοι) and "dominions" (κυριότητες, cf. 1 Cor 8:5), which were occasionally mentioned in Judaism among heavenly hosts of angels (2 Enoch 20:1; Test Levi 3:8), as well as "principalities" (ἀρχαί) and "powers" (ἐξουσίαι)—often named as supermundane beings and powers (for details see Lohse, 51). They probably represent the highest orders of the angelic realm. Whether the list is complete (here δυνάμεις, found in Rom 8:38; cf. 1 Cor 15:24; Eph 1:21, is missing) or the powers are arranged in a particular order is beside the point (Schlier, *Principalities*, 13, 14). From the highest to the lowest, all alike are subject to Christ. They were created *in* him, *through* him and *for* him.

Paul's teaching about Christ as the goal of all creation (εἰς αὐτόν is used of God at 1 Cor 8:6; cf. Percy, *Probleme*, 72, 73) finds no parallel in the Jewish Wisdom literature or in the rest of the extant Jewish materials for that matter. Martin (NCB, 58) aptly comments: "No Jewish thinker ever rose to these heights in daring to predict that Wisdom was the ultimate goal of all creation." And it needs to be remembered that the One of whom Paul speaks in this vein had recently been crucified as a common criminal in Jerusalem. However, he had risen victoriously from the dead and revealed himself to Paul as Son of God (Gal 1:15, 16). To him as goal the whole of creation, and therefore history as well, moved. It was the Father's intention that all things should be summed up in Christ (cf. Eph 1:10).

17. καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν In a twofold statement about the preexistence and cosmic significance of Christ the teaching of verses 15 and 16 is reiterated (cf. Bruce, 220, and Benoit, *Christianity*, 228; on the importance of this verse see Hegermann, *Schöpfungsmittler*, 93, 94). There is no interest in the state or condition of the universe as such—only the concern to reassert the point about Christ's supremacy over the world. The first affirmation, "he is before all things" (αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων), declares his temporal priority to the universe. Therefore one could not rightly say as Arius did that: "There was once when he was not" (ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν). At the same time the statement implies his primacy over the cosmos (cf. Harris, NIDNTT 3, 1177) and points back to the earlier designation "firstborn of all creation." As the preexistent One (cf. John 8:58) he is Lord of the universe. Schweizer has made the interesting suggestion that the emphatic "he" (αὐτός) of this affirmation corresponds to the solemn "I" of the OT which refers to Yahweh himself (62).

τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν. Not only was the universe created in the Son as the sphere, by him as the divine agent, and for him as the goal; it was also established permanently "in him" alone, as the second affirmation, "in him all things are held together," asserts. He is the sustainer of the universe and the unifying principle of its life. Apart from his *continuous* sustaining activity (note the perfect tense συνέστηκεν) all would disintegrate.

Many have drawn attention to the similarities between this statement and the language of Platonic and Stoic philosophy where the term συνεστηκέναι (Plato, *Republic* 530a; Pseudo Aristotle, *Mund* 6; PhiloRerDivHer 281, 311) was employed to denote the wonderful unity of the entire world (for further references see Hegermann, *Schöpfungsmittler*, 94, 95; Feuillet, *Christ*, 214; and Lohse, 52). While there are points of linguistic contact with Stoicism especially, and thus the languag of the hymn may well have served as a bridge for those from such a background (cf. the similar function of λόγος in John 1), nevertheless Pauline thought is different from the pantheistically conceived world-soul of Stoicism. As Feuillet, Schweizer and others have noted, the parallels from Hellenistic Judaism, especially the LXX, are much closer. According to Wisdom 1:7, the Spirit "of the Lord, indeed, fills the whole world, and that which holds all things together (συνέχον τὰ πάντα) knows every word that is said" (JB; on the use of συνέχω rather than συνίστημι see Feuillet, *Christ*, 215), while Ecclesiasticus 43:26 states that "all things hold together by means of his word" (JB; ἐν λόγῳ αὐτοῦ σύγκειται τὰ πάντα). Martin (NCB, 59), following R. B. Y. Scott ("Wisdom in Creation: the *ʾĀmôn* of Proverbs viii.30." *VT* 10 [1960] 213–23), considers the thought is probably indebted to Proverbs 8:30 where Wisdom is called God's אמון, *ʾāôn* (RSV "master workman"). Although Scott translates this as a "living link or vital bond" and suggests that Wisdom is regarded as a principle of coherence between God and his world, the appropriateness of his rendering has been questioned. For Paul, it is the Christ who has made himself known to the apostle who is the Sustainer and Unifier of the universe. As the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it, the Son of God through whom the worlds (αἰῶνες) were made sustains all things and bears them to their appointed end (φέρων … τὰ πάντα) by his powerful word (1:2, 3).

18. καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος, τῆς ἐκκλησίας. With the mention of Christ as the head of the church, the hymn, according to Feuillet (*Christ*, 217), passes from a cosmological perspective to a soteriological one, a perspective that is maintained right to the end of the passage since this notion is of the utmost significance.

But not all commentators agree that verse 18*a*, at least as far as the original hymn was concerned, opens the soteriological section. The great majority of exegetes (see the list in Benoit, *Christianity*, 244) consider, on stylistic grounds, that the final strophe of the hymn commences with the words of verse 18*b*, "He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead" (ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχή, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν), so paralleling the opening statement of verse 15, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως). On this view the statement of verse 18*a*, "He is the head of the body," forms a climax to the first part of the poem (or the middle strophe according to some) and

refers to Christ's headship over the entire cosmos. The words "the church" (τῆς ἐκκλησίας) were added as a gloss by either Paul or the final redactor of the hymn (if the letter is regarded as coming from the Pauline school but not Paul himself) who has reinterpreted the cosmological statement along ecclesiological lines, thereby making his own significant contribution. Clearly the term "body" (σῶμα) in the original hymn was used to denote the whole cosmos, a usage which the majority believes to be paralleled in other writers from early times (for details see Ernst, *Pleroma*, 154–56, and Schweizer, *TDNT* 7, 1024–94).

