

**Living under the Lordship of Christ:
The Ground and Shape of Paraenesis
in the Epistle to the Colossians**

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Abstract

This study examines the broad range of moral exhortations in Colossians. The paraenetical sections evaluated include 1.9-10, 21-23; 2.6-7; 3.1-4, 5-17; 3.18-4.1. My primary objective is to determine the ground or basis for paraenesis in Colossians. I submit that there is a clear and consistent relationship between theology and ethics in Colossians, for paraenesis is repeatedly given a firm theological foundation. The ground for the Colossian paraenesis is primarily Christological (1.9-10, 20-23; 2.6-7; 3.11, 17-18, 20, 22-23), sometimes soteriological (2.11-12; 3.1-4, 9-10), and occasionally eschatological (3.1-4, 24-25).

My secondary aim is to analyse the shape of the Colossian paraenesis in terms of the behavioural, historical, and rhetorical nature of the exhortations. Much of the paraenesis in Colossians, particularly the vice/virtue lists and the household code, is traditional paraenetical material which reflects first century Hellenistic moral exhortation. At the same time, the traditional paraenetical material in Colossians is not traditional material *simpliciter*, for the role of humility (3.12), the nature of love (3.13-14), the placement of the householder under the authority of Christ (4.1), and the Christological foundation (3.11, 17, 18, 22-23) make it distinctively Christian.

To evaluate the manner in which the Colossian paraenesis has been shaped by contingency, I *examine* the nature of the Colossian opposition. The opponents reflect a syncretistic Jewish/pagan mystery cult which the author considered to be a Christological threat. This polemical setting is seen ultimately to shape the Colossian paraenesis, for the paraenesis affirms (esp. 1.21-23; 2.6-7) and elucidates (esp. 3.5-4.1) the nature of Christ's lordship in the face of rival powers.

Acknowledgments and Dedication

A Ph.D. thesis much like New Testament ethics is developed in a community, though the accounting for the final results is given individually. I will always be indebted to the many friends and family members whose prayers, encouragement and generous financial support have made this thesis possible. I specifically want to thank Vicar Philip Hacking and our many friends at Christ Church Fulwood, whose love and Christian example helped to make our time in England both enjoyable and fruitful. To my present congregation at First Baptist Tempe, thanks for your patience and unflagging support over the past three years.

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Chapter One

Introduction

I. Justification of this Study

In the past twenty-five years there has been substantial academic interest in the Colossian epistle, including an evaluation of the Colossian opponents,¹ a discussion of the theology of Colossians,² an exegesis of the entire epistle³ (including the publication

¹ Randal A. Argall, "The Source of a Religious Error in Colossae," *CJT* 22 (1987) 6-20; Andrew Bandstra, "Did the Colossian Errorists Need a Mediator?" in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. by R. Longenecker and M. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 329-43; Günther Bornkamm, "The Heresy of Colossians," in *Conflict at Colossae. A Problem in the Interpretation of Early Christianity Illustrated by Modern Studies*, ed. and trans. by Fred O. Francis and Wayne A. Meeks (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975) 123-45; James Bradley, "The Religious Life-Setting of the Epistle to the Colossians," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 5 (1975) 17-36; Richard DeMaris, *The Colossian Controversy*, JSNTSup 96 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994); Craig Evans, "The Colossian Mystics," *Bib* 63 (1982) 188-205; Fred O. Francis, "The Christological Argument of Colossians," in *God's Christ and His People*, ed. by Jacob Jervell and Wayne Meeks (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1977) 192-208, "Humility and Angel Worship in Col 2.18," in *Conflict at Colossae*, 163-95; Bruce Hollenbach, "Col 2.23: Which Things Lead to the Fulment of the Flesh," *NTS* 25 (1978-79) 254-61; Morna Hooker, "Were There False Teachers in Colossae?," in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament*, FS C. F. D. Moule, ed. by Barnabas Lindars and Stephen Smalley (Cambridge: CUP, 1973) 315-31; Stanislas Lyonnet, "Paul's Adversaries in Colossae," in *Conflict at Colossae*, 147-61; Christopher Rowland, "Apocalyptic Visions and the Exaltation of Christ in the Letter to the Colossians," *JSNT* 19 (1983) 73-83; Thomas J. Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption at Colossae*, JSNTSup 53 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) 150-70; Eduard Schweizer, "Slaves of the Elements and Worshippers of Angels: Gal 4:3, 9 and Col 2:8, 18, 20," *JBL* 107 (1988) 455-68; Herold Weiss, "Law in the Epistle to the Colossians," *CBQ* 34 (1972) 294-314; Roy Yates, "Colossians and Gnosis," *JSNT* 27 (1986) 49-68; "The Worship of Angels (Col 2.18)," *ExpTim* 97 (1985) 12-15.

² C. Burger, *Schöpfung und Versöhnung: Studien zum liturgischen Gut im Kolosser- und Epheserbrief*, WMANT 46 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1975); J. P. T. Hunt, "Colossians 2:11-12: The Circumcision/Baptism Analogy, and Infant Baptism," *TynBul* 41 (1990) 227-44; H. E. Lona, *Die Eschatologie im Kolosser- und Epheserbrief*, Forschung zur Bibel 48 (Würzburg: Echter, 1984); Ralph P. Martin, "Reconciliation and Forgiveness in Colossians," in *Reconciliation and Hope. New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology*, FS L. Morris, ed. by R. Banks (Exeter: Paternoster, 1974) 104-24; J. C. O'Neill, "The Source of Christology in Colossians," *NTS* 26 (1979-80) 87-100; Wolfgang Schenk, "Christus, das Geheimnis der Welt, als dogmatisches und ethisches Grundprinzip des Kolosserbriefes," *EvT* 43 (1983) 138-55; Eduard Schweizer, "Christus und Geist im Kolosserbrief," in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament*, 297-313; Gerhard Sellin, "Die Auferstehung ist Schon gesehen," *NovT* 25 (1983) 220-37; A. J. M. Wedderburn, "The Theology of Colossians," in *The Theology of the Later Pauline Epistles*, ed. by Andrew Lincoln and A. J. M. Wedderburn (Cambridge: CUP, 1993) 3-71, 167-69, 173-78; G. F. Wessels, "The Eschatology of Colossians and Ephesians," *Neot* 21 (1987) 183-202.

³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); Hans Conzelmann et al., *Die Briefe an die Galater, Epheser, Philipper, Kolosser, Thessalonicher und Philemon*, NTD 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981); J. Ernst, *Die Briefe an die Philipper, an Philemon, an die Kolosser, an die Epheser*, RNT (Regensburg: Pustet, 1974); Joachim Gnilka, *Der Kolosserbrief*, HTKNT 10 (Freiburg: Herder, 1980); Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, EGGNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, Hermeneia, trans. by W. Poehlmann and Robert Karris (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971); Ralph P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973); P. T. O'Brien, *Colossians and Philemon*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1982); Petr Pokorný, *Colossians*, trans. by Siegfried Schatzmann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991); Eduard Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians*, trans. by Andrew Chester (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982); Michael Wolter, *Der Brief an der Kolosser. Der Brief an Philemon*, Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar zum Neuen Testament (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1993).

of a major commentary on Colossians last year⁴), and examinations of other aspects of the epistle.⁵ In the last 25 years, academic discussion has also included the publication of monographs and articles on various portions of the Colossian paraenesis (moral exhortation),⁶ and on the types of traditional paraenesis found in Colossians.⁷ Yet in the past quarter of the century no monograph or thesis⁸ has examined all or even most of the Colossian paraenesis. This evidences a clear need for a holistic picture of the

⁴ Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, trans. by Astrid Beck, *Colossians*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1994). Unfortunately, this commentary was published too late to be included in my thesis.

⁵ Some of the more significant works include: W. Bujard, *Stilanalytische Untersuchungen zum Kolosserbrief als Beitrag zur Methodik von Sprachvergleichen*, SUNT 11 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973); R. J. Bauckham, "Colossians 1:24 Again: The Apocalyptic Motif," *EQ* 47 (1975) 168-70; Steven M. Baugh, "The Poetic Form of Col 1:15-20," *WTJ* 47 (1985) 227-44; George Beasley-Murray, "The Second Chapter of Colossians," *RevExp* 70 (1973) 469-79; Paul Beasley-Murray, "Colossians 1:15-20: An Early Christian Hymn Celebrating the Lordship of Christ," in *Pauline Studies*, FS F. F. Bruce, ed. by D. A. Hagner and M. J. Harris (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980) 169-83; Jarl Fossum, "Col 1:15-18a in the Light of Jewish Mysticism and Gnosticism," *NTS* 35 (1989) 183-201; Mark Kiley, *Colossians as Pseudepigraphy* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986); J. Lähnemann, *Der Kolosserbrief. Komposition, Situationen und Argumentation*, SNT 3 (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1971); John R. Levison, "2 Apoc. Bar. 48:42-52:7 and the Apocalyptic Dimension of Colossians 3:1-6," *JBL* 108 (1989) 93-108; N. T. Wright, "Poetry and Theology in Colossians 1:15-20," *NTS* 36 (1990) 444-68.

⁶ Some of the significant works on the Colossian paraenesis in the last twenty-five years include: George Canon, *The Use of Traditional Materials in Colossians* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983); J. E. Crouch, *The Origin and Intention of the Colossian Haustafel*, FRLANT 109 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972); Stephen Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul. An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus*, JSNTSup 36 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990); Lars Hartman, "Code and Context: A Few Reflections on the Parenthesis of Col 3.6-4.1," in *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament*, ed. by Gerald Hawthorne and Otto Betz (Tübingen: Mohr, 1987) 237-47; G. Hinson, "The Christian Household in Colossians 3:18-4:1," *RevExp* 70 (1973) 495-507; C. F. D. Moule, "'The New Life' in Colossians," *RevExp* 70 (1973) 481-93; Karlheinz Müller, "Die Haustafel des Kolosserbriefes und das antike Frauenthema. Eine kritische Rückschau auf alte Ergebnisse," in *Die Frau im Urchristentum*, ed. by G. Dautzenberg et al. (Freiburg: Herder, 1983) 263-319; Robert Scott Nash, "The Role of the Haustafeln in Colossians and Ephesians," Ph.D. Thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982; Wolfgang Schenk, "Christus, das Geheimnis der Welt, als dogmatisches und ethisches Grundprinzip des Kolosserbriefes," *EvT* 43 (1983) 138-55; Rudolf Schnackenburg, "Der neue Mensch-mitte christlichen Weltverständnisses. Kol 3.9-11," in *Schriften zum Neuen Testament. Exegese in Fortschritt und Wandel* (München: Kösel, 1971) 392-413; Roy Yates, "The Christian Way of Life: The Paraenetic Material in Colossians 3:1-4:6," *EQ* 63 (1991) 241-51.

⁷ A few of the significant works which deal with traditional NT paraenetic material include: D. L. Balch, "Household Codes," in *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament: Selected Forms and Genres*, ed. by David Aune (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 25-50; *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981); Wayne Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); E. Schweizer, "Traditional Ethical Patterns in the Pauline and Post-Pauline Letters and Their Development (Lists of Vices and House-Tables)," in *Text and Interpretation*, FS Matthew Black, ed. by Ernest Best and R. M. Wilson (Cambridge: CUP, 1979) 195-209; D. C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles*, SBLDS 71 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983).

⁸ Recent unpublished theses on Colossians include the following: Andrew Chu-Loon Hwang, "Colossians 1:15-20 and Philippians 2:6-11: The Semantic Aspect of the Nature of Parallelism from the Perspective of Semantic Structure Analysis," Ph.D. Thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1992; Robinson Radjagukguk, "Ta Stoicheia tou Kosmou and Life with Christ: An Exegetical Study of Col 2.6-3.4," Ph.D. Thesis, Lutheran School of Theology, 1991; Harold Van Broekhoven, Jr., "Wisdom and World: The Function of Wisdom Imagery in Sirach, Pseudo-Solomon, and Colossians," Ph.D. Thesis, Boston University, 1988; Roy Yates, "Christ Triumphant: A Study of Col 2.13-15," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Manchester, 1989.

Colossian paraenesis in the light of the growing body of literature on the various aspects of Colossian and NT paraenesis.

There is also a need to update the picture of the entire Colossian paraenesis in the light of recent research on the Colossian opponents, in particular taking into account recent findings on the role of mystical Jewish apocalypticism.⁹ While there is much disagreement on the nature of the Colossian opponents, and the extent to which the Colossian paraenesis is polemically shaped, many scholars believe the Colossian paraenesis was significantly shaped by its occasional setting. Thus the relationship between the Colossian paraenesis and the occasional setting needs to be evaluated. In summary, there is still a need for a major study of the Colossian paraenesis which evaluates all or most of the Colossian paraenesis in the light of the epistle's occasional setting. This is what I have set out to do.

More specifically, I will examine the Colossian paraenesis by evaluating the ground (basis for) the Colossian paraenesis, and by evaluating the shape of the paraenesis itself. Though various theses and monographs have been written on the basis for Pauline and deutero-Pauline paraenesis,¹⁰ no one in the past twenty-five years has written a monograph or doctoral thesis evaluating the basis for moral exhortation in Colossians. Quite a bit has been written on the shape of various portions of the Colossian paraenesis, but, again, no one has recently evaluated the shape of all or most of the Colossian paraenesis.

II. Statement of the Thesis Problem

A. Definitions

The term "paraenesis" is employed in this thesis in a descriptive sense commensurate with its ancient use. Paraenesis comes from the word *παράλευσις* which

⁹ Cf. for example Richard DeMaris, *The Colossian Controversy*"; Christopher Rowland, "Apocalyptic Visions and the Exaltation of Christ in the Letter to the Colossians," *JSNT* 19 (1983) 73-83; *The Open Heaven* (London: SPCK, 1982); Thomas Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption at Colossae*; Alan F. Segal, "Heavenly Ascent in Hellenistic Judaism, Early Christianity, and Their Environs," *ANRW* 2.23.2. 1333-394.

¹⁰ Hieronymous Cruz, *Christological Motives and Motivated Actions in Pauline Paraenesis* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990); H. Halter, *Taufe und Ethos Paulinische Kriterien für das Proprium christlicher Moral* (Freiburg: Herder, 1977); Roy Jeal, "The Relationship between Theology and Ethics in the Letter to the Ephesians," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Sheffield, 1990; Otto Merk, *Handeln aus Glauben: die Motivierungen der Paulinischen Ethik* (Marlburg: Elwart, 1968); Michael Thompson, *Clothed with Christ. The Example and Teaching of Jesus in Romans 12.1-15.13*, *JSNTSup* 59 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991); Philip Towner, *The Goal of Our Instruction. The Structure of Theology and Ethics in the Pastoral Epistles*, *JSNTSup* 34 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989).

means "advice, counsel."¹¹ Though the noun is not found in the NT, the verbal form παραινέω is used in Acts 27.9, 22 to refer to admonition or exhortation. Thus we use paraenesis to refer to the broad range of NT moral exhortation, including direct injunctions to engage in a specific type of moral behaviour, prohibitions against certain kinds of moral behaviour, vice/virtue lists, and lists of household duties.

Several scholars, however, largely owing to the influence of Martin Dibelius, describe Pauline paraenesis as "traditional, non occasional moral exhortation."¹² This description often appears to be a presupposition, since little specific examination of the Pauline paraenesis is given to support the assumption that paraenesis is inherently traditional and non-occasional. Dibelius himself argues that the Pauline paraenesis (or "hortatory section") is almost entirely confined to the latter portion of the epistles, and is quite different from the previous doctrinal portion of the epistles, since the hortatory portions supposedly "lack an immediate relation with the circumstances of the letter."¹³ Furthermore, he argues that this paraenesis was traditional, and thus "the common property of Christendom."¹⁴ A. M. Hunter has a very similar understanding of Pauline paraenesis, though his formal definition of paraenesis is quite similar to ours, as he says it is "exhortation, or rather moral instruction with a dash of exhortation."¹⁵ He also concludes (after virtually no specific examination of Pauline paraenetical material) that Pauline paraenesis is traditional and non-occasional. He states,

The substance of the Pauline paraenetic tradition is not his own creation, but something common and apostolic...these hortatory sections in Paul's epistles have little connection with the theoretic foundations of Paul's ethic. Nor do they seem to have an immediate relevance to the churches addressed.¹⁶

Various scholars have vigorously contested this description of paraenesis,¹⁷ and thus we believe it is best to define paraenesis simply in terms of moral exhortation, and

¹¹ In Classical Greek, παραίνεσις refers to exhortation or address (Aeschylus *Eu.* 707; Herodotus 9.44; Thucydides 2.45) and to advice or counsel given by a person (Herodotus 5.11.51). The adjectival form παραίνετικός was used to mean "hortatory" (Aristo Chius, *Stoic.* 1.80).

¹² Verner notes "paraenesis has been described...as moral exhortation which is both general [non-occasional] and traditional in character" (*Household of God*, 112).

¹³ *From Tradition to Gospel*, trans. by Bertram Lee Wolf (New York: Charles Scribners, 1935) 228.

¹⁴ *Tradition*, 239.

¹⁵ *Paul and His Predecessors*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 1961) 52.