According to Plato, the cosmos is a living being with a soul and pervaded by reason (*Tim* 31*b*,32*a*, etc). The cosmos is a body that is directed by the divine soul which it follows as it is led (*Tim* 47*c*–48*b*). An Orphic fragment refers to Zeus as the "head" (κεφαλή) of the cosmos who with his power pervades the universe, the body (Fragment 168). In Stoic thought the cosmos is a living entity, the perfect σῶμα ("body") whose unity is everywhere given special emphasis. Created by God, it is governed by him as the world soul. In fact, the cosmos is God himself (cf. Lohse, 53, 54).

Philo of Alexandria referred to the world of the heavens as a uniform body over which the Logos was set as head (Som 1.128). As the body of man needs the direction and guidance given by the head (Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 3.184), so too the "body" of the universe needs the eternal Logos which is its head to direct it (*Quaest in Ex* 2.117). So on the view that the words of the hymn are a cosmological assertion it is stated that Christ is the "head" (κεφαλή) who rules the "body" (σῶμα) of the cosmos. The universe is governed and held together by this head; it was founded and established in him alone.

There are, however, serious difficulties with this majority view. First, as has already been pointed out (see 35–37), the application of various stylistic criteria has not led to any consensus about the original structure of the hymn. Arguments from strophic balance have been shown to be so precarious that it is uncertain that the words "the church" could not have belonged to the original hymn. Most recent writers regard the words as a redactional addition but Kehl (*Christushymnus*, 93, 97: cf. Hegermann, *Schöpfungsmittler*, 106) and Gibbs (*Creation*, 105) have argued that they are essential to the meaning of verse 18*a*.

Second, it is by no means certain that "body" (σῶμα) originally referred to the cosmos. There is no parallel to this in the Pauline corpus where σῶμα is employed ninety-nine times. But on the other hand, and significantly, σῶμα is used to designate the church or local congregation as the body of Christ. At 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 where the apostle is concerned to impress on the Corinthian Christians that as fellow-members of that body they have mutual duties and common interests which must not be neglected, he asserts "you are the body of Christ and severally members of it" (v 27). Again at Romans 12:4, 5 where Paul focuses on the varieties of service the different members of the church render, in accordance with their respective gifts, he declares: "For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

In these earlier letters, Paul employs the body terminology and its constituent parts to refer to the mutual relations and obligations of church members. Here the "head" (κεφαλή) of the body has no special position or honor; it is counted as an ordinary member (1 Cor 12:21; Best, *Body*, 113). In Colossians (and Ephesians) there is an advance in the line of thought so that the relationship which the church, as the body of Christ, bears to Christ as head of the body is treated. Many

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Philo, Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus*

regard this difference as a valid argument against the identity of authorship (so, for example, Lohse, 55), but such a conclusion is unnecessary (see xlv). As Bruce (*Paul*, 421) has recently pointed out, the "advance from the language of simile in 1 Corinthians and Romans to the real and interpersonal involvement expressed in the language of Colossians and Ephesians may have been stimulated by Paul's consideration of the issues involved in the Colossian heresy." We have noted that Paul had repeatedly spoken of the church as the body of Christ. His headship over the church could easily be conceived as an organic relationship in which he exercised the control over his people that the head of a body exercises over its various parts. The living relationship between the members is thereby kept in view (so 1 Corinthians and Romans), while the dependence of the members on Christ for life and power as well as his supremacy is reiterated against a heresy that called such matters into question.

If it is unnecessary to consider that the term "body" originally referred to the cosmos in the hymn then there is no need to look for Stoic antecedents as the source of the writer's ideas (Best, *Body*, 83; Bruce, *Paul*, 420, claims to do this is "an unwarranted exercise of the imagination"), even though there may be some linguistic parallels. Nor are the antecedents of Gnosticism, the Christian Eucharist, or rabbinic speculation on the body of Adam likely sources for this conception of the church as the body of Christ. A more fruitful line of inquiry, which was earlier mentioned by Best (Body, passim) is the OT concept of corporate personality, where an oscillation between the one and the many, the individual and the corporate can be traced. The notion is by no means strange to Paul for Christ and his people are so closely linked (concerning the notion of the corporate Christ see C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* [Cambridge: University Press, 1977] 47–96) that on occasion he and they together can be called "Christ" (1 Cor 12:12). Further, we might well ask whether the notion was not indelibly impressed on Paul's mind when on the Damascus road he was addressed: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute *me* (τί με διώκεις;)?" (Acts 9:4).

We consider, then, that it was Paul, rather than some unknown redactor, who is the originator of this way of expressing the church's vital union with Christ, the head (cf. Col 2:19). Using the Old Testament concept of corporate personality and by referring to "body" (σῶμα) and "head" (κεφαλή) as he does, he has made his own distinct contribution to NT Christology and ecclesiology. In the context headship over the body refers to Christ's control over his people as well as the dependence of all the members on him for life and power (cf. 2:19; for an important discussion on the meaning of κεφαλή as "origin" see S. Bedale, "The Meaning of κεφαλή in the Pauline Epistles," *JTS* 5 [1954] 211–15). As the body of Christ the church is vitalized by his abiding presence and his risen life.

τῆς ἐκκλησίας. (On the meaning of ἐκκλησία in Colossians, see 57–61).

ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχή, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν. The person who is head of the body, the church, is the *risen* Christ, for he is called the "beginning" (ἀρχή; this word, like πρῶτος, being absolute in itself does not require the definite article; it is most commonly omitted when ἀρχή occurs as a predicate: so Lightfoot, 155), and the "firstborn from the dead" (πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν). The term ἀρχή ("beginning"; see Delling, *TDNT* 1, 479–84) has basically to do with primacy, whether in a temporal sense (Matt 19:4, 8; John 15:27; Acts 26:4; Heb 1:10; 2 Pet 3:4; 1 John 2:24, etc) or with reference to authority and sovereignty (Rom 8:38; 1 Cor 15:24; Eph 1:21; 6:12, etc). In Judaism both Wisdom and the Logos were called "the beginning" (cf. Prov 8:23; Philo,

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Philo, Philo, *De Legum Allegoriarum*

Leg. All. 1.43). At Colossians 1:18 when it is said of Christ that he is the "beginning," it does not mean he is the "beginning of God's creation" (ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ, Rev 3:14), or its first cause, points that might have applied in the first part of the hymn, but rather as the One who is "the firstborn from the dead" he is the founder of a new humanity. At Genesis 49:3 the two terms "firstborn" and "beginning" appear together to describe the firstborn as the founder of a people (cf. LXX Deut 21:17 and Rom 8:29). The resurrection age has burst forth and as the first who has risen from among those who had fallen asleep (ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν) he is the first-fruits who guarantees the future resurrection of others (1 Cor 15:20, 23).

ἵνα γέηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων. Because Christ is the "beginning" and the "firstborn" in resurrection as well as in creation he has therefore become (note the aorist γένηται) preeminent in all things. This was the divine intention as the purpose clause (ἵνα) makes plain. The words "be the first" (πρωτεύω) resume the double reference to "firstborn" (πρωτότοκος, vv 15 and 18), as well as the phrase "he is before all things" (v 17), while the expression "in all" (ἐν πᾶσιν) is linked with the frequently mentioned "all things" (τὰ πάντα). The hymn had previously asserted Christ's primacy in creation; it now mentions his primacy in resurrection. In both new creation and old the first place belongs to him alone (Michaelis, *TDNT* 6, 882). He *has become* preeminent "in everything."

19. ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι. The reason for (ὅτι) this primacy of Christ over everything is now given: "in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell." Two main issues arise in this much disputed and frequently discussed verse: first, what is the subject of "was pleased" (εὐδόκησεν): God, Christ or "all the fullness"? Secondly, what does "all the fullness" (πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα) mean? (For a detailed treatment of this verse with special reference to the meaning of πλήρωμα see Ernst, *Pleroma*, 72–94.)

Regarding the first question it is unlikely that the Son is the subject of "was pleased" for, although Ephesians 2:16 asserts that it is he who reconciles (at 2 Cor 5:18, 19 it is the Father), the phrase ἐν αὐτῷ (i.e. in Christ) seems to exclude the Son as the subject (Moule, 70). Many exegetes consider that "God" (ὁ θεός) should be supplied as the subject of the sentence, with the words "all the fullness … to dwell" (πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι) being taken as an accusative and infinitive construction: "God was pleased to let all the fullness dwell in him." This suggestion fits well with the masculine participle "making peace" (εἰρηνοποιήσας, v 20), while to insert the subject "God" is quite proper since the words εὐδοκία and εὐδοκέω (cf. θέλημα) are sometimes used absolutely to denote the good pleasure of God (Luke 2:14; Phil 2:13). On the other hand, it is grammatically possible to regard "all the fullness" (πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα) as the subject, and if we understand the phrase as meaning "God in all his fullness" (see below) then the subsequent masculines, εἰς αὐτόν ("to him") and εἰρηνοποιήσας ("having made peace"), may be explained as a construction according to sense, because πλήρωμα then stands for a masculine (Moule, 70, 71; Münderlein, *NTS* 8 [1961–62] 265, 266). On balance, this solution is preferred since it is not necessary to supply the missing subject, while at Colossians 2:9 in the following commentary on this passage πᾶν τό πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος ("all the fullness of deity") is clearly the subject of the same verb κατοικεῖ.

Second, what does "all the fullness" (πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα) mean? Various answers have been given depending in part on the history of religions background assigned to the notion. Some understand πλήρωμα as used in accord with the Gnostic (Valentinian) technical term (note, for example, Lightfoot's treatment of this view, 255–71). Certainly the idea of "fullness" played a significant role in the Gnosticism of the second century. The Valentinians referred to "pleroma" as

the fullness of the emanations which came forth from God. It signified the uppermost pneumatic world in close proximity to God which in turn was separated from the cosmos by a boundary (for details see Ernst, *Pleroma*, 41–50; Lohse, 57). But according to Valentinian teaching God himself, "alone unbegotten, not subject to place or time" (Hippolytus, Ref 6.29.5), was distinguished from the heavenly fullness of emanations. Therefore others have argued that this understanding of the word "pleroma" cannot contribute anything to the explanation of Colossians 1:19 since in the hymn God himself is called "pleroma." The supposed parallels are later in time, while the Redeemer of Colossians does not leave the "pleroma" as in Gnostic thought when he makes the long descent to the world. Accordingly Paul was not indebted to Gnostic thought for his understanding of πλήρωμα (note the careful argument of Overfield, *NTS* 25 [1978–79] 384–96);. But it is possible that he is undermining a cardinal point in the Colossian heresy which considered supernatural powers to be intermediaries between God and the world, the more so when it is considered that the phrase "*all the* fullness" is tautologous. Kehl's comment (*Christushymnus*, 119), that the "fullness" is not a "fullness" if it does not mean a totality, is apt. The additional words "all the" (πᾶν τό) may well be polemical.

The backgrounds in popular Stoicism (Dupont) and the Hermetic literature with the cosmos as the "fullness" do not provide an adequate basis for understanding Paul's use of the term in Colossians 1:19 and 2:9. Rather, as Moule (164–69), Kehl (*Christushymnus*, 116–25) and Gibbs (*Creation*, 107, 108) have pointed out there is no need to look beyond the OT for the source of Paul's ideas.

Three observations need to be made in this connection: first, the word πλήρωμα is employed in the OT (cf. Ernst, *Pleroma*, 22–30) in rather stereotyped expressions with an active meaning: the sea and its fullness (1 Chr 16:32; Ps 96:11; 98:7), the earth and everything in it (Ps 24:1; Jer 8:16; 47:2; Ezek 12:19; 19:7; 30:12), and the world with all it contains (Ps 50:12; 89:11). As yet, however, the term has not become a technical expression with a fixed and clearly defined meaning.

Second, in language akin to πλήρωμα the Old Testament recognizes that God himself (or his glory) fills the whole universe: so Jeremiah 23:24, " 'Do I not fill (πληρῶ) heaven and earth?' says the Lord," and Psalm 72:19, "may his glory fill (πληρωθήσεται) the whole earth" (cf. Isa 6:3; Ezek 43:5; 44:4, where the cognate ηλήρης occurs). Obviously this notion, which draws attention to the immanence of God and his personal involvement in the world, is not to be understood along either pantheistic or dualistic lines.