¹⁶ *Paul and His Predecessors*, 53-54.

¹⁷ Cf. esp. V. P. Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968) 81-111; 259-62.

allow our examination of the Colossian paraenesis itself to determine whether or not it is occasional or traditional.¹⁸

Our definition of paraenesis is similar^{to}, though broader, than that given by D. G. Bradley, who says NT paraenesis is "exhortation to seek virtue and to shun vice, and the giving of rules or directions for proper thought and action in daily living in a form which permits a wide applicability of the teachings."¹⁹ In the Pauline literature (including Col/Eph) there are also additional modes of moral exhortation other than direct imperatives (Col 3.5, 8, 9; 3.12-4.5) or hortatory subjunctives (Rom 13.12, 13; 2 Cor 7.1; Phil 3.15). Furnish notes that these other Pauline paraenetical modes include: the asking of questions with clear hortatory implications ("do you not know?"—Rom 6.3; 1 Cor 6.3; "who are you to judge another's servant?"—Rom 14.14; "why do you submit to regulations?"—Col 2.20), the thanksgiving section of the epistles (Phil 1.3-11; Col 1.3-14),²⁰ the benediction section of the epistles (Rom 15.5-6; 2 Cor 13.11-14),²¹ autobiographical narratives used imperatively (Gal 2.11-14; cf. 1.6-9), satire (1 Cor 4.8-13), and indicatives used with imperatival force (Rom 7.4; Col 3.3-4; 1 Thess 4.7).²² The wide modality of Pauline paraenesis again confirms our definition of paraenesis as the broad range of moral exhortation.

B. Primary Problem: The Ground (Basis for) Paraenesis in Colossians

With the appearance of Albert Schweitzer's theological bombshell *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* in 1906, theories of NT ethics have been drastically altered. Schweitzer delivered what proved to be a *coup de grâce* to the eschatology of classical liberalism, an eschatology which viewed the apocalyptic elements of Jesus' preaching as the extraneous husk of the gospel. In bold Teutonic fashion, Schweitzer demonstrated that Jesus' preaching was inextricably apocalyptic in its framework and content.

¹⁸ This is similar to the approach Verner takes, for he states "in the case of the Pastorals, one ought not to prejudge the issue of what role tradition plays in this material and to what extent a coherent perspective emerges from it" (*Household of God*, 125).

¹⁹ David Bradley, "The Topos as a Form in the Pauline Paraenesis," *JBL* 72 (1953) 239. Like Dibelius and Hunter, however, Bradley goes on to describe paraenesis as traditional and non-occasional.

²⁰ On the imperatival aspects of the thanksgiving section of the Pauline epistles, cf. P. T. O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul* (Leiden: Brill, 1977) 101; P. Schubert, *Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1939) 89.

²¹ On the nature of the Pauline benediction section, including the imperatival aspects, cf. Jeffrey Weima, *Neglected Endings. The Significance of the Pauline Letter Closings*, JSNTSup 101 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994).

²² Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, 92-98.

This eschatological paradigm shift has had significant consequences for NT ethics. Schweitzer argued that since Jesus' teachings are framed in an apocalyptic world-view, his ethics cannot be modernised since he offered only an interim ethic.²³ This is said to explain Jesus' radical demands for obedience and his apparent apathy toward existing social/political structures. Schweitzer's bold re-formulation of eschatology and ethics has greatly influenced later NT critics. With respect to NT ethics in the early 20th century, among the most important of those influenced by Schweitzer was Martin Dibelius. Dibelius, utilising a *formgeschichtliche* method, asserted that the early church's preoccupation with an imminent apocalyptic parousia precluded the development of Christian ethics, for the early Christian churches "were prepared for the disappearance of this world and not for life in it. They were therefore in no way prepared for the necessity of bringing forward hortatory sentences for every-day life."²⁴ Thus the early church supposedly "borrowed" ethical material from Hellenistic Judaism and contemporary philosophy and made it part of early church paraenetic tradition. Paul and other NT writers are said to have drawn from this paraenetic tradition. This is said to result in the Pauline ethical material having little or nothing to do with the theoretic (theological) teachings in the rest of the epistles in which they are found.²⁵

It has been noted²⁶ that this model of the Pauline paraenesis has been formative for NT scholars such as Philip Carrington,²⁷ A. M. Hunter,²⁸ and C. H. Dodd.²⁹ Käsemann himself gives Dibelius credit for the insight that "the context of parenetic

²³ "Jesus cannot preach to men a special ethic of the Kingdom of God, but only an ethic which in this world makes men free from the world and prepared to enter unimpeded into the Kingdom. That is why His ethic is so completely negative; it is, in fact, not so much an ethic as a penitential discipline" (*The Quest of the Historical Jesus. A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. by W. Montgomery, 3rd ed. [London: Adam and Charles Black, 1954] 239). Richard Hiers, however, advocating a minority opinion asserts that Schweitzer's interim ethic has been misunderstood ("Interim Ethics: An Essay in Tribute to A. Schweitzer," *Theology and Life* 9 [1966] 220-33).

²⁴ Dibelius, *Tradition*, 240; cf. also Dibelius, *A Fresh Approach to the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (New York: Charles Scribners, 1936) 224. For a helpful evaluation of Dibelius' perspective on ethics and eschatology, see C. W. Coetzer, "Pauline Eschatology and Ethics—A Critical Evaluation of Martin Dibelius," *Neot* 21 (1987) 25-31. Coetzer criticises Dibelius for failing to recognise the Pauline dialectic between the present and the future, which can particularly be seen in the Pauline theology of Pneuma "which is representative of the *eschaton* which is breaking into the present era" (30). Coetzer also notes that Dibelius almost completely failed to recognise the role "new creation theology" plays in the Pauline ethic (cf. Rom 12.1-2; 1 Cor 5.6-8; 2 Cor 5.15-17; Col 3.7-11).

²⁵ Dibelius, *Tradition*, 239-40.

²⁶ Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, 261, n. 33.

²⁷ Cf. *The Primitive Christian Catechism, A Study in the Epistles* (Cambridge: CUP, 1940).

²⁸ *Paul and His Predecessors*, 52.

²⁹ *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1944) 7-

tradition in the New Testament was not originally determined by the laws of logic or by those of systematic theology,"³⁰ a fact he says is evidenced by the manner in which ethical material is often completely out of context with the surrounding theological material, and thus often "betrays the fact that the thematic connection was created as an afterthought and often for worse rather than for better."³¹

While he develops this model (that Pauline paraenesis is disconnected from the remainder of the epistle in which it is found) in a different manner, and does not appear to have been influenced by Schweitzer or Dibelius, David Bradley reaches similar conclusions regarding a form of NT paraenesis he labels "*topos*."³² He gives several examples of NT *topoi*, including Col 3.5-4.6, and defines a *topos* as "the treatment in independent form of the topic of a proper thought or action, or of a virtue or a vice, etc."³³ He argues that *topoi* are all self-contained, unitary teachings which are essentially disconnected from each other and from the surrounding epistolary material.³⁴ He explains the disconnectedness of the *topoi* by describing their origin. He argues that Hellenistic teachers would build a stock of answers to ethical concerns. These answers are said to have been stereotyped in both form and content, and were drawn on as needed.³⁵ In like manner, the NT *topoi* are Paul's "bag of answers to meet recurring problems and questions common to the members of different early Christian communities."³⁶ Thus Pauline *topoi* are essentially disconnected from the epistles in which they are found, and from the readers to which they are written. The Pauline *topoi* are shaped neither by the readers' specific needs, nor by the *kerygma* in the rest of the epistle.

J. T. Sanders presses the logic of Dibelius' and Schweitzer's eschatological findings to what he sees as its logical conclusion, arguing that the writers of Scripture shared Jesus' perspective regarding the imminent coming of the kingdom. When the parousia did not occur, he asserts that little basis existed for ethics.³⁷ Sanders asserts that the Pauline ethic is distorted in Colossians. He says the Colossian believers are told

³⁰ "Worship and Everyday Life," in *New Testament Questions of Today*, trans. by W. J. Montague (London: SCM, 1969) 188.

³¹ "Worship and Everyday Life," 188.

³² "The Topos," 238-46.

³³ "The Topos," 240.

³⁴ "The Topos," 243.

³⁵ "The Topos," 246.

³⁶ "The Topos," 246.

³⁷ *Ethics in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 13, 29, 45-46, 65-6, 110. H. P. Owen's criticisms of Schweitzer are also applicable to Sanders, for Owen demonstrates that while for Jesus and Paul, the expectation of an imminent Parousia did provide ethical motivation, it did not wholly determine the content of their ethical teachings ("Eschatology and Ethics in the New Testament," *SJT* 15 [1962] 374-80).

to be somehow ethically different from unbelievers, but are given no basis for this different behaviour, for an entirely realised eschatology cannot provide such an ethical foundation. In view of the supposed failure of the author of Colossians to give a basis for the ethical statements, Sanders concludes "there is in Colossians no inner coherence between theology and ethics."³⁸ Hence he reasons that ultimately "we can learn nothing from Colossians and Ephesians relevant to our ethical situation today."³⁹

While Sanders' model of NT ethics has attracted few followers, and Bradley's model has largely been refuted,⁴⁰ they have benefited the discussion of NT ethics by forcing exegetes to evaluate carefully the relationship between ethics and theology within individual epistles. Thus the first problem we will address is the basis for paraenesis in Colossians. This might also be described as the relationship between paraenesis and *kerygma*. As J. I. McDonald notes "paraenesis is supremely didactic, yet related to a *kerygmatic* core."⁴¹ The question for our study is: "Exactly how is paraenesis related to the *kerygmatic* core?" More specifically, we are seeking to answer the question: "What is the theological basis for moral exhortation in Colossians?"

C. Secondary Problem: The Shape of Paraenesis in Colossians

While the basis of paraenesis in Colossians is our primary concern, we will also evaluate the shape of the Colossian paraenesis. By shape, we refer to the behavioural, historical, and rhetorical nature of the exhortations. The behavioural nature of the exhortations refers to that which the writer was specifically imploring the Colossians to do or to avoid. The historical nature of the exhortations relates to their origin. To investigate the origins of the Colossian paraenesis, we will be asking: "Are these exhortations the creations of the writer, or did he draw from existing Jewish, Christian, Hellenistic, or other sources?" The rhetorical nature of the moral exhortations relates to

³⁸ *Ethics*, 79.

³⁹ *Ethics*, 80.

⁴⁰ T. Y. Mullins modified Bradley's model by adding four formal elements of a *topos*: injunction, reason, discussion, and analogous situation, and by demonstrating that the NT *topoi* are not stereotypical answers to similar ethical concerns or questions ("Topos as a New Testament Form," *JBL* 99 [1980] 542-47). J. C. Brunt is more critical of Bradley than Mullins ("More on the Topos as a New Testament Form," *JBL* 104 [1985] 495-500). He believes the term "*topos*" is misleading, since in the Classical sources he surveys, it is not used of the kind of general ethical teaching Bradley spoke of. Rather, it was commonly used of stereotyped arguments applied to specific cases (496-98). Furthermore, he argues that Bradley failed to identify carefully the criteria for *topoi*, and was gratuitously disposed to divorcing the Pauline *topoi* from the rest of the epistle. For additional criticisms of Bradley's model, cf. also Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, 90, 99-100; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC [Dallas: Word, 1990] 294-95.

⁴¹ *Kerygma and Didache: The Articulation and Structure of the Earliest Christian Message*, SNTSMS 37 (Cambridge: CUP, 1980) 127.

the role of the paraenesis in the overall argument of the epistle. We will not give equal weight to these three aspects of the shape of the Colossian paraenesis in each chapter, and in particular, will place greater weight on the historical and rhetorical nature of the paraenesis in the chapters which deal with traditional material ("The Colossian Hymn"; "The Vice/Virtue Lists"; "The Household Code").

One of the ways we will seek to link our two major thesis problems (the ground and the shape of paraenesis in Colossians) will be through evaluating the function of the paraenetical material, particularly the traditional material in Colossians.

III. Research Methodology

A. General Methodology: Historical, Exegetical

J. C. Beker astutely notes that the essential challenge for the modern Christian church is to recognise the delicate balance between contingency and coherence in Paul's gospel. The challenge consists in "how to be simultaneously attentive to the claims of the original tradition and the claims of the new historical and sociocultural situations, to which the tradition intends to speak in a live manner."⁴² Hence he argues that Paul's legacy can only be evaluated correctly when the claims of the original tradition (the *traditum*) are properly balanced with the claims of the adaptations that the transmission of tradition necessitates (the *traditio*).⁴³ In this attempt to analyse the first-century Pauline traditions (the *traditum*) reflected in the Colossian text, I have utilised a historical-exegetical methodology.⁴⁴ I will leave it to others to adapt these traditions to new historical and sociocultural situations.

⁴² *Heirs of Paul: Paul's Legacy in the New Testament and in the Church Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991) 15.

⁴³ *Heirs of Paul.*, 10-11, cp. 115-16. See also Lohse, who states "The writings of the New Testament are a choir of witnesses that address us with a variety of voices. What they have to say needs to be understood first within the context of its own time and then, with considered judgment, translated into our time. Providing the orientation necessary for this interpretive process is the goal of this basic outline" (*Theological Ethics of the New Testament*, trans. by M. Eugene Boring [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991] vii). While Lohse recognises the interplay between the *traditum* and the *traditio*, he focuses almost entirely on the former.

⁴⁴ In utilising a historical-exegetical methodology, I am not deprecating recent literary approaches to the biblical text. I recognise that no literary text can convey knowledge with absolute accuracy, and that ultimately, one cannot divorce the reader from the interpretive process. At the same time, even Edgar McKnight, an influential advocate of the reader-response approach, asserts that while the reader's experience and actualisation of the biblical text is in a sense an experience of ultimacy, it is not "an experience that can bypass the historical and contingent" (*Post-Modern Use of the Bible. The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1988] 266); cf. also *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, ed. by Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1995) xiv-xix.

B. Text Selection

The paraenetical nature of Col. 2.6, 3.1-4.1 is obvious, and has been recognised by most exegetes. Hence we will examine this entire section. Based on our broad definition of paraenesis, we will also examine 1.9-12 and 1.21-23, though the call to moral behaviour in these verses is not explicit as it is in 2.6, 3.1-4.6. In 1.9-12 the call to moral behaviour is implied by virtue of the nature of the thanksgiving section, and in 1.21-23 exhortation is implied. We will examine the hymn in 1.15-20 since it provides the basis for the implied exhortations in 1.21-23, and since it is quoted or alluded to four times in ch. 2, revealing its significance in the polemic of the epistle. Finally, we will examine the whole of ch. 2, particularly vv. 2-10, 15-23, in our evaluation of the nature of the Colossian opposition.⁴⁵ Though some exegetes have restricted their study of the Colossian opponents to an examination of 2.8, 16-23,⁴⁶ we believe the entire chapter is directly or indirectly polemical, and gives valuable insight into the nature of the opposition. While some analyse the paraenesis in Colossians and give little or no attention to the opponents, due to an *a priori* assumption that NT paraenesis is not shaped by contingency,⁴⁷ as we noted in our definition of paraenesis, we believe this is a mistake. In fact, many exegetes now argue that much of the paraenesis in Colossians evidences great influence by the polemical occasion. We will evaluate this contention by carefully examining the nature of the Colossian opponents, and their relationship to the Colossian paraenesis.

⁴⁵ I will avoid referring to the teaching of the Colossian opponents as the "Colossian error" or "heresy" in spite of the fact that many commentators do so (cf. Randal A. Argall, "The Source of a Religious Error in Colossae"; Andrew Bandstra, "Did the Colossian Errorists Need a Mediator?"; Günther Bornkamm, "The Heresy of Colossians"). Obviously, the writer of Colossians believed the teachings of the opponents were untrue and distorted Christianity as he understood it, but the question of whether or not the beliefs of the Colossian opponents accords with reality or with other early Christian beliefs, is beyond the purview of this study.

⁴⁶ For example, Richard DeMaris limits his evaluation of the Colossian opponents to a study of 2.8, 16-23, which he calls the "polemical core" (*The Colossian Controversy*, 41-45). His rationale for doing so is that: (1) the inclusion of additional material may direct the researcher away from the texts which scholars believe contain the most direct characterisation of the opponents' philosophy; and (2) the numerous differences in previous reconstructions of the Colossian error mandate the tightest control over the reconstruction data (44). With the first rationale, DeMaris fails to realise the subjective nature of what constitutes "the most direct, concrete characterization of the [opponents'] philosophy." Furthermore, he fails to recognise that other portions of ch. 2 (esp. vv. 2-4) are overtly polemical, and thus must be evaluated for a comprehensive understanding of the Colossian opponents. With respect to the second rationale for limiting the study of the opponents to nine verses, I believe an opposite conclusion is warranted—in the light of the many conflicting theories regarding the Colossian opponents based in large measure on the scarcity of data, it is best to look at all of ch. 2 to determine what light it sheds on the opponents.