Third, the verb "be pleased" (εὐδοκέω) which often appears in the OT to denote the good pleasure of God (Ps 44:3; 147:11; 149:4) is particularly used to designate divine election. Of special significance is the connection between God's choosing and his dwelling place. This conjunction repeatedly occurs and, on occasion, the same two verbs of Colossians 1:19, εὐδοκέω and κατοικέω are employed. Zion is "the mountain on which it pleased God to dwell" (εὐδόκησεν ὁ θεὸς κατοικεῖν ἐν αὐτῷ LXX Ps 67:17; cf. LXX Ps 131:13, 14; Isa 8:18; 49:20, where the verb "elect," ἐκλέγομαι, replaces "be pleased"). As is well-known in Deuteronomic theology, the notion of the God of Israel choosing a place for himself where he wants his name to dwell repeatedly appears (Deut 12:5, 11; 14:23; 16:2, 6, 11; 26:2, etc).

These three lines converge at Colossians 1:19 in the person of Christ (cf. Kehl, *Christushymnus*, 123, and Ernst, 171, and *Pleroma*, 84). He is the "place" (note the emphatic position of ἐν αὐτῷ) in whom God in all his fullness was pleased to take up his residence (the verb is the aorist infinitive κατοικῆσαι). All the attributes and activities of God—his spirit, word, wisdom and glory—are perfectly displayed in Christ (Bruce, 207). This is no temporary indwelling

as the verb κατοικέω (in contrast to παροικέω, "sojourn") with its present tense at chapter 2:9 makes plain: "in him all the fullness of deity *dwells* (κατοικεῖ) bodily."

He is the one mediator between God and the world of mankind. The Colossian Christians need not fear those supernatural powers under whose control men were supposed to live, whether divine emanations, agencies or the like. God in all his divine essence and power had taken up residence in Christ.

20. καί δι' αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι … τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. With the statement about God's good pleasure in reconciling all things through Christ, the conclusion of the final strophe occurs, and the "high point" (so Kehl, *Christushymnus*, 125) of the hymn is reached.

The opening words of the paragraph have asserted that all things—the various heavenly bodies, thrones, lordships, principalities, powers and so on—were created in Christ, through him and for him. He is their Lord in creation. What is not spelled out, however, is what has happened to all things *since* creation (C.K. Barrett. *From First Adam to Last. A Study in Pauline Theology* [New York: Scribner's, 1962, 86]). Although there has been no previous mention of it, the presupposition is that the unity and harmony of the cosmos have suffered a considerable dislocation, even a rupture, thus requiring reconciliation (Lohse, 59; cf. Schweizer, 68, Schnackenburg, EKKNT Vorarbeiten 1, 38, Hegermann, *Schöpfungsmittler*, 103–105, and others). (On the problem of a disruption in nature within the thought of Hellenistic Judaism, see Schweizer, 68.)

The notion of reconciliation is certainly Pauline, appearing in the major letters (Rom 5:10, 11; 11:15; 2 Cor 5:18–20), even though the compound verb ἀποκαταλλάσσω ("reconcile") is unusual (cf. Eph 2:16 in addition to Col 1:20, 22) and is possibly a Pauline creation (Benoit, *Christianity*, 249). Also in each reference the ground of reconciliation lies in the gracious initiating activity of God (at Rom 5:8 the basis is the love of God, while Col 1:20 points to the divine good pleasure; cf. 2 Cor 5:18). The unusual feature of this passage is that it refers to the reconciliation of "all things" (τὰ πάντα) and that as a past event. Although 2 Corinthians 5:19 (cf. John 3:16 and similar passages) speaks of the reconciliation of the world (κόσμος), it is clear that it is the world of men which is in view. Further, it is argued that the freeing of creation from its bondage to decay so that it obtains the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom 8:19–21) is a *future* eschatological event (Schweizer, *Beiträge*, 133).

Three related questions, therefore, arise: (a) What is the meaning of the phrase "to reconcile all things to him" (ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν)? (b) What is the relationship of this expression to the words which follow, "having made peace through the blood of his cross" (εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ)? (c) Is it possible or even desirable to equate verse 20 with the notion of God's leading the evil powers in his triumphal procession at chapter 2:15?

The following views have been set forth as commentators have grappled with these questions: (1) Noting that the verb to "reconcile" properly applies to persons (except in the language of actuaries or logic) some exegetes consider the objects of reconciliation to be that which is reconcilable. On this view "all things" (τὰ πάντα) are concretized and explained by the additional phrases "whether things (εἴτε τά) upon the earth, or things (εἴτε τά) in the heavens." The first category is usually understood to denote the world of men which is reconciled, the second the world of angels (either the renewed subordination of the angels under Christ after his *kenosis*, so Michl, *TQ* 128 [1948] 442–62; or the reconciliation of the angels of the law which had been dethroned according to chapter 2:15, so B. N. Wambacq, " 'per eum reconciliare … quae in caelis

sunt' Col 1:20, " *RB* 55 [1948] 35–42). For a critique of this see Vögtle, *Das Neue Testament*, 222.

(2) Kehl (*Christushymnus*, 163–65), refusing to understand ἀποκαταλλάξαιτὰ πάντα as denoting "an objective physical-metaphysical reconciliation of everything," examined the phrase against the background of God's glory filling the whole of creation. According to Romans 1:23, pagans "exchanged (ἤλλαξεν) the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles." This, according to Kehl, was the breach or rupture presupposed in Colossians 1. It had occurred in man, not in creation. Reconciliation, therefore, involved the healing of this breach. "The ἀποκαταλλαγή of Colossians 1:20 is the reversal of the exchange of Romans 1:23" (160). But in spite of its many insights Kehl's approach has been criticized for its narrow anthropocentric slant. It has been argued that he appears to oversimplify and limit the meaning of the text with its utterances on the cosmic rule and peace-making work of Christ (cf. M. Barth, *CBQ* 30 [1968] 110; cf. Wolter, *Rechtfertigung*, 55).

(3) According to another view, reconciliation has to do with the subjection, that is, the pacification of the cosmic powers. "All things" (τὰ πάντα) does not include the world of men but denotes the cosmic forces as the object of God's reconciling activity. Since all of these powers are evil (so Schlier, *Principalities*, 14, 15) they need to be brought into subjection to Christ as head. They are "pacified" through him (cf. Col 2:14, 15) and cosmic peace is once again restored. However, if Kehl's view was open to the criticism of wrongly limiting "all things" to the world of men, this approach is open to a similar charge of incorrectly narrowing the text to the cosmic powers, and while this viewpoint has the great merit of seeking to relate chapter 2:15 to the climactic words of the hymn, it does not in the end adequately explain the meaning of "all things" (τὰ ηάντα).

(4) Lohse's view (59–61) is that the universe ("all"), which suffered a considerable disturbance, has now been reconciled through the Christ-event. Heaven and earth have been returned to their divinely created and determined order and this has occurred through the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. The universe is again under its head, and cosmic peace—a peace which according to some apocalyptic expectations would only occur at the end time—has returned. Lohse, along with the majority of recent commentators, regards the phrase "through the blood of his cross" (v 20) as an interpretative addition to the original hymn by the author of the epistle. "Peace has not been established in an other-worldly drama but rather in the death of Jesus Christ" (60). The principalities are stripped of their power (cf. 2:14, 15) and the reconciliation of all things has taken place. This word is then addressed to the recipients of the letter, for the message of reconciliation which pertains to the whole world applies to them as well (vv 21–23).

(5) The approach of F. Mussner (*Christus, das All und die Kirche. Studien zur Theologie des Epheserbriefes* [TTS 5; Trier: Paulinus, 1955]), following the view of Gewiess (cf. Vögtle, *Das Neue Testament*, 227–29), considers the emphasis of the passage lies elsewhere. Instead of underscoring the words "all things" (τὰ ηάντα) in the sentence, and then determining what categories are included (e.g. How can the cosmos as an impersonal entity be reconciled? Does the reconciliation concern men with God, men with angels, men with one another, or fallen angels with

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RB Revue biblique

TTS Trier theologische Studien

e.g. *exempli gratia*, for example

God, etc?) this approach considers our attention should be directed to the one who effects the reconciliation. The significant question is not, "*Who* or *what* is reconciled?" but "Who is the mediator of reconciliation?" and the answer given is "Christ alone" (Mussner, *Christus*, 71). In the first strophe of the hymn the centrality of Christ is asserted and the "all"-formula is employed so as to elicit praise for Christ as the Mediator and Lord of creation. He is also the focus of attention in the second strophe, verses 18b–20, and the "all"-formula serves to point decisively to him once again. He and only he is the Mediator of reconciliation. The statement of verse 20, "whether things upon the earth, or things in heaven," which is in apposition to "all things," does not contradict this view, it is argued, since the words do not provide a detailed breakdown of the objects of reconciliation. The redactor of the hymn is only interested in men as the objects (hence the application in vv 21–23), while the omission of any reference to a cosmic fall is in keeping with the author's intention of focusing his interest on Christ. Vögtle (*Das Neue Testament*, 227–29), who has recently championed this view, claims Schweizer's emphatic statement about the reconciliation of all things being understood as an "exclusively Christological assertion" (*Beiträge*, 134) approximates to his own position.

But granted that the passage, in a magnificent fashion, emphasizes Christ's supremacy in every sphere, clearly asserting that he alone is the Mediator of reconciliation, this same text does in fact mention the objects or beneficiaries of this reconciliation, first generally ("all things") and then rather more specifically ("whether on earth or in heaven"). To ask "Who or what has been reconciled?" may not be the primary question, but it is a legitimate question nevertheless since the text itself encourages us to look for an answer. Further, to suggest with Vögtle, on the basis of the application in verses 21–23, that the "redactor" is only interested in men as objects, overlooks the fact that many truths of a Christological kind asserted in the hymn are not directly applied to the readers. We ought, however, not to conclude that these were therefore unimportant.

(6) The "reconciliation of all things" ought to be understood, in our judgment, with Lohse (59) to mean that the "universe has been reconciled in that heaven and earth have been brought back into their divinely created and determined order … the universe is again under its head and … cosmic peace has returned."

Although Schweizer and others reject the suggestion, it is best to understand "reconciliation" as expanded in the following words—"having made peace through the blood of his cross." If, on Schweizer's view, the author made corrections to the hymn, why did he allow certain elements, which were different from his own theology, to remain? If reconciliation and pacification are essentially different why did not the author remove the idea which did not harmonize with his own view? (cf. O'Brien, RTR 33 [1974] 45–53, against Schweizer, *Neotestamentica*, 326, 327.)

The peace which Christ has brought may be "freely accepted, or … compulsorily imposed" (Bruce, 210), for when Paul speaks of reconciliation on this wide front he includes the notion of "pacification." If, as many commentators suggest, verse 20 is to be understood in the light of God's triumph in Christ over the principalities and powers (2:15)—though the meaning of Christ's reconciling work ought not to be limited by these words of chapter 2:15 since it is broader than the pacification of the principalities and powers, applying to the world of men, indeed the whole cosmos as well—then these are certainly not depicted as gladly surrendering to God's grace but as "submitting against their wills to a power which they cannot resist" (Bruce, 210). In other words, they have been pacified—a notion that was not strange to those living in the Mediterranean region under Roman rule of the first century A.D. Yet "pacification" of or victory over these powers, presumed to be hostile toward God or Christ, does not mean they are done away with or finally destroyed. It is evident that they continue to exist, inimical to man and

his interests (cf. Rom 8:38, 39; Barrett, *Adam*, 86). Nevertheless they cannot finally harm the person who is in Christ, and their ultimate overthrow in the future is assured (1 Cor 15:24–28; see on Col 2:15).

Paul affirms that this universal reconciliation has been brought about, not in some other-worldly drama, but through something done in history, the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross. Further at chapter 2:14, 15 it is asserted that God, in Christ, destroyed the "certificate of indebt-edness" that stood over against the Colossian Christians, nailing it to the cross, and also van-quished the principalities and powers leading them in his triumphal procession.