⁴⁷ For example, Crouch in his seminal monograph on the Colossian household code writes less than a page on the Colossian opponents (*The Colossian Haustafel*, 151). In his brief and inconclusive discussion of the role of the *Haustafel* in Colossians and the identity of the opponents, he seems to offer an *apologia* for ignoring the role of the opponents in the Colossian paraenesis. He states "it has become a dogma of scholarship that no relationship exists between the situation of the letter and the paraenesis which it contains."

Finally, we acknowledge that by our definition 4.2-6 is paraenetical, but have chosen not to examine this section due to the limitations on thesis length, and due to the fact that no apparent basis is given for the paraenesis in this section. We believe the paraenesis in 4.2-6 warrants a separate study in which the closing portion of the letter is evaluated in the light of other Pauline and deutero-Pauline closing sections.⁴⁸

IV. Thesis Assumption

Since the authorship of Colossians is hotly debated, and there is little evidence that scholars will reach a consensus in the near future, my major thesis assumption explains why the question of Pauline authorship of Colossians is not my major concern. My thesis assumption is this—whether or not the apostle Paul actually wrote Colossians, the epistle at least stands in the broad Pauline tradition. In other words, there is general continuity between Colossians and the undisputed Pauline writings. I will now further explain and support this assumption.

Since this is a study of the Colossian paraenesis in particular, and not of the Pauline paraenesis in general (other Pauline paraenetical texts are evaluated only as they relate to Colossians), it is not necessary to make a final judgment on the authorship of Colossians. Hence throughout this thesis, we will simply refer to the "writer" or "author," without making a conclusive judgment on whether the Apostle Paul, his amanuensis (cf. Col 4.18),⁴⁹ or a later pseudonymous writer in the Pauline school actually wrote this epistle. At the same time, in the light of the fact that in this thesis paraenetical sections of Colossians are related to other relevant paraenetical material in the Pauline *homologoumena*, and in the light of the fact that I end up interacting to some degree with most of the theological objections to Pauline authorship in the course of this thesis, I will now briefly summarise the arguments against Pauline authorship. While I will seek to put a question mark against some of the arguments against Pauline authorship, I am not seeking in this short section to claim Pauline authorship, but to demonstrate general continuity between the undisputed Pauline letters and Colossians. In doing so, the contention that Colossians at least stands in the broad Pauline tradition is strengthened.

⁴⁸ Unfortunately, Jeffrey Weima in his recent monograph *Neglected Endings*, restricts his study to the Pauline *homologoumena*. Hopefully, another scholar in the near future will relate Weima's findings to the closing portion of Colossians.

⁴⁹ For a recent study of the role of the secretary in the ancient world, along with the defence of Pauline authorship of Colossians through the agency of an amanuensis, cf. E. Randolph Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, WUNT 42 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1991).

It should be noted that even those who reject Pauline authorship of Colossians generally accept the fact that it stands in the Pauline tradition, and say that the pseudonymous author was probably familiar with the Pauline writings and sought to remain faithful to the spirit of those writings. Pokorný states,

Everything that causes us to doubt the authenticity of Colossians does not at all change the fact that we must interpret it as a text that seeks to link up the thought of the main letters of Paul, and that, in this sense, authentically renders the apostolic witness.⁵⁰

In a recent, influential work on canonical pseudepigraphy, David Meade uses the concept of *Vergegenwärtigung* (the contemporising of canonical tradition)⁵¹ to explain canonical pseudonymity. His thesis statement is that literary attribution is primarily an assertion of authoritative tradition, and not of literary origins.⁵² James D. G. Dunn, who supervised Meade's thesis, applies the concept of *Vergegenwärtigung* to the question of the consistency of tradition, which is quite relevant to the issue of whether Colossians stands in the broad Pauline tradition. He shows that if one accepts the presence of pseudonymity in the NT, it does not necessitate incongruity with that tradition, and in fact, is based upon, and is an extension of, that tradition.⁵³ Dunn concludes,

Canonical pseudepigraphy is best seen as an example of the Jewish understanding and practice of tradition as a living force. That practice consisted essentially in the reworking and contemporising of authoritative tradition which stemmed from a recognised spokesman for God and channel of divine revelation. A later disciple standing within that tradition and intent to re-express its message or to develop its emphases for a new day and situation saw himself as the mouthpiece of that tradition, *speaking words congruent with the earlier revelation*. He could present his message as the message of the originator of that stream of tradition, because in his eyes that is what it was (emphasis mine).⁵⁴

Again this suggests that even if one does not accept Pauline authorship of Colossians, this does not mean the epistle does not stand in the broad Pauline tradition.

⁵⁰ *Colossians*, 13. Beker argues that the writer of Colossians sought to adapt faithfully the Pauline tradition to new situations (*Heirs of Paul*); cf. also Kiley, *Colossians as Pseudepigraphy*, 103-107.

⁵¹ *Pseudonymity and Canon*, WUNT 39 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1986) 14-16, 42-43, 128-33, 189-90.

⁵² *Pseudonymity and Canon*, 157, 161, 193.

⁵³ See also Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lxx-lxxiii. With respect to Colossians, Robert Tannehill, who is skeptical of Pauline authorship of this epistle, strongly affirms the consistency of its theology with the theology of the undisputed letters. He says "Colossians, even if not written by Paul, clearly stands in the Pauline tradition and reflects patterns of thought used by Paul. Colossians may even bring out more clearly certain ideas which are only touched upon in the Pauline *homologoumena*" (*Dying and Rising with Christ*, BZNTW 32 [Berlin: Töppelmann, 1966] 48).

⁵⁴ "The Problem of Pseudonymity," in *The Living Word* (London: SCM, 1987) 84.

We will now look at some of the specific stylistic and theological arguments against Pauline authorship to strengthen our assumption that Colossians stands in the Pauline tradition (stylistically as well as theologically).

While a significant number of NT scholars reject Pauline authorship of Colossians,⁵⁵ there is by no means a consensus against it.⁵⁶ The external evidence is virtually unanimous in testifying to the authorship of Colossians by Paul himself. Internally, doubts regarding Pauline authorship have been raised in the light of stylistic and theological issues. Meeks argued over a decade ago that Bujard's stylistic analysis of Colossians should end the authorship debate, for he believes Bujard has proven that Colossians is pseudonymous.⁵⁷ These stylistic arguments have not settled the debate, however. Stylistically the vocabulary of Colossians is unlike the other undisputed Pauline epistles, containing 34 words which are not found in the rest of the NT, and 28 words which are not found in the rest of the undisputed Pauline epistles. It should be noted, however, that statistical analysis of literary vocabulary is far from an exact science, particularly when applied to relatively short documents.⁵⁸ Kenneth Neumann,

⁵⁵ Among those who affirm the pseudonymity of Colossians are Beker, *Heirs of Paul*, 64-71, 86-91; G. Bornkamm, "Die Hoffnung im Kolosserbrief: zugleich ein Beitrag zur Frage der Echtheit des Briefes," in *Studien zum Neuen Testament und zur Patristik*, FS Erich Klostermann (Berlin: Akademie, 1961) 56-64; Bujard, *Untersuchungen zum Kolosserbrief*; Raymond Collins, *Letters that Paul Did Not Write* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1988) 171-208; Conzelmann and Lindemann, *Interpreting the New Testament* 8th ed., trans. by Siegfried Schatzmann (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1988) 200-203; Kiley, *Colossians as Pseudepigraphy*; Edward Lohse, "Pauline Theology in the Letter to the Colossians," *NTS* 15 (1969) 211-20; Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) 125; Charles Nielsen, "The Status of Paul and His Letters in Colossians," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 12 (1985) 103-22; Pokorný, *Colossians*, 3-19; Sanders, *Ethics in the New Testament*, 67-81; Wedderburn, "The Theology of Colossians"; R. Yates, "A Reappraisal of Colossians," *ITQ* 58 (1992) 95-117.

⁵⁶ Pace Sanders who boldly asserts "that Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and 1 Peter are pseudonymous and imitate Paul's style and thought is not to be debated here but rather accepted as an assured result of historical critical scholarship" (*Ethics*, 67, n. 1); cf. also Willi Marxsen, who, although he declares that Colossians can be called Pauline, says "it is almost universally assumed that Colossians was written by a student of Paul" (*New Testament Foundations for Christian Ethics*, trans. by O. C. Dean Jr. [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993] 272). There are numerous scholars who affirm Pauline authorship of Colossians, including F. F. Bruce, *Colossians*, 28-33; G. B. Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976) 155-57; Cannon, *The Use of Traditional Materials*, 228-29; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990) 572-77; Harris, *Colossians*, 3-4; J. L. Houlden, *Paul's Letters from Prison* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970) 134-39; W. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* 17th ed., trans. by Howard Clark Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975) 340-46; O'Brien, *Colossians*, xli-xlix; Martin, *Colossians*, 32-40; C. F. D. Moule, *Colossians and Philemon* (London: Nelson, 1962) 13; E. Percy, *Die Problem der Kolosser- und Epheserbriefe* (Lund: Gleerup, 1946); Richards, *The Secretary*, 189-201; N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, TynNTC (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1986) 31-34. Schweizer takes a modified position, asserting that Colossians "is neither Pauline nor post-Pauline" (*Colossians*, 21). Käsemann also appears to vacillate on the question of authorship, for he states regarding the authorship of Colossians "if authentic, as late as possible on account of style; if not authentic, as early as possible" ("Kolosserbrief," in RGG 3rd ed., 1727-28, cited and trans. by Pokorný, *Colossians*, 4).

⁵⁷ *First Urban Christians*, 125.

⁵⁸ Bruce Metzger, "A Reconsideration of Certain Arguments Against the Pauline Authorship of the Pastoral Epistles," *ExpTim* 70 (1958-59) 91-94.

in fact, contends that recent stylostatistical studies reveal that the use of *hapax legomena* is one of the least effective stylistic indices for determining authenticity.⁵⁹ Note, for example, that Galatians, an undisputed Pauline letter, contains 31 words not found in the rest of the NT. Furthermore, the unusual vocabulary in Colossians might be largely explained by the use of pre-existing hymnic material which contains many of the rare terms, and in the Pauline utilisation of the language of his opponents, language which may contain many rare technical terms.⁶⁰

Scholars also argue that in addition to the unusual vocabulary of Colossians, other stylistic factors evidence non-Pauline authorship, including the manner in which genitives as well as synonymous expressions are strung together, the infrequency of infinitives, and the repeated use of participial phrases.⁶¹ Recently, however, two stylistic statistical studies affirm stylistical continuity between Colossians and the Pauline *homologoumena*. Neumann's stylostatistical analysis of the Pauline epistles revealed that based on word length, the use of relative and indefinite pronouns, the number of words with an initial *tau*, the first noun position in a modified full-stop sentence, and the use of initial sentence connectors, Colossians does not reflect significant stylostatistical deviation from the Pauline *homologoumena*.⁶² While he makes no firm conclusion on the Pauline authorship of Colossians/Ephesians, he concludes "there is little reason on the basis of style to deny the authenticity of the disputed [Pauline] letters."⁶³ Anthony Kenny analysed a greater number (96) of stylistical features, and reached very similar conclusions. He contends that stylistical evidence clearly marks Colossians as having been written by the same author as the rest of the *homologoumena*.⁶⁴ Thus stylistically, Colossians may well be closer to the undisputed Pauline epistles than has previously been recognised.

⁵⁹ *The Authenticity of the Pauline Epistles in the Light of Stylostatistical Analysis*, SBLDS 120 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990) 215.

⁶⁰ R. Martin, *New Testament Foundations: A Guide for Christian Students*, vol. 1 (Exeter: Paternoster, 1975) 39. Cannon also notes the difficulty in attempting to determine authorship by doing stylistic and vocabulary analysis, given the generally agreed upon observation that Colossians contains much traditional material. He concludes, for example, that 55% of the first two chapters of Colossians is influenced by "words, ideas, and modes of expression that were already existing in the early church," with 30% of the lines of text being drawn from traditional material, and another 25% consisting of the careful application of traditional material (*Traditional Materials*, 49). On the Pauline use of the language of his audience and opponents, see H. Chadwick, "All Things to All Men," *NTS* 1 (1954-5) 261-75.

⁶¹ So argues Schweizer, *Colossians*, 18.

⁶² *Stylostatistical Analysis*, 206-11.

⁶³ *Authenticity of the Pauline Epistles*, 217.

⁶⁴ *A Stylometric Study of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) 98-100. Kenny's stylistic analysis in fact reveals that Colossians stands closer to the Paulistic stylistic "centre" than Philemon or 1 Corinthians (98).

Theologically, it is asserted that the Christology, ecclesiology, and eschatology in Colossians give evidence of post-Pauline authorship and signal theological disjunction with the Pauline *homologoumena*. While there are clearly some theological differences between Colossians and the undisputed Pauline letters, these differences may not be as severe as some scholars have indicated. Lohse says the Christology of Colossians unfolds from the Christ hymn cited in 1.15-20, but when the author goes on to assert that all the fulness of the godhead dwells bodily in Christ (2.9), and that Christ is already the exalted Lord over all (2.10), as opposed to him becoming Lord at the end of the apocalyptic events, this significantly exceeds the Christology of the undisputed Pauline literature (1 Cor 8.6; Phil 2.9-11).⁶⁵ We must ask, however, whether the theology of Colossians in fact contradicts that found in the other Pauline letters, or whether the implications of certain points of Pauline theology found elsewhere are drawn out in this epistle due to the specific theological needs of the Colossian community. It may be that the Christology of Colossians is a further elaboration of that found in 1 Cor 2.8, 8.6, 2 Cor 4.4, Phil 2.6 and 9-11. While the exact identity of the opponents is impossible to determine, the statements of ch. 2 strongly suggest that there was a specific group of opponents who were calling the character and cosmic authority of Christ into question (2:8-10, 15-23). If this assessment is correct, then we might expect to find a highly developed Christology in Colossians.

Lohse further argues that the ecclesiology of Colossians, being closely connected with the Christology, has evolved from the earlier Stoic picture of the church as a living organism or body with many diverse members (Rom 12; 1 Cor 12), into a truly ecumenical ecclesiology in which the ἐκκλησία is seen as the whole church which is subordinate to Christ its head.⁶⁶ Again, it may well be that we are not dealing with ecclesiological concepts which are incongruous with those found in the other Pauline literature, but which are an occasional elaboration of them. It is also important to note that the typically Pauline use of "body," which refers to the living organism of believers, is found in Col 3.15, where believers are urged to let the peace of Christ rule, since they were called "in one body."

While the origin of the term "body of Christ" is the subject of much debate,⁶⁷ we can say with Bultmann that "body of Christ" is a Pauline ecclesiological term which

⁶⁵ "Pauline Theology," 214-15.

⁶⁶ "Pauline Theology," 215. See also "Christusherrschaft und Kirche im Kolosserbrief," *NTS* 11 (1964-65) 203-16.

⁶⁷ Bultmann believes the idea of the church being the body of Christ is largely a Gnostic mythological concept (*Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1, trans. by Kendrick Grobel [New York: Charles Scribners, 1955] 178-183). J. A. T. Robinson asserts that "body of Christ" comes from Paul's Damascus Road experience (*The Body* [London: SCM, 1952] 58). D. E. H. Whiteley, on the other

expresses both the unity of the church and the foundation of unity.⁶⁸ The ecumenical ecclesiology in Colossians is an elaboration of the unity of the church implied in the metaphor itself. In addition, Kümmel notes that while the concept of Christ as κεφαλή of the church is unique to Colossians and Ephesians (Col 1.18, 24; 2.19; Eph 5.23), the linking of Christ's identity with the church as his "body" is made elsewhere (1 Cor 1.13, 12.12, 13; Gal 3.28). Whether one views the metaphor of Christ as head of the church as a concept Paul understood earlier as an implication of his Christology, or whether it was first developed in response to the Colossian opponents, the Christology and ecclesiology of Colossians and that of the undisputed Pauline epistles are not clearly irreconcilable to each other.⁶⁹

Finally, the eschatology of Colossians is seen by many to indicate post-Pauline authorship, for it is different from that found in the undisputed Pauline epistles.⁷⁰ For example, the concept of hope seems to have somewhat shifted from an eschatological and temporal look toward the future to a spatial upward glance (1.5, 26-27).⁷¹ It is furthermore argued that in contradiction to the genuine Pauline epistles, eschatology in Colossians is a minor motif, and when it does appear, it is spatial, not apocalyptic (1.26-27; 3.1-3).⁷² Eschatological themes such as future judgment and resurrection, common in the undisputed Pauline literature, are not prominent in this epistle. And the most apparent eschatological departure from the undisputed Pauline epistles is that in Colossians, the writer asserts that believers have not only died with Christ and been

hand, avoids such human explanations of Paul's use of the phrase and simply says it is a metaphor which expresses a fact which cannot entirely be understood by a metaphor because "God and his activity are beyond our understanding" (*The Theology of St. Paul* [Oxford: Oxford, 1964] 199). See also F. W. Dillistone, "How is the Church Christ's Body?" *Theology Today* 2 (1945) 56-68; R. Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976); H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 362-76.

⁶⁸ *Theology* vol. 1, 310.