W. Michaelis (*Versöhnung des Alls. Die frohe Botschaft von der Gnade Gottes* [Bern: Siloah, 1950]) argued on the basis of Colossians 1:20, Ephesians 1:10, etc, that because God's eternal plan and purpose was reconciliation then nothing in his creation would finally or ultimately be lost. Yet can verse 20 be taken to mean that Paul looked for the ultimate reconciliation to God of all people and, indeed, of hostile spiritual powers as well? The cosmic reconciliation has to do with τὰ ηάντα, including everything in its scope. The reconciliation of the principalities and powers is in mind. They are one category whatever others are included. Yet these forces are shown as submitting against their wills to a power they cannot resist. They are reconciled through subjugation (cf. 1 Cor 15:28), and Christ's victory has reduced them to the position of "weak and beggarly elements" (cf. Gal 4:9). Though they are included within the reconciliation, theirs is no glad surrender to the Lord of the cosmos. Similarly it cannot be assumed from verse 20 that all sinful men have freely accepted the peace effected through the death of Christ. Like the principalities and powers, might not that peace have to be imposed compulsorily, at least on some?

Although all things will *finally* unite to bow in the name of Jesus and to acknowledge him as Lord (Phil 2:10, 11), it is not to be assumed that this will be done gladly by all. For as the words following the hymn (Col 1:21–23) indicate, the central purpose of Christ's work of making peace has to do with those who have heard the Word of reconciliation and gladly accepted it. To assert that verse 20 points to a universal reconciliation in which every man will finally enjoy celestial bliss is an unwarranted assumption.

A Note on the Term ἐκκλησία *in Colossians and Philemon*
1. ἐκκλησία in the Greek city-state

The term ἐκκλησία ("assembly"), derived from ἐκ-καλέω ("call out," a verb used for the summons to the army to assemble), is attested from the time of Euripides and Herodotus onward (fifth cent. B.C.) and denoted the popular assembly of the full citizens of the πόλις or Greek city-state. During this period it met at regular intervals, though the term in cases of emergency could describe an extraordinary gathering. Every citizen had the right to speak and to propose matters for discussion. The term ἐκκλησία, centuries before the translation of the OT and the time of the NT, was clearly characterized as a political phenomenon; it was the assembly of full citizens, functionally rooted in the Greek democracy, an assembly in which fundamentally political and judicial decisions were taken. The ἐκκλησία (as distinct from the δῆμος ["people, populace, crowd"] which was continuous) was only regarded as existing when it was actually assembled.

2. ἐκκλησία in the LXX, Josephus and Philo

In the translation of the LXX the Greek word ἐκκλησία ("assembly") occurs about one hundred times, of which twenty-two are in the Apocrypha. It represents the Hebrew *qāhāl* ("assem-bly") some seventy-three times (but never *cēdâh*, "congregation"; frequently *qāhāl* is rendered by the Greek συναγωγή, "place of assembly"; W. J. Dumbrell, *The Meaning and Use of Ekklesia*

in the New Testament with Special Reference to its Old Testament Background. University of London: Unpublished M.Th. thesis, 1966, 1–26, especially 3, argued that although *qāhāl* and *cēdĥ* have the same basic meaning of a convened meeting, the latter "represents the people as a national unit, whether assembled or not … while *qāhāl* represents the people as summoned, convened or assembled for some special purpose"). The Hebrew term *qāhāl* and its Greek equivalent ἐκκλησία could describe assemblies of a less specifically religious or nonreligious kind, for example the gathering of an army in preparation for war (1 Sam 17:47; 2 Chron. 28:14) or the "coming together" of an unruly and potentially dangerous crowd (Ps 26 [LXX 25]: 5; Ecclus 26:5). However, particularly significant are those instances of ἐκκλησία (rendering *qāhāl*) which denote the congregation of Israel when it assembled to hear the Word of God on Mt. Sinai, or later on Mt. Zion where all Israel were required to assemble three times a year. Sometimes the whole nation appears to be involved, as on those occasions when Moses is addressing the people prior to their entry into the promised land. In this connection Deuteronomy 4:10 may be cited. Recalling the scene at Sinai, Moses reminded the Israelites of "the day when you stood before the Lord your God in Horeb, when he said to me, 'Assemble the people before me to hear my words.' " The parallel is even clearer in the LXX which uses the word ἐκκλησία and its cognate ἐκκλησιάζω: "the day of the church when the Lord said to me, 'Form the people into a church before me' " (cf. Deut 9:10; 18:16; 31:30; 8:35 [LXX 9:2]; Judg 20:2, etc). At other times it is only the chief representatives that seem to be present, as with the congregation of tribal heads, or patriarchal chiefs, at Solomon's dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:14, 22, 55, etc).

Josephus also used the word frequently (some forty-eight times, of which eighteen are LXX quotations), always of a gathering. These vary in character, e.g. religious, political and spontaneous assemblies are mentioned (Josephus *Ant.* 4.309; *Life* 268; *J. W.* 1.654, 666). Philo employs the term some thirty times, all but five of which are in quotations from the LXX. These five appear in a classical Greek sense.

The term, then, in the Greek and Jewish world prior to Paul meant an assembly or gathering of people; it did not designate an "organization" or "society." Although it had no intrinsically religious meaning and could refer to meetings that were quite secular in character, of special significance are those occurrences of ἐκκλησία in the LXX which refer to the congregation of Israel when it assembled to hear the Word of God.

3. ἐκκλησία in the New Testament

The word ἐκκλησία turns up 114 times in the NT and over half of these occur in Paul (sixty-two instances; and other occurrences are: Matthew, three; Acts, twenty-three; Revelation, twenty; non-Pauline epistles, six). Whether the Christian use of ἐκκλησία was first adopted from Jewish or Gentile usage is a disputed point. I. H. Marshall ("New Wine in Old Wine Skins: V. The Biblical Use of the Word 'Ekklēsia,' " *ExpTim* 84 [1972–73] 359–64) after an examination of the alternatives, contends that the most satisfactory explanation for the Christian employment

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Ant. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*

Life Life

J. W. Josephus, *Jewish Wars*

ExpTim The Expository Times

of the term is "ultimately connected with the Jewish use in the LXX" (362). (On the question as to why the early Church did not use συναγωγή, "gathering-place, place of assembly," to describe itself—James 2:2, is the one exception though even here ἐκκλησία occurs—if it was choosing a designation from the LXX, W. Schrage, " 'Ekklesia' und 'Synagoge.' Zum Ursprung des urchristlichen Kirchenbegriffs," *ZTK* 60 [1963] 178–202, argued the former was avoided because of its close links with the Jewish law and because it had come to be used of Jewish buildings. Although these reasons are possible, it must be remembered that ἐκκλησία denoted a "meeting" or an "assembly," rather than an "organization" or a "society," and this is how the term is used in the NT.)