⁶⁹ Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 344. Dunn notes that Colossians presents more "variations on the σῶμα theme" than any of the other Pauline epistles, and yet Dunn does not appeal to the unique use of σῶμα in Colossians as evidence of pseudonymity ("The Body in Colossians," in *To Tell the Mystery*, JSNTSup 100, FS Robert Gundry [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994] 163-81). Rather, he suggests that the author (whether it be Paul or a Pauline disciple, 164, n. 2) created a series of deliberate plays on the σῶμα-σάρξ theme, found in 1.22 and 1.24; 2.11 and 2.13; 2.17, 18 and 19; 2.23 (179).

⁷⁰ Sanders sees the eschatology of Colossians as the most serious breach of Pauline theology, and the one which has the most negative effect on ethics. He says in Colossians eschatology is "turned on its head" through the presentation of an almost entirely realised eschatology (*Ethics*, 69; cf. also Wedderburn, "The Theology of Colossians," 59-61; Yates "A Reappraisal of Colossians," 107-109).

⁷¹ Conzelmann, *Interpreting the New Testament*, 202. O'Brien also notes that Bornkamm in *Die Hoffnung im Kolosserbrief*, 56-64, argues that ἐλπίς used to indicate object of hope in Col 1.5 (instead of the subjective experience of hope) was not Pauline. O'Brien responds, however, that Rom 8.24-25 and Gal 5.5 clearly contradict Bornkamm's thesis (*Colossians*, xlvi).

⁷² "In place of the expectation which waits patiently for the future fulfillment of the divine promise, a spatially oriented thinking steps in. The Kairos is no longer the point of time for which the believers yearn longingly, but the period of time of which one ought to make the most (4.5)" (Lohse, "Pauline Theology," 216).

buried with him in baptism (cp. Rom 6.3-5), but they have already been raised with Christ (Col 2.12-13; 3.1-2).

While the eschatology of Colossians is different from that found in the *homologoumena*, links can be traced between the eschatology of the *homologoumena* and that found in Colossians, evidencing the fact that Colossians stands at least within the broad Pauline tradition. Vincent Branick, for example contends that the eschatology of Colossians is not "so terribly un-Pauline" since the seeds of realised eschatology can be clearly seen in the Pauline *homologoumena*.⁷³ These seeds are seen in Paul's teachings on: the newness of life (Rom 6:4-5) in which the resurrection of the body is future, and yet the believer in the present has experienced death with Christ and new life; the interior transformation (2 Cor 4:16) which is progressive but leading toward a future consummation; the spiritual existence (1 Cor 15) in which the believer is already spiritual (1 Cor 2:12) but will not be completely so in the present (1 Cor 2:6); the sharing in Christ (2 Cor 5:17) in which the new eschatological age has begun; the present abundance (Rom 5:15; 15:13; 2 Cor 4:15; 8:7); and the progressive transformation (2 Cor 2:16; 3:18).

Furthermore, in our exegesis of Col 3 we will seek to show that in fact, the eschatology in this book is not an entirely realised eschatology, but reflects the tension of the already and the not yet, a well-known Pauline concept. While the writer asserts that the believer has been raised with Christ (3.1-3), he also asserts that there is more to come (v. 4). Future eschatology in Colossians is evidenced in the future revealing of Christ (3.4), the future wrath of God on the wicked (3.6, cp. v. 25), and future rewards for believers (3.24). Clearly the eschatological focus on the "already" in Colossians is different from the eschatological focus on the "not yet" in other Pauline epistles such as 1 Corinthians and 1 Thessalonians. This may, however, be a matter of a different emphasis due to a different audience, not necessarily of contradictory theologies due to different authors.⁷⁴ Again, we are not implying that the eschatology of Colossians is entirely consistent with that found in the Pauline *homologoumena*, for it is not. Rather, we assert that the differences are not so great as to place Colossians outside the ambit of the Pauline tradition.

⁷³ "Apocalyptic Paul?" *CBQ* 47 (1985) 675.

⁷⁴ Andrew Lincoln notes "To the observation that Paul comes perilously close to the position he passionately fights in 1 Corinthians 15 we simply reply that in Colossians his opponents are not the Corinthians and the Colossian philosophy is significantly different from the over-realized eschatology of the Corinthians" (*Paradise Now and Not Yet* SNTM 43 [Cambridge: CUP, 1981] 133). It must be noted however, that more recently Lincoln has modified his position, for he no longer believes Ephesians was written by Paul, and seems to question whether Colossians was (*Ephesians*, lviii, lxvi- lxvii).

In summary, stylistic and theological factors (Christological, ecclesiological, and eschatological) have been cited as evidence against Pauline authorship of Colossians. This is a complex issue, and no final pronouncement will be made in this thesis on the authorship of Colossians. It has been briefly noted, however, that the writing style and theology of Colossians may be closer to that of the Pauline *homologoumena* than many scholars recognise. Even if Colossians is pseudonymous, it is generally agreed that it stands in the broad Pauline tradition.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Thus Pokorný, who denies Pauline authorship of Colossians, maintains "Colossians wants to be understood as in line with this Pauline theological tradition, regardless of how authorship is resolved" (*Colossians*, 12).

Chapter Two

The Opponents

I. Introduction

There is no dearth of material to aid in the research of the nature of the Colossian opponents and the spiritual threat being confronted by the writer. Most of Col 2 deals with this very subject, giving a much more detailed description of the opponents than is generally found in the Pauline epistles. Unfortunately, however, the data in Colossians have proven extremely difficult to weave into a coherent picture.

Three primary difficulties arise as one attempts to identify these opponents. First of all, the numerous statements found in this epistle which appear to describe the Colossian opponents and their teachings are sufficiently broad to be applicable to several first-century religious movements or cults.¹ This in part, explains the wide diversity of proposals regarding the Colossian opponents, for it has been suggested that the Colossian opponents reflect an entirely Jewish influence, an entirely pagan cult, and no specific group of opponents at all. Secondly, our knowledge of first-century religious practice is still quite limited, particularly the ancient religion practiced in Phrygia. A final problem encountered in seeking to identify the Colossian opposition is the lack of archaeological data from Colossae itself. Unlike several other cities in Asia Minor, Colossae has never been excavated.²

Hence it is not surprising that John Gunther, in his monograph on the Pauline opponents, states that of all the opponents reflected in the Pauline epistles, the identification of the Colossian opponents has proven the most difficult for modern researchers.³ Gunther identifies 44 different scholarly opinions on the identity of the Colossian opponents, and the twenty-two years which have passed since his monograph was published have led to more models but no consensus. We would do well to remember Bornkamm's admission before he set forth his view of the Colossian

¹ Craig Evans correctly notes "no reconstruction of the heresy or error which prompted the writing of the epistle to the Colossians has yet been offered that has won the assent of the majority of scholars. The problems faced by the exegete here are particularly difficult because of the allusive and abbreviated language of the author" ("The Colossian Mystics," 188).

² For a survey of some of the ancient descriptions of Colossae, cf. F. F. Bruce, "Jews and Christians in the Lycus Valley," *BSac* 141 (1984) 3-15; Bo Reicke, "The Historical Setting of Colossians," *RevExp* 70 (1973) 429-38.

³ *St. Paul's Opponents and Their Background: A Study of Apocalyptic and Jewish Sectarian Teaching*, NovTSup 35 (Leiden: Brill, 1973) 3-4. While Gunther could have significantly reduced the number of varying opinions by combining similar views, his work certainly illustrates the complexity of identifying the Colossian opponents.

opposition "the extent and manner of his [the author's] reference to the opposing doctrine cannot be determined with certainty. Thus the attempt to reconstruct the Colossian heresy remains encumbered by guesses and possibilities."⁴

In the light of these difficulties spawned by numerous *lacunae* in our knowledge of first-century religion, we will seek to describe the salient features of the Colossian opposition rather than give it a specific place in the history of religions.⁵ The attempt to identify precisely the Colossian opponents has, in my view, led to many premature (and contradictory) conclusions.

II. The Nature and Source of the Opposition

A. No Actual Group of Opponents

Morna Hooker questions the presence of specific opponents in Colossae, suggesting instead that the author is responding in a pastoral manner to the general fears and concerns that would have resulted from their pagan background.⁶ Thus the writer is giving the Colossians a warning rather than an accusation. For example, with respect to the warnings in ch. 2 she argues "exhortation to avoid a certain course of action certainly does not necessarily indicate that those addressed have already fallen prey to the temptation, as every preacher and congregation must be aware."⁷ Hooker supports her pastoral conclusion of the Colossian warning statements by asserting: the warning statements are of a general nature; the writer's thanksgiving and praise statements are unusually profuse and therefore reflect a healthy church, not one battling with false teachers; the epistle lacks the sense of distress evident in Galatians (cf. 3.1; 4.11, 16, 20) or the angry outbursts against specific opponents reflected in Philippians (cf. 3.2).

⁴ "The Heresy of Colossians," 123.

⁵ After acknowledging the difficulty of making a precise identification of the Colossian opponents, Bornkamm states "nevertheless, a series of characteristic features can be extracted from the statements of the letter and fitted together into a whole. If we succeed in assigning the details and the whole to a place in the history of religions, then we shall have attained the desired degree of certainty and avoided the suspicion of vague combinations and hypotheses" ("The Heresy of Colossians," 123). While this attempt is commendable, I am sceptical that we currently have the information necessary to make such a judgment. The fact that no model of the Colossians' opponents, including Bornkamm's, has been generally accepted strongly supports this contention.

⁶ "False Teachers in Colossae," 315-21. See also Wright who, building on Hooker's work, argues that Colossians was written not in response to an actual group of opponents, but to warn a church against the enticements of the synagogue (Wright, "Poetry and Theology in Colossians 1:15-20," 463-64). Wright argues this based on the Christological hymn, which he asserts transfers to Christ that which previously belonged to Wisdom and Torah, in spite of the fact that law is never specifically mentioned in Colossians.

⁷ "False Teachers in Colossae," 317.

While Hooker's essay serves as a salutary caution regarding the difficulties of precise identification of the Colossian opposition, it fails to account for the numerous specific warnings in ch. 2, and in particular the accusatory question in vv. 20-22, which is far too pungent and specific to be hypothetical. In particular the author asks the Colossians, in the light of their death with Christ to the elements of the world, why they were submitting to ascetic decrees. Whether the verb $\delta\omicron\gamma\mu\alpha\tau\acute{\iota}\zeta\epsilon\sigma\theta\epsilon$ in v. 20 is taken as an indirect passive or a direct middle, the sense of the clause is clearly "Why are you submitting yourselves to illegitimate decrees?"⁸ This indicates an actual, not just a potential, surrender to the opponents. In ch. 2, the author not only cautions the Colossians about being deceived by false teaching (vv. 4, 8), which in itself could be preventative, but goes on to give very detailed descriptions regarding the nature of the false teaching (cf. vv. 16-23). Such specificity in the context of strong warnings concerning being led astray by false teachers surely indicates a specific religious danger which threatened the Colossian church. With respect to the writer's praise of the Colossians, this is in keeping with the Pauline epistolary style, which in turn reflects the form of first-century epistolary literature.⁹

Other commentators beside Hooker assert that we would expect more acerbic language from the author if a serious Christological opposition had invaded the church.¹⁰ While the polemical language in Col 2 is anything but pallid, the absence of the extremely caustic statements found in other polemical contexts (cp. Gal 1.8-9, 5.12; Phil 3.2) and the indefinite references to the opponents (compare $\mu\eta\delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ and $\mu\acute{\eta}\ \tau\upsilon\varsigma$ in 2.4, 8, 16 with the direct $\acute{\upsilon}\mu\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ and $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \acute{\upsilon}\mu\acute{\iota}\nu\ \tau\upsilon\tau\epsilon\varsigma$ in Gal 1.6; 3.1) may indicate that few of the Colossians had yet given in to the opponents' teachings (though 2.20

⁸ So Harris, *Colossians*, 128. A direct or reflexive middle would emphasise their involvement in the defection, and could be translated "Why do you submit yourselves?" (A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research*, 4th ed. [Nashville: Broadman, 1934] 807). A permissive use of the passive would emphasise the surrender itself, and could be translated "Why do you allow yourselves to be regulated?" (F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and revised from the 9th and 10th German edition by R. W. Funk [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961] 165, §314). Nigel Turner suggests it is an intransitive verb, active in meaning, which could be translated simply "Why do you submit?" (*Syntax*, vol. 3, in J. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963] 57).

⁹ See John Lee White, *The Body of the Greek Letter*, SBLDS 2 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1972) 22, 95-96 and William G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973) 31-33. White labels the section of thanksgiving in Greek epistolary literature (including the Pauline literature) the "joy expressions" in the body opening portion of letters (22).

¹⁰ Evans, "The Colossian Mystics," 197; Wesley Carr, *Angels and Principalities: The Background, Meaning, and Development of the Pauline Phrase $\eta\alpha\iota\ \text{Archai kai } \eta\alpha\iota\ \text{Exousia}$* , SNTMS 42 (Cambridge: CUP, 1981) 84. Carr specifically says that Colossians reflects Pauline "gentleness," for "he was not countering a major Christological error, for which he surely would have used stronger language." On the contrary, being made a prey (v. 8), being disqualified (v. 18), and being removed from the head (v. 19) are strong (though not caustic *ad hominem*) statements, indicating a real Christological danger.

indicates that at least some of the Colossians had capitulated). However, even if only a few of the Colossians had given in, this would make the threat from the opponents no less real or identifiable.

B. Essene Type Gnosticism

Though proposed over 110 years ago, J. B. Lightfoot's reconstruction of the opponents continues to receive consideration.¹¹ Bishop Lightfoot sees in the opposition the presence of Jewish and gnostic elements, the Jewish element witnessed by circumcision, observance of Sabbaths and new moons, the gnostic element evidenced by theosophic speculation, belief in spiritual intermediaries, angel worship, and asceticism. He suggests that a mystical, Essene type Judaism lay behind the opposition.¹² Moule finds the evidence inadequate to engender firm conclusions regarding the identity of the opponents, but suggests they were aligned with a gnostic, Essene (possibly Qumran) type of Judaism very similar to that proposed by Lightfoot.¹³ Meeks' assessment of Lightfoot's position is instructive,

A property of Lightfoot's model which is at once a strength and a weakness is its diffuseness or openness. Lightfoot enables us to see phenomena in Colossians that might go unobserved if one were compelled to identify the opponents with a particular sect of antiquity. Yet, if one's conceptualization is like no particular history, but only like some generality of Hellenistic phenomena, one must ask whether it is sufficiently analytic. Surely Gnosticism and Essenism are not umbrella-terms for exotica in Hellenistic religiosity.¹⁴

As we noted earlier, the *lacunae* in our knowledge of ancient religion, particularly as practiced in Colossae, militate against Meeks' criticism, though Meeks' comments stimulate us to refine Lightfoot's model of the Colossian opponents.

¹¹ *St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians and Philemon*, 9th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1890) 73-113. The on-going significance of Lightfoot's proposal is seen in its inclusion in *Conflict at Colossae*, 13-59.

¹² *Colossians*, 94-95.

¹³ *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, CGTC (Cambridge: CUP, 1957) 29-34.

¹⁴ *Conflict at Colossae*, 210. A similar criticism can be made of Sumney's model, for his textual observations are helpful, yet his conclusions are too broad. He fails to relate the opponents to any known first-century religious group ("Those Who 'Pass Judgment': The Identity of the Colossian Opponents," *Bib* 74 (1993) 366-88).

C. Qumran Type Judaism

This proposal is largely the antithesis of Dibelius' model, for it wholly emphasises the Jewish character of the opposition. Relying largely on J. Dupont's work on gnosis,¹⁵ Lyonnet carefully distinguishes gnostic language derived from popular Stoicism, and gnostic language derived from Judaism. He argues that terms such as πλήρωμα and σῶμα do not reflect the language of the opponents, but were introduced by the writer himself, being drawn from the Stoic literary milieu. Other terms, however, such as ἀρχαί, ἐξουσίαι, and τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου are said to reflect the purely Jewish language of the opponents.¹⁶ Terms in Col 2 such as "body of flesh," are said to have direct parallels in the Qumran literature. W. D. Davies puts forth very similar arguments regarding the Colossian opponents being Jewish, possibly associated with the Qumran sect. He attempts to demonstrate that "body of flesh" in 2.11, Sabbath regulations and dietary rules in 2.16, wisdom and knowledge in 2.8, and forces of evil in 2.14-15, all have Qumran parallels.¹⁷ E. M. Yamauchi, however, questions this thesis, and asserts that there are some distinct differences between the Qumran community and the Colossian opponents such as the role of ceremonial washings, which were an integral part of the religious rites of the Qumran community, but are not mentioned in Colossians.¹⁸

Lyonnet believes the Colossian opponents were very similar to the Galatian opponents. This is supposedly evidenced by the reference in Col 2.13 to a circumcision not made with hands, suggesting that the Colossians, as the Galatians, were being pressured into keeping Jewish law as a means of salvation.¹⁹ Few exegetes, however, would agree with Lyonnet that circumcision played the same role with the Colossians as it did with the Galatians, for the references to circumcision in the two epistles are quite different.

With respect to the "cult of angels" evidenced in Col 2.18, Lyonnet argues that this refers to the honouring of angels due to their unique role as law givers. Thus the author reproved the Colossians not because they worshipped angels, but because they failed to honour God as they should have, and instead followed human traditions by honouring angels.