A. PAULINE USES IN THE EARLIER LETTERS

Other occurrences of the term ἐκκλησία ("assembly") in the NT all postdate Paul's usage of the word and therefore it is necessary to determine the meaning he attaches to it in the various contexts. His first use occurs at 1 Thessalonians 1:1 in his greetings to the Christians at Thessalonica: "Paul, Silas and Timothy. To the church of the Thessalonians (τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων) in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The term is employed in the same way as in Greek and Jewish circles, that is, like other assemblies in the city, it is described as "a gathering of the Thessalonians." But it is distinguished from the regular political councils by the addition of the words "in God the Father," and from the regular synagogue meetings by the use of the term ἐκκλησία and the additional phrase "in the Lord Jesus Christ" (so correctly R. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community. The Early House Churches in Their Historical Setting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980) 43; note the same ascription at 2 Thess 1:1). From the closing remarks of the letter it is clear Paul has in mind an actual gathering of the Thessalonian Christians. So he requests that his letter "be read to all the brethren" and that they "greet all the brethren with a holy kiss" (1 Thess 5:26, 27).

In the two Thessalonian letters reference is made to "the churches (ἐκκλησίαι) of God" (2 Thess 1:4) and "the churches of God in Judea" (2:14). Other epistles such as Galatians (1:2), the two letters to the Corinthians (1 Cor 7:17; 11:16; 14:33, 34; 2 Cor 8:19, 23, 24; 11:8, 28; 12:13) and Romans (16:4, 16) also employ the plural when more than one church is in view (the only exceptions are the distributive expression "every church," 1 Cor 4:17, and the phrase "the church of God," 1 Cor 10:32, in a generic or possibly localized sense). So reference is made to "the *churches* in Galatia (Gal 1:2; 1 Cor 16:1), "the *churches* of Asia" (1 Cor 16:19), "the *churches* in Macedonia" (2 Cor 8:1), and "the *churches* of Judea" (Gal 1:22). This suggests that the term was only applied to an actual gathering of people, or to a group that gathers when viewed as a regularly constituted meeting (Banks, *Idea*, 43). Although we often speak of a group of congregations collectively as "the church" (i.e. of a denomination) it is doubtful whether Paul (or the rest of the NT) uses ἐκκλησία in this collective way. Also the notion of a unified provincial or national church appears to have been foreign to Paul's thinking. An ἐκκλησία was a meeting or an assembly. This primary sense of "gathering" comes out clearly in 1 Corinthians 11–14 where expressions such as "when you assemble in church" (1 Cor 11:18) and "to speak in church" (14:35; cf. vv 4, 5, 12, 19, 28) turn up. It is of particular significance that at the beginning of the two Corinthian letters (1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; cf. 1 Cor 10:32, 11:22 and Rom 16:16), the church is described as belonging to the one who brought it into existence (that is, God), or the one through

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whom this has taken place (that is, Christ). Such an ἐκκλησία was not simply a human association or a religious club, but a divinely created entity (cf. Banks, *Idea*, 45).

Paul's reference in Galatians (1:13: cf. also 1 Cor 15:9; Phil 3:6) to his original persecution of "the church of God" does not contradict this suggestion since the expression may signify a reference to the church at Jerusalem before it was distributed into a number of smaller assemblies in various parts of Judea, or that it was as the believers met together that the arrests were made—their gathering together provided evidence of their Christian associations (Banks, *Idea*, 44).

B. ἐκκλησία IN THE LATER LETTERS

Our term ἐκκλησία turns up five times in Colossians and Philemon and is used in three separate though related, ways: *(a)* at Colossians 4:16 the word is employed in its customary sense of an "assembly," that is, at Laodicea. As in the earlier instances so here too an actual gathering is in view: after Paul's letter to the Colossians has been read aloud in the assembly, they are to pass it, or perhaps a copy, on, so that it may be read in the congregation at Laodicea (the expression παρ᾽ ὑμῖν, "among you," is virtually equivalent to ἐν … ἐκκλησίᾳ, "in … the assembly"). *(b) In two references* ἐκκλησία designates a "house-church": so at Colossians 4:15 reference is made to "Nympha and the church that is in her house (καὶ τὴν κατ᾽ οἴκον αὐτῆς ἐκκλησίαν)," while at Philemon 2 it is clear that Philemon's house was used as a meeting-place in Colossae ("the church that meets in your house," τῇ κατ᾽ οἴκον σου ἐκκλησίᾳ). Paul has already used the word ἐκκλησία in this sense of a "house-church" (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19, BAG, 241; for further details see on Col 4:15).

Of particular significance are the two instances in Colossians 1 where ἐκκλησία has a wider reference than either a local congregation or a house-church: at verse 18 it is stated that Christ is "the head of the body, that is, the church," while in verse 24 a similar expression is employed in the context of Paul's sufferings ("on behalf of his body, which is the church"). Most commentators interpret these developed references in Colossians (and the similar instances in Ephesians) of the "universal church" which is scattered throughout the world. But there are two serious criticisms that may be levelled against this view: first, the term ἐκκλησία can no longer have its usual meaning of "gathering" or "assembly," since it is difficult to envisage how a worldwide church could assemble, and the term ἐκκλησία must be translated in some other way to denote an organization or society. Second, the context of chapter 1:15–20 which is moving on a heavenly plane suggests it is not an earthly phenomenon that is being spoken of in verse 18, but a supernatural and heavenly one. Earlier in the letter it has been mentioned that the readers have already been fitted for a share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light, and have been transferred from a tyranny of darkness to a kingdom in which God's beloved Son holds sway (1:12–14). On the one hand, the Colossians are obviously members of an earthly realm (note the exhortations of 3:4–4:6), and the apostle looks forward to their being presented as "holy, irreproachable and blameless" before God on the last day (1:22). On the other hand, they are described as presently existing in a heavenly realm. Since they have been raised with Christ they are to seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at God's right hand (3:1). Because they live with Christ in this heavenly dimension (note that Christ who is their life is already in heaven, vv 3, 1) they are assured that when he appears they will also appear with him in glory (v

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BAG W. Bauer, W. F. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Chicago: Chicago U. P., 1979)

4). Such thoughts are not entirely new: in Galatians, Paul had already drawn a contrast between the children of the "present Jerusalem" and those who belong to the "Jerusalem above" (Gal 4:25–27). Later, in his letter to the Philippians, the idea is developed with reference to heavenly citizenship: the Philippian Christians who are alive on earth are at the same time members of a heavenly community (Phil 3:19, 20). "Membership in this heavenly community, together with all the benefits that accompany it, was as continuing an affair as membership in the Roman commonwealth" (Banks, *Idea*, 53).