¹⁵ *Gnosis: La connaissance religieuse dans les épîtres de Saint Paul* (Paris: Gabalda, 1949).

¹⁶ "Paul's Adversaries in Colossae," in *Conflict at Colossae*, 147-48.

¹⁷ "Paul and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Flesh and Spirit," in *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, edited by K. Stendahl (London: SCM, 1958) 166-69.

¹⁸ "Sectarian Parallels. Qumran and Colossae," *BSac* 121 (1964) 141-52. Obviously ceremonial washings and baptism (Col 2.12) are visibly similar, but they are two very different religious acts conveying very different meanings.

¹⁹ Lyonnet, "Paul's Adversaries in Colossae," 148.

While Lyonnet has benefitted the discussion of the Colossian opponents by highlighting evidence for the Jewish character of the opponents, he disregards conflicting evidence (such as dismissing the possible pagan influences). His proposal also cannot adequately explain the Christological and soteriological development in Colossians. If the Colossian opponents were simply following human traditions and giving undue honour to angels as givers of the law, why would the author affirm Christ's divine identity and consequent personal superiority (1.15, 18; 2.3, 9, 19) and soteriological victory (1.13-14; 2.10-15) with such vigour? More significantly, why is law not specifically mentioned in this epistle if it played such a central role in the opponents' teachings?

D. Pagan Mystery Cult

Eighty years ago Martin Dibelius made one of the most influential proposals regarding the identity of the Colossians opponents.²⁰ Dibelius believed the key to identifying the opponents lies in the verb ἐμβατεύων ("to enter") in 2.18. After studying inscriptions at the temple in Claros, he concluded that ἐμβατεύων is a technical term used to describe pagan initiation rites, specifically, the entering into the inner temple shrine in the process of pagan mystery worship.²¹ He takes the relative clause ἃ ἐώρακεν to be the object of the verb ἐμβατεύων, leading to the translation "who enters (in the initiation) that which he saw."²² Since it was believed in the mystery cults that the initiate would often in a trance see the rooms he or she would later enter in the

²⁰ Sappington notes that W. Ramsay and M. Dibelius independently argued that ἐμβατεύων was a technical term connected with initiation into a mystery cult (Dibelius' view being published in 1912, Ramsay's in 1913), though Ramsay's contribution is less well known (Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption*, 154). Dibelius' proposal regarding the Colossian opponents is set forth in "The Isis Initiation in Apuleius and Related Initiatory Rites," which has been reprinted in *Conflict at Colossae*, 61-121.

²¹ *Conflict at Colossae*, 87-88. For a negative response to Dibelius' thesis, cf. Wesley Carr, "Two Notes on Colossians," *JTS* n. s. 24 (1973) 496-500 and F. Francis, "The Background of Embateuein (Col 2.18) in Legal Papyri Inscriptions," in *Conflict at Colossae*, 197-207. There is still much debate over the meaning of this *hapax legomenon*. W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich suggest, based on its use in Philo and 2 Macc 2.20, that ἐμβατεύω can refer to entering into a subject to investigate it closely (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. revised and augmented by F. W. Gingrich and F. W. Danker, translated and ed. by W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979] s.v., "ἐμβατεύω"). Thus, they suggest in Col 2.18 it may mean "entering at length upon the tale of what he has seen in a vision." They also note Dibelius' research at Claros, and indicate that based on his research, ἐμβατεύων in Col 2.18 might mean "who enters (the sanctuary) which he saw (in ecstasy)," or "taking his stand on what he has seen in the mysteries." Liddell and Scott give four primary definitions for ἐμβατεύω: (1) step in, frequent; (2) enter on, come into possession; (3) mount, cover; (4) to be initiated into the mysteries. *Jahresh* 15.46 and Col 2.18 are given to support the latter definition (*A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed., revised and augmented by H. S. Jones and R. McKenzie [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940] s.v., "ἐμβατεύω").

²² *Conflict at Colossae*, 88.

initiation ceremony, this translation of Col 2.18 is shown to harmonise with pagan initiation rites.²³ In summary, Dibelius concludes that an outside pagan mystery group proclaimed to the Colossian Christians that Christ was not enough, they still needed a gnostic initiation experience. While Dibelius' proposal is stimulating, and has attracted much attention, in recent years it has fallen out of favour among scholars.

An obvious objection to this model is that it fails to incorporate the evidence for a Jewish element in the opposition. The descriptions of the opposition in Col 2 do indicate a Jewish component. Sabbath observance most forcefully demonstrates this,²⁴ but dietary restrictions, interest in heavenly ascent, and festival keeping would also be characteristic of Jewish influence. A Jewish element in the Colossian opposition is not surprising in view of the fact that a substantial Jewish community apparently existed in Phrygia.²⁵ Francis' frontal assault on Dibelius' interpretation of Col 2.18 has demonstrated a Jewish influence resonant in this verse and elsewhere in ch. 2, and has significantly discredited Dibelius' model.²⁶

Finally, it has been noted that the cult of the Clarian Apollo was an oracle sanctuary, and there is no evidence of an oracle sanctuary in Colossae, which significantly weakens Dibelius' interpretation.²⁷ There is still much we do not know about the nature and distribution of Isis sanctuaries in the ancient world, but what is known does not tend to support Dibelius' model which places so much weight on a single term.²⁸

²³ Apuleius, *Metam.* 11.27.

²⁴ For a discussion of various Jewish texts dealing with Sabbath, see Paul Giem, "SABBATON in Col 2.16," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 19 (1981) 195-210. Giem concludes that since ἑορτή, νεομηνία, and σάββατον often occur together in the context of the sacrificial system in the Old Testament (esp. Num 28-29), the Colossian readers would have understood 2.16 to refer to sacrificial offerings, not Sabbath keeping as such. This is an inference without adequate support, but he does demonstrate that these three terms used together (cf. 1 Chr 23.30-31; 2 Chr 2.4; 8.12-13; Ezek 46.4-15; Neh 10.33; 1 QM 2.4-6; *Jub.* 2.9-10; 6.34-38) strongly evidence a Jewish influence on the Colossian error.

²⁵ Cf. Bruce, "The Lycus Valley," 3-8. Bruce notes, for example, that Cicero claimed the Asian province was being impoverished by the Jewish exportation of gold to Jerusalem to maintain the temple (5-6). Cicero estimated that 20 pounds of gold for the temple was annually impounded at Laodicea, and 100 pounds at Apamea; this amounted to approximately 45,000 half-shekels collected at Apamea, and 9,000 at Laodicea (Cicero, *Pro Flacco*, 68; cf. also A. J. Marshall, "The Jews of Asia," *Phoenix* 29 [1975] 139-54). Other historical and inscriptional evidence suggests that the first-century BCE Jewish community which Cicero recorded continued to inhabit the region for several centuries.

²⁶ Francis' reconstruction of 2.18 will be explained under "Ascetic-Mystical Judaism."

²⁷ Meeks, *Conflict at Colossae*, 210.

²⁸ On the distribution of Isis sanctuaries, see Robert Wild, "The Known Isis-Sarapis Sanctuaries from the Roman Period," *ANRW* 2.2.17. 3. Wild notes that a chronological evaluation of Isis and Sarapis sanctuaries shows religious enthusiasm for them peaked in the second century BCE, and again in the second century CE (1834-36), somewhat reducing the chances that Colossae possessed an Isis oracle sanctuary.

Dibelius' interpretation of Col 2.18, and his consequent model of the Colossian opponents has not been entirely discredited. It is exegetically and historically possible, but in the light of recent research it no longer appears to explain adequately the Colossian text.

E. Mystical, Apocalyptic Judaism

1. F. Francis

Recently a different approach to the Colossian opposition has been taken. Fred Francis' article "Humility and Angelic Worship in Col 2.18"²⁹ marks a watershed in the contemporary discussion of the Colossian opponents. He takes issue with Dibelius' exposition of this verse, and offers a bold new interpretation based largely on ancient Jewish mysticism and apocalypticism. He re-examines the Clarian inscriptions and concludes that ἐμβατεύω is not used as a technical term, but its use in various texts signifies entering into possession or attainment of something.³⁰ Thus, the phrase ἃ ἐώρακεν ἐμβατεύων would mean "the things viewed upon entering."

The content of this heavenly vision is said to be found in the phrase θρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων, which is construed as a subjective genitive, indicating "the worship which the angels perform."³¹ Hence the one having the visionary experience is not worshipping angels, but is delighting in viewing the angelic worship. This departure from the traditional interpretation of "worship of angels" is given viability by the use of θρησκεία in a subjective genitive clause in 4 Macc 5.7 and Josephus *Ant.* 12.253.³² Various texts are also cited to demonstrate Jewish preoccupation with participation in the angelic liturgy.³³ Francis argues that the Colossians misunderstood their completeness in Christ, and sought to reach the heavenly Lord through asceticism and mystical soul ascension. He shows that ταπεινοφροσύνη (v. 18) in ancient literature, especially Jewish literature, is often connected with ascetic practice, particularly

²⁹ This article first appeared in *Studia Theologica* 16 (1963) 109-34.

³⁰ "The Background of Embateuein (Col 2.18) in Legal Papyri and Oracle Inscriptions," in *Conflict at Colossae*, 201-204.

³¹ "Humility and Angel Worship," 177.

³² These two uses should properly be called possessive genitives, though subjective and possessive genitives are very similar, and are often indistinguishable in meaning, cf. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: CUP, 1959) 40.

³³ *Asc. Isa.* 7.37; 8.17; 9.28; *T. Job* 48-50; *3 Enoch* 1.12; *Philo, Som.* 1.33-37; *IQSb* 4.25-26; *IQH* 3.20-22.

fasting,³⁴ which is said to be necessary for attaining a transcendent visionary experience.³⁵ Heavenly visionary experiences are often described as heavenly entrance which occurs through the translation of the spirit.³⁶

Thus Francis contends that through ascetic practices the Colossian opponents sought to experience a mystical heavenly vision in which they would be able to worship in a fuller way as the angels did, in the very presence of God. He furthermore argues that the Colossian opposition was not directly Christological, for the writer of Colossians "never explicitly attacks a view of Christ advocated by the opponents. When the writer does refer to Christ in polemical passages, Christ is the common ground...faith in Christ is the presupposition that makes the argument work."³⁷ Hence the opponents did not deny Christ's divine character or soteriological and eschatological work, but failed to realise the implications his work had in their own lives.³⁸

2. Summary and Response to Francis

In short, Francis, drawing largely from Jewish mystical and apocalyptic sources, identifies the Colossian opposition as a type of essentially Jewish mysticism whose adherents sought a fuller spiritual experience through heavenly visions which were experienced through ascetic practice. Francis says the cult apparently acknowledged the divine character and saving work of Christ, but failed to appreciate the ramifications of Christ's work for their own lives.

While Francis' interpretation of *θηρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων* is grammatically possible, it is by no means certain.³⁹ When *θηρησκεία* has an active meaning of

³⁴ See Tertullian, *De Jejun.* 12; Hermas, *Sim.* 5, 3, 7. The cognate terms *ταπεινῶ* and *ταπεινώσις* are also used in the LXX to indicate fasting (Lev 16.29, 31; Ps 34.13; Isa 58.3, 5; Judith 4.9).

³⁵ Dan 12.4; 4 Ezra 5.13, 20; 6.31; 2 Bar 5.7; 9.2; Hermas, *Vis.* 3, 10, 6; *T. Isaac; Apoc. Abr.* 9; Philo, *Ex.* 24.11b.

³⁶ 1 Enoch 14.8; 2 Enoch 3.1; *T. Levi* 2.5-7; *T. Abr.* 7-10; Hermas, *Sim.* 9; 3 Bar. 11.1-4; 14.1; 15.1.

³⁷ "The Christological Argument of Colossians," 207. Drawing directly on Francis' work, Craig Evans analyses polemical passages in Colossians and comes to the same conclusion regarding the Christology of the Colossian opponents, "The Colossian Mystics," 195-99, 203-204.

³⁸ "The errorists did not question the fact that Christ had done all this [reconciled them, triumphed over the powers]—their heavenly songs praised him for it! They simply did not have the assured understanding that in, with, by, and after Christ they themselves had been delivered," "Humility and Angel Worship," 133.

³⁹ Lohse (*Colossians*, 119, n. 36) Martin (*Colossians*, 94) and Schweizer (*Colossians*, 159) assert that the description of the error in 2.23 as *ἐθελοθηρησκεία* rules out a subjective genitive interpretation for *θηρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων* in 2.18, for *ἐθελοθηρησκεία* means "self-chosen worship" thus connoting human, not angelic activity. Francis ("Humility and Angel Worship," 189-90) and Lincoln (*Paradise Now and Not Yet* [Cambridge: CUP, 1981] 223, n. 9) respond to this argument by

"worship" and is modified by a noun in the genitive case, the noun is typically an objective genitive.⁴⁰ The objective genitive "worship of angels" is attested at a relatively early date by Clement (*Strom.* 6, 5, 41) and Origen (*John* 13, 17; *Contra Cel.* 1, 26.5, 6), both of whom refer to the *Preaching of Peter* which says that certain Jews worshipped angels and observed new moons. Certainly angelic worship by pagan mystics is well attested in the ancient world,⁴¹ but there is also some evidence that angel worship among Jews was a significant problem. Though Rowland does not see a pagan influence in the Colossian opposition, he acknowledges "the prohibition of address to angels in the Talmud and the command not to worship angels in Rev 19.10 and 22.8f., as well as in *Ascension of Isaiah* 7.21, may indicate that this was a much more widespread problem than is often supposed."⁴²

Even if one accepts τῶν ἀγγέλων in 2.18 as a subjective genitive indicating worship like angels instead of angel worship, there is much in ch. 2 to suggest the Colossians' Christology was being seriously threatened, and that the opposition was not just a matter of praxis. Francis is correct that the author does not attack the Christology of the opponents point by point, but when he concludes from this observation that Christology was not at issue in Colossae (rather a matter of common ground and comfort to the hearers), he badly misconstrues the situation.⁴³

A point by point refutation of the Colossian opposition is not necessary to establish the threat as Christological and not just behavioural. Rather, the use of various Christological statements in ch. 2 clearly evidences a Christological component in the opponents' teaching. While Christian practice was one of the problem issues associated with the opposition (2.6, 21-22), it was not the sole problem. In fact, it seems much more likely that their Christological misunderstandings led to deviations in praxis, for in 2.6 we read "as therefore you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him." The implication here is that their behaviour needed to be grounded on the doctrine of Christ reflected in the gospel they had accepted at their conversion. The command to

noting that self-chosen is an accurate description of what the Colossians were doing, for they themselves were choosing to participate in the angelic liturgy.

⁴⁰ Arndt and Gingrich give numerous examples of this use (*Herodian* 4, 8; *Wis* 14.27; *Philo, Spec. Leg.* 1.315; *Josephus, Ant.* 1.222, 12.271; *1 Clem.* 45.7), noting "the Being who is worshipped is given in the obj. gen." s.v. "ἄγγελος."

⁴¹ Percy (*Die Probleme der Kolosser*, 161) and Francis ("Humility and Angel Worship," 177) argue that asceticism would surely not honour the powers behind the elements, but as we will see in our discussion of τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, this is in fact quite conceivable (see especially the texts cited by Schweizer in "Slaves of the Elements and Worshippers of Angels," 457-64).

⁴² "Apocalyptic Visions," 80, n. 17.

⁴³ Francis' conclusion is somewhat at variance with his statement elsewhere that "the Colossian error fundamentally consists of a limitation of Christology" ("Humility and Angel Worship," 183).

walk properly in 2.6 is furthermore linked to their having been rooted and grounded in Christ (v. 7). Their grounding in Christ and the establishment of their faith (v. 6), was considered under threat due to a deceptive philosophy which would lead them away from Christ (v. 8).

In v. 8 the author specifically warns the Colossians not to be taken captive through philosophy and empty deceptions. This terse description of the opposition is further described by three prepositional phrases, "according to the traditions of men" (κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων), "according to the elements of the world" (κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου), and "not according to Christ (οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν)." The Colossian opposition is thus set in direct opposition to Christ, for it somehow compromised the Christological traditions they had received ("traditions of men" in v. 8 is set in contrast to the apostolic tradition alluded to in v. 6).

Verse 9 further clarifies the nature of the Christological deviation (though again not being a point by point polemic), for it repeats the message of 1.19, affirming that the fulness of deity dwells in Christ, not in the cosmic spirits of v. 8. The writer's application of this principle in v. 10 ("in him you have been made complete") implies the existence of a competing system of spirituality advocated by the opponents. Apparently they were promoting a spiritual fulness in conjunction with ascetic submission to the elements (2.8, 20-21), whereas the writer says it is in Christ and in him alone that the believer is made complete. The authority of Christ to provide spiritual fulness is given in v. 10b, which is thematically connected with the cosmic spirits of v. 8. The Colossians are called to reject the false spirituality of the opponents based on ascetic submission to the elements since Christ is the head over all principalities and powers. This is a recitation from the hymn, specifically 1.16, which affirms Christ's authority over all powers in earth and in the heavens.⁴⁴

Finally, it should be noted that in 2.19 the Colossians are warned that to give in to the opponents calls for ascetic practice and heavenly ascent would be to detach oneself from Christ the head (cf. 1.18 where Christ is described as the head of the body, the church). Thus, capitulation to the teaching of the opponents is described as Christological defection. Admittedly, we are not told exactly how the opposition involves a falling away from Christ,⁴⁵ and thus this verse cannot be used to prove that

⁴⁴ On the concept of fulness in 2.8-10 see Fowl, *The Story of Christ*, 135-38.

⁴⁵ Francis' explanation of 2.19 is that "'not holding to the head' is a criticism that does not specify any particular Christological outlook among the opponents. At the same time, the fact that the writer appended to the criticism the figure of the growth of the body does indicate that the writer's Christological argument was allied to his ecclesiology" ("The Christological Argument of Colossians," 202). The implication here seems to be that Christology was not an issue since a specific Christological error is not delineated, rather a related ecclesiological error is in view. Again, Francis has

v. 18 refers to the worship of angels. It does, however, indicate that the opposition was perceived by the writer as a Christological threat in some manner, making Francis' argument that Christology was a matter of common ground between the author and the Colossians inaccurate.

While Francis has argued cogently against Dibelius' model which centres around pagan initiation rites, some of Francis' reconstruction could apply to the syncretistic pagan/Jewish mystic models, such as those put forth by Schweizer and Lohse. For example, Francis is surely correct in linking ταπεινοφροσύνη with ascetic practice with a view to transcendent visionary experience, but in discussing subjection to the elements we will note that ascetic practice was important in the liberation of the soul from bondage to the cosmic spirits or elements and ascent into heaven. Thus Francis' reconstruction of the Colossian opponents demonstrates a strong Jewish apocalyptic influence, but this in no way rules out a pagan influence as well. Francis acknowledges in theory the possibility of a pagan influence, but virtually rules it out in practice.⁴⁶

3. Thomas Sappington

Francis' bold reformulation of the Colossian opposition has attracted many supporters, and encouraged others to consider the relevance of Jewish literature to the Colossian situation.⁴⁷ Thomas Sappington has done extensive recent research applying what he calls "Jewish apocalyptic literature" to the Colossian opponents. He largely follows the findings of Christopher Rowland, who views the reception of revelation through visions or heavenly ascent as a cardinal pillar in Jewish apocalyptic literature.⁴⁸

begged the question, failing to explain the sense of the clause καὶ οὐ κρατῶν τὴν κεφαλὴν. In other words, What would falling away from Christ indicate if it is not a Christological threat? Carr makes a similar mistake, asserting that not holding to Christ the head does not mean they did not recognise Jesus as Lord, but that "they do not keep a close enough grip on the nexus of Christ and church" (*Angels and Principalities*, 79).

⁴⁶ While Francis acknowledges "ascetic-mystic piety obtained generally in the Hellenistic world—not specifically gnostic, not entirely Jewish" ("Humility and Angel Worship," 185), he takes few non-Jewish or non-Christian sources into account. This methodology (utilising only Jewish sources) applied to a church as far from Palestine as Colossae is tendentious unless carefully defended (which it is not).

⁴⁷ Those who are in general agreement with Francis' model are: Bandstra, "Did the Colossian Errorists Need a Mediator," 330-32; Carr, *Angels and Principalities*, 68-72; Evans, "The Colossian Mystics," 191-203; Fowl, *The Story of Christ*, 126-29; Lincoln, *Paradise Now*, 110-13; O'Brien, *Colossians*, xxxvii-viii; Rowland, "Apocalyptic Visions," 73-83; Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption*, 150-60; Yates, "The Worship of Angels," 12-15. Bruce posits a similar model, and identifies the error as Jewish merkabah mysticism, though he draws primarily from G. Scholem, and disagrees with Francis that Col 2.18 refers to worship like angels instead of worship of angels (*Colossians*, 17-26).

⁴⁸ Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption*, 21; Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 21.

As many others who assert a primarily Jewish influence on the Colossian opposition, he does not carefully define Jewish apocalyptic literature, other than to quote Rowland who says it is characterised by the belief that "man is able to know about the divine mysteries by means of revelation, so that God's eternal purposes may be disclosed, and man, as a result, may see history in a totally new light."⁴⁹ This definition would seem to apply to mystical Jews, Gnostics, and even pagan mystery cults, though Sappington clarifies the discussion by identifying the eleven literary sources he primarily utilises⁵⁰ which are said to be typical of the Jewish apocalyptic genre.⁵¹

He concludes from his study that the opposition at Colossae reflects heavenly ascent ideology in keeping with that found in Jewish apocalyptic literature. He summarises the Colossian opposition as "the attempt to achieve supernatural experiences and to gain heavenly revelation or 'wisdom' through certain ascetic practices."⁵²

The fact that the Colossian opposition reflects heavenly ascent ideology, as evidenced in the visionary experiences and ascetic practice mentioned in 2.18, does not in itself narrow the identity of the opponents; this could apply to many ancient cults or religions. Alan Segal, in fact, traces the heavenly ascent theme in Persian, Greek, Hellenistic Jewish, Christian, and Gnostic writings. He finds that Christianity was not heir to a single mythical ascension tradition (be it Jewish, pagan or Gnostic), but a mythical ascension structure which was shared by most ancient cultures.⁵³ He

⁴⁹ Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption*, 21; Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 13. A slightly better definition (though still too broad in my opinion) is given by Rowland a little later when he says "We ought not think of apocalyptic as being primarily a matter of either a particular literary type or distinctive subject-matter, though common literary elements and ideas may be ascertained. Rather, the common factor is the belief that God's will can be discerned by means of a mode of revelation which unfolds directly the hidden things of God. To speak of apocalyptic, therefore, is to concentrate on the theme of the direct communication of the heavenly mysteries in all their diversity. With such an understanding one can attempt to do justice to all the elements of the apocalyptic literature" (Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 14). On a definition of Jewish apocalyptic literature, see also J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 (1979) 1-19.

⁵⁰ Daniel; *1 Enoch*; *2 Enoch*; *Jub.* 4 *Ezra*; *2 Baruch*; *3 Baruch*; *The Apocalypse of Abraham*; *The Testament of Abraham*; *The Apocalypse of Zephaniah*; *The Testament of Levi* (2-5).

⁵¹ We will thus accept the label "Jewish apocalyptic literature" for the sake of discussion, though even with the eleven sources Sappington cites it is not certain that they are all Jewish, that they were written within a century after the writing of Colossians, or that they are of the same literary genre. For example, the date, provenance, and community setting of *2 Enoch* are all unsettled, and suggestions range from it being a pre-Christian Jewish work to a medieval Christian composition (see the bibliography in Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption*, 36, n. 3). The genre of *Jubilees* is quite problematic, the apocalyptic material being largely confined to ch. 23. The date and source of *3 Baruch* are contested, with M. R. James suggesting it is a second-century Christian apocalypse, L. Ginsberg arguing that it is a second-century Jewish-gnostic work, and H. Hughes claiming it is a second-century Jewish work altered by Christian redactors (James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* [New York: Doubleday, 1983] vol. 1, 655-66).

⁵² *Revelation and Redemption*, 21.

⁵³ "Heavenly Ascent," 1387. On ascension in the ancient world cf. W. Bousset, *Die Himmelsreise der Seele*, *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 4 (1901) 136-69; Ithamar Gruenwald,

concludes that "it is possible to see the heavenly journey of the soul, its consequent promise of immortality and the corollary necessity of periodic ecstatic journeys to heaven as the dominant mythical constellation of late classical antiquity."⁵⁴

Sappington, however, builds a very solid case for the ascension theme in Colossians being specifically of Jewish apocalyptic influence by demonstrating a particular kind of ascension emphasis in the Colossian opposition which is well attested in Jewish apocalyptic literature, viz., the attainment of revelation or wisdom through heavenly ascent. Sappington does this by relating Col 2.18 with other passages in Colossians, particularly 1.9-14, 24-29 and 2.2-7, which all speak of the believer's revelatory need which Christ abundantly fulfils.

Sappington demonstrates that in Jewish apocalyptic literature heavenly revelation attained through heavenly ascension or descent is necessary for at least three reasons: first, God is transcendent and little involved in this world, hence angels, good and evil, control the world in this age⁵⁵ and mediate revelation from God to humans.⁵⁶ Secondly, a spatial dualism exists, creating a firm and fixed separation between the heavenly things above and the earthly things below.⁵⁷ Finally, wisdom is understood to be hidden away in heaven.⁵⁸ Thus Jewish apocalyptic literature depicts a great need for divine revelation which is said to be aided or prompted by a righteous life,⁵⁹ prayer, fasting, confession, mourning, and meditation.

Sappington then shows how access to divine revelation through heavenly ascension depicted in Jewish apocalyptic literature is very applicable to the writer's response to the opponents, indicating a strong Jewish influence. For example, the goal of the writer's prayer in 1.9 is revelatory ("that you might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding") and ethical ("that you might walk worthy of the Lord"). The second of the two prayer goals (the worthy walk), is further modified in vv. 10b-12 by four participial clauses, the second of which is also revelatory ("increasing in the knowledge of God"). In 1.24-29 Christ is again identified

Apocalyptic and Merkabah Mysticism (Leiden: Brill, 1979); Rowland, *The Open Heaven*; Segal, "Heavenly Ascent,"; James Tabor, *Things Unutterable. Paul's Ascent to Paradise in its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Contexts* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986); G. Widengren, *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift, 1950); S. G. Wilson, "The Ascension. A Critique and an Interpretation," *ZNW* 59 (1968) 269-81.

⁵⁴ "Heavenly Ascent," 1388.

⁵⁵ *1 Enoch* 72-80 describes day to day angelic operation of the cosmos; *1 Enoch* 89.59-67 describes angelic shepherding of the nation of Israel.

⁵⁶ Dan 7.2-14, 16-27; 4 Ezra 9.38-10.28, 38-54; 13.1-13, 21-56; 2 Bar. 53; 55-74.

⁵⁷ *1 Enoch*; 2 *Enoch*; *Apoc. Abr.*; *T. Levi*; 3 *Bar.*; *Apoc. Zeph.*; *T. Abr.*; 2 *Bar.* 51.

⁵⁸ *1 Enoch* 42; 4 Ezra 4.5-5.13; 2 *Bar.* 48.33-36.

⁵⁹ 4 Ezra 6.31-32.

as the revelation of God, for he is said to be τοῦ μυστηρίου τούτου ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν (v. 27), while Paul (v. 23) is identified as the human agent who proclaims the mystery (vv. 25-26, 28-29). Whatever the exact source of the term μυστήριον in this passage,⁶⁰ it indicates a present divine unveiling (νῦν δὲ ἐφανερώθη, v. 26) of that which was previously hidden. This revelation is not given to a select group of visionaries, or initiates but to all saints (ἄγιοι).⁶¹ This stands in marked contrast to the mysteries in the Jewish apocalyptic literature which were future oriented and were revealed to a select few.⁶²

Finally, Christological revelation is underlined in 2.2-5⁶³ in the stated context of victory over the opponents. The polemical intent of 2.2-5 is clearly evidenced by the opening clauses in v. 4 "τοῦτο λέγω ἵνα μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς παραλογίζηται." The ἵνα clause is best taken as a retrospective purpose clause ("I say this in order that no one may delude you") instead of a prospective imperatival clause ("what I mean is this, do not let anyone delude you"),⁶⁴ and probably refers to all the material in 1.24-2.3,⁶⁵ which repeatedly deals with the issue of revelation in Christ.

In relating the purpose for his struggle on behalf of the Colossians in 2.1-3, the author strongly emphasises their need for revelation which is completely fulfilled in Christ.⁶⁶ He says he struggles that they might attain the wealth of the fulness of

⁶⁰ Sappington (*Revelation and Redemption*, 184) and R. Brown (*The Semitic Background of the Term 'Mystery' in the New Testament* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968] 52-56) argue that μυστήριον is a decidedly Semitic term. On Qumran parallels (cf. 1QH 1.21; 2.13; 4.27-29) see J. Coppens, "'Mystery' in the Theology of Saint Paul and its Parallels at Qumran," in *Paul and Qumran*, ed. by J. Murphy-O'Connor (Chicago: Priory, 1964) 132-58. On pagan and Gnostic uses of μυστήριον see Bornkamm, "μυστήριον," *TDNT* 4.803-13, though he argues that the term "displays evident dependence on the later Jewish apocalyptic concept, and distinction from that of the mystery cults and Gnosticism" (820).

⁶¹ The author has already defined the saints Christologically in 1.2 as those who are ἐν Χριστῷ. O'Brien correctly notes that "in Christ" does not refer primarily to the object of their faith but to their organic relationship with Christ (*Colossians*, 4).

⁶² Dan 2:18, 19-30, 47; *1 Enoch* 63.3; 2 *Bar.* 81.4; 2 *Esdr* 14.5; 1 *QPHab* 7.4-6. Lohse notes "The primitive Christian proclamation gave witness to the revelation of a mystery that does not concern a future event which lies hidden in God's plan, but rather an act of God which has already become a reality" (*Colossians*, 74).

⁶³ For additional discussion, see P. Benoit, "Col 2.2-3," in *The New Testament Age*, FS Bo Reicke, ed. by W. Weinrich (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984) 41-51.

⁶⁴ Moule argues for an imperatival meaning (*Colossians*, 88), but O'Brien gives three cogent arguments for it being retrospective: (1) the so-called parallels in Gal 3.17 and 1 Cor 1.12 do not contain a ἵνα clause; (2) there are no NT instances of an imperatival ἵνα clause following a τοῦτο λέγω clause, whereas the ταῦτα λέγω ἵνα construction in John 5.34 is retrospective; (3) the presence of the conjunction γάρ in 2.5 would be quite awkward if the ἵνα clause in v. 4 is taken as imperatival, for the theme of v. 5 (the author's absence) ties vv. 1-5 together.

⁶⁵ See Cannon's argument that 1.24-2.5 is the "body opening" of the letter, and is bound together by the "apostolic parousia" (*Traditional Materials*, 152-55; Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption*, 177).

⁶⁶ Four purposes are given for Paul's labour (ἀγών) on behalf of the Colossians and the Laodiceans: encouragement of their hearts (ἵνα παρακληθῶσιν αἱ καρδίαι αὐτῶν), being knit together in love (συμβιβασθέντες ἐν ἀγάπῃ), attaining the wealth of the fulness of understanding

understanding and attain the knowledge (ἐπίγνωσις)⁶⁷ of God's mystery, namely Christ. Furthermore, the writer asserts that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. This statement powerfully undermines the ascension theology of the opponents, for divine revelation is not said to be hidden in heaven, reserved only for the few who are able to experience heavenly ascent. Rather, all wisdom and knowledge is hidden in Christ. Since the Colossians were in Christ (1.2), the obvious inference is that they had access to divine revelation through their relationship with him, and had no need to seek heavenly ascent through ascetic practice.⁶⁸ Thus in 2.6 the writer calls the Colossians back to their conversion experience, for they were to walk in a manner commensurate with their conversion union with Christ.

4. Summary and Critique of Sappington

Sappington has done an excellent job of relating apocalyptic Jewish literature and recent research on the subject to the Colossian opposition. He has developed and further documented Francis' model of the Colossian opponents, showing a probable Jewish influence in the visionary and ascetic practices discussed in Col 2. Most significantly, he demonstrates the role heavenly visions and the attainment of revelation played in Jewish apocalyptic literature, and how this applies to the Colossian opposition. His conclusion that the Colossian opponents sought a fuller spiritual experience through the attainment of divine revelations gained by heavenly visions aided by ascetic practice is sound. Much, if not most, of his reconstruction of the Colossian opposition is plausible and, in my opinion, correct.

(πάν πλοῦτος τῆς πληροφορίας τῆς συνέσεως), and attaining knowledge of God's mystery, namely Christ (εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ θεοῦ, Χριστοῦ). Since the second εἰς which introduces the final purpose is not introduced by a καί, as is the previous clause, this may indicate the final phrase is a summary or comprehensive statement of Paul's purpose, placing even greater emphasis on their revelatory needs met in Christ (Harris, *Colossians*, 81).

⁶⁷ The possible distinction in meaning between ἐπίγνωσις and γνῶσις is still debated. Lightfoot asserts that ἐπίγνωσις "is an advance upon γνῶσις, denoting a larger, more thorough knowledge" (*Colossians*, 136). J. A. Robinson, however, disputes this interpretation, and says γνῶσις is a wider word and expresses "knowledge in the fullest sense: ἐπίγνωσις is knowledge directed toward a particular object, perceiving, discerning, recognising; but it is not knowledge in the abstract: that is γνῶσις" (*St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* [London: Macmillan, 1903] 254). Robert Picirelli, on the other hand to some degree synthesises these two views, saying that ἐπίγνωσις "often involves the particular crisis experience when knowledge is applied to the individual, that time when there is ingress or entrance into the state of knowledge" [Heb 10.26; 2 Pet 1.3, 8] "The Meaning of 'Epignosis,'" *EVQ* 47 (1975) 92.