Later references in Ephesians are thought to point in this same direction: it is expressly mentioned that God "made us alive with Christ, … raised us up with him and seated us in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (2:5, 6). The same readers of this circular letter have been "blessed … in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (1:3). Again reference is made to Christ's headship over the "church" (ἐκκλησία) which is his body (1:22, 23). If the term ἐκκλησία is to be understood here as "church" taking place in heaven then this would mean that Christians participate in it as they go about their ordinary daily tasks. They are already gathered around Christ which is another way of saying that they now enjoy fellowship with him. Further references (3:10, 21; 5:23, 25, 27, 29, 32) have been taken in the same way.

If the term ἐκκλησία does point, on some occasions at least, to a heavenly entity then one may well ask what is its relationship to the local congregations (or even house-churches) which are styled ἐκκλησίαι? Certainly local gatherings are not *part* of the heavenly church any more than they are part of an alleged universal church. Paul consistently refers to *the* church which meets in a particular place. Even when there are several gatherings in a single city (e.g. at Corinth) the individual assemblies are not understood as *part* of the church in that place, but as *one* of "the churches" that meet there. This suggests that each of the various local churches are manifestations of that heavenly church, tangible expressions in time and space of what is heavenly and eternal.

(For further references to secondary literature on ἐκκλησία, "assembly, congregation, church," in addition to those already noted, see: Marshall, *ExpTim* 84 [1973], 359–64, and Coenen, NIDNTT 1, 305–7.)

Explanation

The language of prayer and thanksgiving shades off at the end of chapter 1:14, with its reference to the forgiveness of sins, into a magnificent hymnic passage in praise of Christ as the Lord in creation and reconciliation. It begins with a series of predicates and activities employed in the OT and Judaism of the personalized Wisdom of God which are applied to the One who had been so ignominiously executed only a few years before.

The first statement spells out his relationship to God, the second to creation. As the "image of the invisible God," Christ is the preexistent One who has revealed the very nature and character of God. He is both prior to and supreme over creation, for he is its Lord. All things have been created in him as the sphere and through him as the agent. Yet the passage tells us more: Christ is unique, for he is the ultimate goal of all creation (no parallel assertion was ever made of Wisdom in the OT or Jewish literature).

Probably with special reference to the Colossian heresy the hymn emphasizes that even the cosmic principalities and powers, from the highest to the lowest, are all subject to Christ. It could not rightly be said that: "There was once when he was not," for the passage asserts that he is both prior to the universe and supreme over it. Further, that universe was established in him alone; apart from his continuous sustaining activity all would disintegrate.

Passing from a cosmological perspective to a soteriological one, Paul affirms that Christ is the head of the body, that is, the church. That headship, pointing to an organic and living relationship with his people, denotes his control over them and their total dependence on him for life and power. It is the risen Christ who is this head; as the beginning and firstborn in resurrection he is the founder of a new humanity. The hymn had previously asserted his primacy in creation; now it mentions his primacy in resurrection. He has therefore become preeminent in everything.

The reason for this primacy is then spelled out: Christ is the one in whom God in all his fullness was pleased to take up residence. His spirit, word, wisdom and glory are perfectly displayed in Christ. Further, this was no temporary indwelling as the hymn and the subsequent commentary on it (2:9) make plain.

Although there has been no previous mention of it, the presupposition is that the unity and harmony of the cosmos have suffered a dislocation, even a rupture, so requiring reconciliation. It was God's good pleasure to reconcile all things through Christ. Heaven and earth have been brought back to their divinely created and determined order. The universe is under its Lord and cosmic peace has been restored. Reconciliation and making peace (which includes the notion of pacification) are used synonymously to describe the climactic work of Christ effected on the historical plane in and through his death on the cross.

To speak of this paragraph as a Christological digression or even as an excursus is misleading for it is to suggest that the hymn does not really belong to its context. Whatever previous existence the passage may have had (and whether it was composed by Paul or not), it is clearly central to the context in which it currently stands, and the task of the exegete is to explain its meaning within this framework and not some hypothetically reconstructed context. Paul's lengthy prayer leads up to the hymn, while the words which immediately follow take up phrases and ideas from it and apply the truths to the readers. Indeed, the paragraph undergirds the whole letter; remove it and a serious dislocation occurs.

The language is majestic. In the opening lines the writer has drawn on a Wisdom background from the OT and Judaism, applying predicates and activities to Christ. Stylistic features such as repetition, parallelism, chiasmus and *inclusio* (see p. 32–37) have all been employed in order to praise Christ as the Lord in creation and reconciliation. Some of the language, e.g. his lordship over the principalities and powers, appears to touch on the heresy of the false teachers.

In the words immediately following the hymn, themes, such as reconciliation, are applied to the readers: Christ's mighty reconciling work had special reference to the Colossians who had previously been alienated from God and at enmity with him. Later in the letter other motifs are touched upon or expanded further (cf. 2:9). But not every statement is directly applied to the recipients.

It is difficult to ascertain, perhaps impossible, how much the Colossians knew of the language and concepts contained in the hymn prior to their reception of the letter. We are told that they had accepted Christ Jesus the Lord as their tradition (2:6, 7), and in the light of Paul's praise of the teaching ministry of his colleague, Epaphras (1:7; cf. 4:12, 13), we may assume that what was asserted in the hymn was not inconsistent with the instruction previously given in the gospel. However, we do know what Paul expected his readers to understand *now* (chapter 2 will deal with some of the ramifications of this). Further, these majestic words in praise of Christ may well have become the basis for their own praises and thanksgivings, offered both corporately as they met together and privately.