⁶⁸ M. N. A. Bockmuehl comments on 2.3-4 "in other words: what the Colossian opponents are claiming to be their privilege is in fact the rightful property of *all* Christians by virtue both of their incorporation in the Christ (in whom God's fulness is already manifest: 1:19f.; 2:9 etc.) and of their assured share in the 'inheritance of the saints in light' (1: 12)" ("Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity," unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1987, 274-75).

At the same time, however, he has so emphasised the Jewish influence, that he fails to account for the fact that much of the textual evidence in Col 2 could be explained by pagan or Jewish sources, and some of the evidence, particularly submission to the elements of the universe, reflects a syncretistic pagan influence. His exegesis of τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου is weak,⁶⁹ susceptible to the same criticisms as is Bandstra's model (whose argumentation he essentially follows). (We will discuss Bandstra's model in the latter section of this chapter on the elements of the world.) The author's description of the elements of the universe in Col 2, as well as his emphasis on Christ's superiority over angelic powers, evidences more syncretistic influences than Sappington has acknowledged.

The fact remains that νόμος is never explicitly mentioned in Colossians, nor does circumcision appear to have been a prominent issue, at least not in the same way it was in Galatia or Philippi (Gal 2.2-3; 5.2-12; Phil 3.2-9).⁷⁰ Conversely, some of the more significant ideas found in the Jewish apocalyptic literature Sappington surveys do not appear to have been significant in the opponents' teaching. For example, Sappington largely builds his model around the perceived need among Jewish mystics to receive heavenly revelation, and shows that in Jewish apocalyptic literature five kinds of behaviour were associated with (to some degree prerequisite for) heavenly revelations: prayer, fasting, confession and mourning, meditation (especially on the Merkabah of Isa 6 and Ezek 1), and sexual abstinence.⁷¹ With the Colossian opposition, however, the only one of these practices which is apparent is fasting.⁷² This does not prove the other elements were not associated with the opponents' teaching, but it does bring into question the degree to which Sappington associates it almost exclusively with Jewish apocalypticism.⁷³

⁶⁹ *Revelation and Redemption*, 164-70.

⁷⁰ On the role of Mosaic law in Colossians, cf. Weiss, "Law in the Epistle to the Colossians." Weiss cogently argues that Mosaic law played a minor role in the Colossian opposition, and in fact due to the syncretistic nature of the Colossian opposition, Mosaic law "is no longer functioning as a recognisable entity," 311.

⁷¹ *Revelation and Redemption*, 65-70. Prayer: Dan 2.18-19; 4 Ezra 5.13; 6.31, 35; 2 Bar. 54.6-7; 56.1; 3 Bar. 1.4-5; fasting: Dan 10.2-3; 4 Ezra 5.13, 20; 9.23-28; 12.51; T. Abr. 9.7; confession and mourning: Dan 9.3-4, 20; meditation: Dan 9; 4 Ezra 6.38-59; 1 Enoch 14.8-23; 71; 2 Enoch 22; Apoc. Abr. 17-18; sexual abstinence: 1 Enoch 83.2; 2 Enoch 71.2

⁷² Some believe sexual abstinence lies behind the quotation "μη̄ ἀψῆν," in v. 21, since ἀπτομαί is sometimes used of sexual relations, cf. 1 Cor 7.1 (so argues R. Leaney, "Colossians 2.21-23," *ExpTim* 64 [1952-53] 92). The author's response in v. 22 that these things are destined to perish with use makes this interpretation highly unlikely, and instead points to ascetic prohibitions against food and drink. O'Brien (*Colossians*, 150) also notes that ἀπτομαί is used to describe a wide variety of behaviours, and when it is used of sexual relations, the object of the verb makes the sexual connotation clear (Gen 20.4, 6; Prov 6.29; 1 Cor 7.1).

⁷³ Sappington asserts that Lincoln has misunderstood Francis by asserting that he (Francis) gives a one-sided treatment of the Colossian error, viewing it almost entirely as the result of Jewish

F. Syncretistic Pagan/Jewish Cult

Though there are many parallels between the Colossian opposition and Jewish apocalyptic literature, we have noted that there are also some differences. When all the evidence in Col 2 is evaluated, it appears that there were apocalyptic Jewish and pagan mystical influences reflected in the opponents' teaching.⁷⁴ Given the fact that Colossae was the home of Christians, Jews, and pagans (who in turn may have participated in several different mystery religions) and given the syncretistic religious tendencies of the ancients, including the Jews,⁷⁵ this is not surprising.

That first-century religion tended to be syncretistic is well documented. Everett Ferguson, for example, places nonexclusivity and syncretistic worship first on his list of twelve characteristics of religion in Hellenistic-Roman times.⁷⁶ Ramsay MacMullen gives several examples of syncretistic tendencies among pagan worshippers. In Mithraea (temples dedicated to the worship of Mithras) for example, archaeologists have found images or honorific verses exalting various deities, including Silvanus, Sarapis, Venus, Vulcan, and Mercury Cissonus.⁷⁷ In his analysis of the Greek magical papyri (*PGM*), H. D. Betz notes that these extant texts "contain magical material of a highly syncretistic nature," representing older Egyptian magic, Classical Greek magic, Hellenistic Jewish magic, and Christian magic.⁷⁸

It is acknowledged that the presence of competing deities in a temple dedicated to a particular deity might be considered not to connote syncretism but to affirm the ontological unity of various gods. The pagan syncretism we are referring to with respect to the Colossian opponents is not the ontological blending of several deities into

influences (*Revelation and Redemption*, 19, n. 5), but in fact Francis and Sappington are both guilty of an imbalanced model which functionally sees little or no pagan influence in the Colossian error.

⁷⁴ Both Lähnemann ("Der kleinasiatische Synkretismus als Rahmen der kolossischen Lehre," in *Kolosserbrief*, 82-100) and W. House ("Heresies in the Colossian Church," *BSac* 149 [1992] 45-59) argue that the Colossian opposition was syncretistic, reflecting both Hellenistic Jewish and pagan mystical influences, though they both fail to emphasise the apocalyptic aspect of the Jewish influence.

⁷⁵ For one of the best discussions of Hellenistic influences on Judaism, see M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 2 vols., trans. by John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974). In his conclusion Hengel recapitulates that even Palestinian Judaism (and certainly Phrygian Judaism) shared in the religious ethos of its Hellenistic oriental environment, for "Jewish Palestine was no hermetically sealed island in the sea of Hellenistic oriental syncretism" (1.312).

⁷⁶ *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 132.

⁷⁷ R. MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) 92-94.

⁷⁸ "Magic and Mystery in the Greek Magical Papyri," in *Hellenismus und Urchristentum*, ed. by H. D. Betz (Tübingen: Mohr, 1990) 218-19. He argues that the few Christian magic elements are part of the "Hellenistic-Jewish syncretistic spells" (*PGM* 4.1233, 3019; 12.192, 391-92; 13.289; 44.18) ("Magic and Mystery," 219).

one (though this was occasionally championed, particularly in the worship of Isis⁷⁹), but the cultic blending of the worship of various deities and religious practices into one religious system. This kind of syncretism was very characteristic of first-century religion, and certainly occurred in Phrygia.⁸⁰ For example, the local god Sabazios was given the attributes of Zeus, Dionysos, Mithra, and underworld deities, and was worshipped alongside Yahweh by some Phrygian Jews.⁸¹

Günther Bornkamm presents a syncretistic model, identifying the opposition as a gnosticised Judaism which contained Jewish and Iranian-Persian elements, along with influences from Chaldean astrology as well as Christianity.⁸² Numerous other exegetes assert this or a similar syncretistic Jewish/pagan model, identifying the pagan elements with various pagan mystery cults, particularly Pythagoreanism, Mithraism, and the cult of Cybele and Attis.

Bornkamm's syncretistic Jewish/pagan model has been well received by many other exegetes, though modifications have been made to the identity of the pagan group. Schweizer, for example, also emphasises the pagan nature of the syncretistic opposition.⁸³ Based on evidence from a first-century Pythagorean text which he believes contains all of the elements of the opposition except for Sabbath observance (emphasis on the elements of the universe, transport from this world to the realm above, abstinence from certain foods, angel worship, abstinence from sexual activity, baptism, and ascent to heaven), Schweizer sees a form of Jewish Pythagoreanism as the background to the opponents' teaching.⁸⁴ Lohse regards the Colossian opposition as a pre-Gnostic, syncretistic mystery cult in which the cosmic powers (elements of the universe) were placated on the assumption that possibly Christian baptism was inadequate to provide security against the cosmic powers.⁸⁵ Martin emphasises the syncretistic religious milieu of Phrygia, which probably included the cults of Cybele, Isis, and Mithras, suggesting the latter is particularly relevant to understanding the "elements of the world" in Col 2. Argall, Conzelmann, and Lähnemann also identify the opponents with syncretistic pagan mystery religion.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ See R. E. Witt, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971)19-20.

⁸⁰ See Lähnemann, *Kolossierbrief*, 82-100; Martin, *Colossians*, 4-5.

⁸¹ Lincoln, *Paradise Now*, 224, n. 25.

⁸² "The Heresy of Colossians," 135.

⁸³ *Colossians*, 130-133.

⁸⁴ *Colossians*, 130-133. On possible Pythagorean influences on Essene Judaism (though he concludes there was little direct influence), see Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1.243-247.

⁸⁵ *Colossians*, 97-99, 130-131.

⁸⁶ Argall, "The Source of a Religious Error in Colossae," 14-20; Conzelmann, *Kolossier*, 132; Lähnemann, *Kolossierbrief*, 63-100.

The next section will survey the relevant mystery religions to demonstrate possible influences, but will not posit a specific pagan religion or mystery cult as the influence on the Colossian opposition, for the data are insufficient to do so. We will instead argue that it had certain elements which cannot be explained solely in terms of Jewish apocalyptic influence, and demonstrate that it was syncretistic, blending Jewish and pagan elements.

1. Mystery Religions

While our knowledge of pagan mystery religions is still quite limited,⁸⁷ and the language of Col 2 is often elusive and abbreviated, we can formulate a functional description of the opposition based on the Colossian text informed by a knowledge of religious beliefs in first-century Phrygia. To aid in this functional description, we will now discuss pagan mystery religions which were active in Phrygia in the first century CE which might have in some manner influenced the opposition.

Two possible pagan religions most commonly believed to have influenced the Colossian opposition are the cults of Cybele and Mithras. The worship of Cybele was widespread in Asia Minor and Phrygia.⁸⁸ Walter Burkert, for example, suggests that the worship of Cybele or Mater spread to the Greeks primarily from Phrygia.⁸⁹ Worship of Cybele, sometimes labelled the "Phrygian mother goddess" and Attis, her youthful consort, involved mysteries and ritual castration, but we know little about the specifics of cultic Cybele worship other than the existence of a festival in March (which involved sacrifice of a bull, fasting and other ascetic practices, ritual castration by new priests, and the water purification of the cultic objects) and the rite of the taurobolium. The taurobolium involved the ritual slaying of a bull in which the initiate was covered with the bull's blood. Thus reference to circumcision in Col 2.11, fasting and festivals in 2.16, and the severe treatment of the body in 2.23 might ultimately have their source in

⁸⁷ The very nature of secretive mystery religions greatly contributes to the difficulty in our understanding the pagan mystery cults. R. Beck believes the ancient accounts we have of mystery religions may often be distorted due to misunderstanding or slander. Beck also notes that the cultic monuments, which are another primary source of knowledge regarding pagan mystery religion, are intrinsically opaque, for we do not know the meaning of the symbols, or even what kind of meaning to look for, "Mithraism Since Franz Cumont," *ANRW* 2.17.4. 2058-59. Joscelyn Godwin suggests the ancient craftsmen themselves did not always understand the symbols they were artistically depicting (*Mystery Religions in the Ancient World* [London: Thames and Hudson, 1981] 98) again compounding the difficulty in obtaining an accurate understanding of ancient mystery religion.

⁸⁸ On the worship of Cybele in Asia Minor, see Maarten J. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis: The Myth and the Cult*, trans. by A. M. Lemmers (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977) 24-32.

⁸⁹ *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (London: University of California Press, 1979) 103.

the worship of Cybele,⁹⁰ though our lack of specific knowledge regarding this ancient cult makes it impossible to prove this association.

Mithras was an ancient eastern god of light and truth. He is mentioned as guarantor of treaties as early as 1400 BCE in the Hittite Treaty. He became closely associated with the Persian monarchy after 400 BCE, and in the following years of Persian conquests of Mesopotamia and Asia Minor his cultic worship took on astrological elements from Babylonian and Chaldean religion. Mithras worship eventually evolved into a Hellenistic mystery religion, probably due to the influence of *magi* of the Zarathustrian reform movement in Asia Minor.⁹¹ The mystery cult of Mithras spread rapidly in the Roman Empire, particularly among the Roman soldiers stationed on the frontier,⁹² until it was officially validated in the empire through the Mithraic initiation of the emperor Commodus at the end of the second century CE.

Mithraic cultic worship took place in underground caves or sanctuaries resembling caves, and involved seven ranks of initiation which correspond to the seven astrological planets.⁹³ While we do not know much about the specifics of this cult practice, it seems to have included initiatory baptism, communal celebrations, cultic meals, and severe initiation ceremonies (on the latter practice, cp. Col 2.23).⁹⁴ In one historian's opinion, the use of crypts, the wearing of animal masks by the ceremonial officials, unexpected lighting effects, and the use of tricks (some quite gruesome),⁹⁵ amazed and terrified the Mithraic participants beyond what would have been experienced in the other mystery cults.⁹⁶ It is possible that this has a bearing on the emphasis in Colossians on Christ's absolute superiority over the hostile powers.

One final ancient religious movement which has bearing on the question of the Colossian opponents is Gnosticism.⁹⁷ Gnosticism as represented by Marcion and

⁹⁰ Martin affirms this possibility (*Colossians*, 4). However, in the light of the strong evidence for a mystical apocalyptic Jewish influence upon the Colossian opponents, it is most likely that the reference to circumcision in Col 2.11 ultimately has a Jewish source.

⁹¹ Gary Lease, "Mithraism and Christianity: Borrowings and Transformations," *ANRW* 2.23.2. 1310.

⁹² Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 230.

⁹³ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 236.

⁹⁴ Lease, "Mithraism and Christianity," 1312.

⁹⁵ In a Mithraeum located in present day Germany, a trick sword (a handle and upper part of the blade was attached to a loop of metal, which was attached to the final portion of the blade) was found which would make it appear that the victim was transfixed by the sword though still alive. E. Schwertheim, "Mithras. Seine Denkmäler und sein Kult," *Antike Welt* 10 (1979) 29, cited by MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, 125.

⁹⁶ MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, 125-26.

⁹⁷ Guthrie believes the Colossian opposition was "of syncretistic Jewish-Gnosticizing type" (*NT Introduction*, 568-69), as does G. R. Beasley-Murray ("The Second Chapter of Colossians," *RevExp* 70 [1973] 469-79). See also T. H. Olbricht, "Colossians and Gnostic Theology," *ResQ* 14 (1971) 65-79.

Valentinus in the second century, is an anachronistic label when applied to the New Testament,⁹⁸ for we still do not know when the mature Gnosticism of the second century began.⁹⁹

Second-century Gnosticism was characterised by cosmic dualism resulting in asceticism or libertinism, the attempt to obtain secret knowledge through which one might obtain salvation, and a cosmology in which the *pleroma* contained gradations of emanations, with the intermediate beings (archons) ruling the world through fate which resulted in an emphasis on astrology, for the stars were seen as hostile forces inhabited by spirits who control the destinies of humans.¹⁰⁰ Many of these second-century Gnostic characteristics can possibly be seen in an incipient form in the Colossian opposition, for the developed religious systems of the second century we call Gnosticism had first-century seeds from which they flowered.

Possible gnostic tendencies among the Colossian opponents might be seen in: the prayer for the Colossians to develop a knowledge (ἐπίγνωσις) with all understanding, and to increase in the knowledge of God (1.9-10); the statement of the believers' renewal in knowledge (3.10); the assertion of Christ's absolute supremacy (1.16) and victory over the principalities and powers (2.15); the prohibitions against asceticism and severe treatment of the body (2.21, 23); the presence of an extended paraenetic section (3.1-4.6), which includes specific injunction against sinning with the physical body (3.5); the use of the term "flesh" (1.22, 24; 2.1, 5, 11, 13, 18, 23, 3.22).

In summary, in the light of the religious syncretism common in the first century CE, and given the description of the Colossian opponents in ch. 2, pagan mystery religions may have influenced the Colossian opposition. While there is no firm evidence that the mature form of Gnosticism extant in the second century CE existed in the first century CE, the religion represented by the Colossian opponents does bear marks of an incipient gnosticism, and may have been on the trajectory which later developed into

⁹⁸ Note, for example, Walter Schmithals' bold attempt to explain the Corinthians' problems in terms of the presence of Gnosticism, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971).

⁹⁹ On Gnosticism and the New Testament, see Ralph Martin, "Gnostic Motifs in Paul," in *NT Foundations*, 1.320-325; Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983); R. Wilson, "How Gnostic Were the Corinthians?" *NTS* 19 (1972-73) 65-74; Edwin Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973) and "Pre-Christian Gnosticism, the New Testament and Nag Hamadi in Recent Debate," *Themelios* 10 (1984) 22-27.

¹⁰⁰ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 247-48; R. Martin, *New Testament Foundations*, vol. 2, 2nd ed. (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1986) 321-22.

Gnosticism.¹⁰¹ In order to further clarify the nature of the Colossian opposition, we must look at other terms in Col 1-2, particularly ἀρχαί and ἐξουσίαι and the phrase τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου.

2. Textual Evidence of Syncretistic Pagan Influence

While Francis and Sappington have demonstrated Jewish apocalyptic influence on the Colossian opposition, there are other elements which are better accounted for in terms of a pagan influence or a syncretistic Jewish influence which have largely been ignored by Francis, Rowland, and Sappington. These influences are particularly seen in the use of the terms ἀρχαί and ἐξουσίαι and the use of the phrase τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου in Col 1-2.

a. Principalities and Powers

Historically, most exegetes have understood the use of ἀρχαί and ἐξουσίαι in Colossians as a reference to evil spirits.¹⁰² Carr, however, has directly challenged this view.¹⁰³ He contends that the mid-first century was one of social and religious calm, contributing to minimal interest in the demonic world among Christians or Jews. While he acknowledges that demons are found in Jewish apocalyptic as well as first-century pagan literature, he sees their role as minimal in both. In *I Enoch*, for example, which was completed by the first century CE,¹⁰⁴ Carr says that the existence of demons is affirmed, but what is noteworthy "is the remarkably small role that demons play in the

¹⁰¹ There is still much debate on the roots of Gnosticism, see in particular Alan Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven. Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977). At the same time, the characteristics of the Colossian opposition attested in Col 2 do suggest the distinct possibility that second-century Gnosticism grew out of this type of religion. Lincoln thus asserts that the Colossian opposition reflects "a syncretism of nonconformist Jewish elements and speculative Hellenistic ideas and this could perhaps be seen as one stage in a trajectory which leads from the interests of late Judaism via contact with Christianity in a Hellenistic environment to the later Gnosticism we have attested in the Nag Hammadi documents" (*Paradise Now*, 117).

¹⁰² For a basic overview of 20th-century interpretations of "principalities and powers" cf. P.T. O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers: Opponents of the Church," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 16 (1992) 353-84.

¹⁰³ *Angels and Principalities*. Yates is one of the few scholars who supports Carr's assertion that principalities and powers in the NT refer to heavenly angels, not demonic beings ("A Reappraisal of Colossians," 99, 115).

¹⁰⁴ The discovery of fragments of *I Enoch* among the Dead Sea Scrolls has pushed the date of its completion back to the first century CE at the latest. See J. H. Charlesworth, "The SNTS Pseudepigrapha Seminars at Tübingen and Paris on the Books of Enoch," *NTS* 25 (1979) 315-23; E. Isaac, "1 Enoch," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1.6-7; C. L. Mearns, "Dating the Similitudes of Enoch," *NTS* 25 (1979) 360-69.

book. Their presence is acknowledged but their nature and function, especially when compared with those of the angels, is of little concern."¹⁰⁵

Similarly, he believes the early Christians showed little belief in the demonic world and no concern about a cosmic struggle between God and his followers and the forces of Satan. In the Pauline literature all references to principalities or powers are said to designate human authorities or good angels. He states

We must conclude that far from being a fundamental part of the background and proclamation of the Christian message, the notion of the mighty forces of evil ranged against man was not part of the earliest Christian understanding of the world and the gospel. There is nothing in the Pauline writings that refers to a battle between Christ and hostile forces. Indeed, it is also noticeable that there is no conflict directly between Christ and Satan.¹⁰⁶

Carr has been severely criticised by several reviewers and authors,¹⁰⁷ since his model regarding first-century attitudes toward the demonic is seriously flawed. The evidence not only points toward widespread belief in the the demonic world, but widespread concern over demonic involvement in human affairs. One need look no farther than the four canonical Gospels and the book of Acts to note the strong belief among early Christians in demonic powers which could negatively affect humans unless overcome by the power of God.¹⁰⁸ The belief in a cosmic struggle between the forces of God and the forces of Satan permeates the New Testament,¹⁰⁹ and is certainly found in Colossians.

In terms of the non-Christian influences on the Colossian opposition, Carr is again wrong to assert that demonic powers play little role in Jewish apocalyptic literature or in general pagan beliefs of the first century. Wink refutes the premise that the Jewish apocalyptic literature focusses almost solely on good angels.¹¹⁰ He demonstrates, for example, that in *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees* as much attention is given to

¹⁰⁵ *Angels and Principalities*, 28.

¹⁰⁶ *Angels and Principalities*, 176-77.

¹⁰⁷ See especially Clinton Arnold, "The 'Exorcism' of Ephesians 6.12 in Recent Research: A Critique of Wesley Carr's View of the Role of Evil Powers in First-Century AD Belief," *JSNT* 30 (1987) 71-87; Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 22-32, 55-60, 84-88. Negative book reviews include: P. W. Barnett, *JRH* 12 (1982) 206; John Koenig, *Interp* 37 (1983) 322-24.

¹⁰⁸ Matt 9.32; 12.22, 43-45; 15.22; Mark 1.23-27; 5.2-20; 7.26; 9.17-29; Luke 4.33-36; 8.26-39; 9.42; Acts 8.5-8; 16.16-18; 19.13-17.

¹⁰⁹ Luke 10.17-20; John 13.2; 2 Cor 2.11; 12.7; Eph 6.12; James 4.7; 1 Pet 5.8; 1 John 3.8-10; Jude 9; Rev 2.10; 12.9, 12; 20.2, 10. See also H. Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1962); G. B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956); G. H. C. Macgregor, "Principalities and Powers: The Cosmic Background of Paul's Thought," *NTS* 1 (1954) 17-28; Clinton Morrison, *The Powers that Be* (London: SCM, 1960); Heinrich Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament* (New York: Herder, 1961).

¹¹⁰ *Naming the Powers*, 23-26.

demonic powers as to good angels.¹¹¹ In Jubilees,¹¹² for example, the myth of the Watchers explains the origin of demons, recounting that some good angels (4.15) had sexual relations with the daughters of men (cf. Gen 6.1-4) and were condemned to live on the earth (5.6-11). While their offspring the giants were destroyed, the spirits of their offspring roam the earth as demons (*I Enoch* 15.8) causing physical illness (10.1) tempting humans to sin (as in the case of Mastema tempting Jacob to sacrifice Isaac, 17.15-18.13) and promote idolatry (1.1). In the pre-Christian Jewish apocalyptic literature, demons exert a fearful, malevolent influence on human affairs. Hence we find Abraham praying "save me from the hands of evil spirits which rule over the thought of the heart of man, and do not let them lead me astray from following you, O my God" (*Jub.* 12.20). Carr has additionally failed to recognise the role of the demonic in the Qumran literature.¹¹³

While Carr has seriously misrepresented the widespread role of demons in pre-Christian Jewish apocalyptic literature, it is important to note that the demonic role in this literature is primarily one of tempting humans to sin.¹¹⁴ With the Colossian opposition, however, the demonic forces seem to have a wider, more potent role against humans,¹¹⁵ for the author repeatedly emphasises Christ's absolute superiority and victory over them. Furthermore, Colossians links the demonic forces with ascetic practice, indicating that the opponents were seeking to appease the cosmic forces through ascetic behaviour. These observations strongly point to a pagan influence on the opposition.

While we cannot specifically identify the pagan influence, Clinton Arnold points out that Ephesus, the chief political and commercial centre of Asia Minor, was known as a centre for magic in this region.¹¹⁶ This reputation was in large part due to the

¹¹¹ *I Enoch* 6.1-8; 7.1-6; 8.1-4; 9.1-11; 10.1-22; 12.1-6; 13.1-10; 14.1-8; 15.1-12; 16.1-4; 18.13-16; 19.1-3; 21.1-10; 23.1-4; 84.4; 86.1-6; 87.1-4; 88.1-3; 91.15; 100.4; 102.2-3; *Jub.* 4.15, 21-22; 5.1-12; 7.21; 8.3; 10.1-13; 20.5. George Barton catalogued the names of angels and demons in Jewish apocalyptic literature written before 100 CE, and discovered twenty-eight good angels listed by name, but fifty different demons ("The Origin of the Names of Angels and Demons in the Extra-Canonical Apocalyptic Literature to 100 A. D.," *JBL* 31 [1912] 156-67). Several scholars have noted the significant role angels, especially evil angels, play in the theology of the Jewish apocalyptic literature (see Harold Kuhn, "The Angelology of the Non-Canonical Jewish Apocalypses," *JBL* 67 [1948] 230-31). Demons play a particularly significant role in the theodicy of *Jubilees* (see O. S. Wintermute, "*Jubilees*," *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2.47-48).

¹¹² See Wintermute, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2.47-48.

¹¹³ See especially the *War Rule* (1QM); also 1QS 3.18; CD 2.18; 11QMelch.

¹¹⁴ *Jub.* 1.20; 10.3-8; 23.29; *I Enoch* 8.4.

¹¹⁵ W. Foerster makes the point in comparing the Rabbinic and pseudepigraphal views of demons "of the view of demons in the pseudepigrapha we should note first that, in contrast to the Rabbis, we meet only rarely the belief in capricious spirits which seek to harm man and against which precautions can be taken," *δαίμων*," *TDNT* 2.14.

¹¹⁶ "The 'Exorcism' of Ephesians 6.12," 75.

"Ephesian Letters" which were said to contain a series of six names which had magical power, for if recited they would invoke the aid of certain powerful spirits. This kind of magic is primarily defensive, based on the assumption that oppressive evil spirits exist which one must guard against.¹¹⁷ Additionally, amulets and magic bowls have been found in Asia Minor which appear to have been used prophylactically against demons.¹¹⁸ A similar world view which affirms the existence of malevolent demonic powers or cosmic spirits against which humans must guard themselves seems to lie behind the Colossian opposition.

Thus commensurate with the Jewish and pagan religious milieu of the first century CE, angelic powers played a significant role in the Colossian opposition, for in three different texts we find paired references to ἀρχή and ἐξουσία (1.16; 2.10, 15).¹¹⁹ Some have argued that angelic references in the hymn have little relevance to the Colossian opposition, for the author is probably quoting from a pre-existing hymn for general, not corrective, purposes.¹²⁰ The objection that this may be hymnic material begs the question, for whatever the source of the hymn, the author is utilising it to serve his rhetorical purposes. The polemical use of the hymn is seen in the fact that immediately after concluding the hymn, the author specifically applies it to the Colossians (1.21-22), and cautions them against falling away from the gospel (1.23). Furthermore, portions of the hymn are quoted or alluded to in four verses in ch. 2 (1.19 in 2.9; 1.16-17 in 2.10; 1.20 in 2.15; 1.18 in 2.19). Hence it is reasonable to assume that the contents of the hymn played some role in the writer's polemic against the Colossian opponents.¹²¹

Our specific concern with the hymn is found in v. 16, where Christ's superiority over the entire created world is emphasised, including his superiority over the heavenly and earthly beings. With respect to the former, four different terms are

¹¹⁷ "The 'Exorcism' of Ephesians 6.12," 75; J. M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* (London: SCM, 1974) 37-44.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, eds., *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1985). Naveh and Shaked note, for example, that in addition to the discovery of prophylactic amulets which were worn to guard against demonic powers, numerous bowls have been found in their original position upside down, which many scholars believe served as a trap in which demons were supposedly captured and held (15).

¹¹⁹ These terms are paired together ten times in the New Testament, and seven of these references (including the three in Colossians) denote hostile angelic powers. For example, 1 Cor 15.24 speaks of the divine abolishment of ἀρχαί and ἐξουσίαι in the context of the subjection of the divine enemies (vv. 25-27). The reference to ἀρχαί and ἐξουσίαι in Eph 1.21 is in a similar context of subjection of all things to Christ (v. 22). Eph 6.12 is the clearest witness to the demonic use of ἀρχαί and ἐξουσίαι, for the principalities and powers are said to be the objects of the believers' battle, are contrasted with flesh and blood, and are described as "spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."

¹²⁰ Carr, *Angels and Principalities*, 76; Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption*, 176.

¹²¹ We will strengthen this contention in the next chapter on the Colossian hymn.

used to indicate angelic powers: θρόνοι (thrones), κυριότητες (dominions), ἀρχαί (rulers, powers), ἐξουσία (authorities), though it is difficult and unnecessary to ascertain whether this is a hierarchical listing.¹²² All four of these words are used of angelic beings,¹²³ and some of demonic beings.¹²⁴ In Col 1-2 these terms surely refer to demonic beings given the descriptions connected with these terms (especially 2.15 where the ἀρχαί and ἐξουσία are said to be disarmed and triumphed over publicly). The important point with respect to Col 1.16 is that Christ is presented as absolutely supreme over all angelic and demonic powers. The message of this verse is repeated in 2.10, where the context is overtly polemical (cf. v. 8). In 2.10, however, the significance of Christ's victory over the demonic powers becomes more clear, for it is proclaimed in the context of the believers' spiritual completeness in Christ (v. 10a) and of Christ being the fulness of deity in bodily form (v. 9). This suggests that possibly the opponents were attributing semi-divine status to the cosmic powers, and hence the Colossians needed to be reminded that the fulness of deity dwells in Christ. More certainly, the opponents were linking spiritual fulness with ascetic practices which appeased the cosmic powers. In affirming Christ's supremacy over all spiritual powers and the fulness of spirituality he provides, the syncretistic teaching of the opponents was undercut.¹²⁵

This undercutting of the ascetic practices designed to appease the cosmic powers can also be seen in the soteriological development of 2.11-15, where Christ's victory is given in the context of the flesh (note the use of σάρξ in 2.11, 13, 18, 23). Our metaphorical, sinful flesh (2.11, 13) was removed through Christ's physical flesh (cp. 1.22) being nailed to the cross (2.14).¹²⁶ In doing this, he stripped the demonic powers

¹²² Schlier, *Principalities and Powers*, 13-14.

¹²³ θρόνος: *T. Levi* 3.8; κυριότης: Eph 1.21; possibly *1 Enoch* 61.10 and *2 Enoch* 20.1; ἀρχή: Eph 1.21; 3.10; ἐξουσία: Eph 1.21; 3.10; *2 Macc* 3.24; *T. Levi* 3.8; *T. Sol.* 20.15. In some texts where one or more of these terms occur, it is unclear whether human or angelic powers are in view (*1 Cor* 2.6, 8—ἀρχαί), but this is not surprising, since the early church understood humans and human authority structures to be ultimately under the influence of Satan, the ruler of this world (*John* 14.30; *2 Cor* 4.3-4; Eph 2.2-3; *1 John* 3.8; 5.19; *Rev* 2.10; 12.9; 20.3).

¹²⁴ θρόνος: *Rev* 2.13; 13.2 (Satan and the dragon's throne), cf. Wink (*Naming the Powers*, 19) who says θρόνος is a metonymy for "throne prince" or "throne angel"; ἀρχή: *1 Cor* 15.24; Eph 6.12; *Jude* 6; ἐξουσία: Eph 6.12; *1 Pet* 3.22. If we include the noun ἀρχων, which is virtually synonymous with ἀρχή, numerous other angelic (*Dan* 10.13, 20-21; *1QS3*; *1QM13*; *Jub.* 10.8), Satanic (*Matt* 9.34; *Mark* 3.22; *Luke* 11.15; *John* 12.31; 14.30; *T. Sim.* 2.7; *T. Dan* 5.6; *T. Jud.* 19.4; *1QM17*; *Asc. Isa.* 4.2-4) and demonic (*Dan* 10.13, 20; *Jub.* 10.1-13; *1 Enoch* 80.6-7; *Asc. Isa.* 4.2-4; 10.12) references are found.

¹²⁵ Arnold emphasises the undercutting of the Colossian syncretistic teaching (which sought to placate demonic powers) through the author's emphasis on the absolute supremacy of Christ (*Powers of Darkness. Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992] 138-47).

¹²⁶ This interpretation is based on the χειρόγραφον in v. 14 being Christ himself. This view is supported by Oliva Blanchette, "Does the Cheirographon of Col 2.14 Represent Christ

of any power they might have over the believer, and nullified all demands for submission to ascetic practices (2.16) which really cannot aid in fleshly indulgence anyway (2.23), and are proposed by those who by physical denial show themselves to be morally fleshly (2.18).

The extent of Christ's domination over the demonic powers is graphically described in v. 15,¹²⁷ where the nouns ἀρχή and ἐξουσία are used to describe the evil angels God stripped or disarmed (the middle participle ἀπεκδυσάμενος is taken as having an active meaning)¹²⁸ and publicly humiliated based on the death of Christ (v. 14).¹²⁹ Two verbs give further description to the nature of the defeat of the powers, the first δειγματίζω, is found in the NT only in Matt 1.19 with reference to Joseph not putting Mary to public exposure, and in this verse has a similar meaning of public exposure.¹³⁰ The second verb, θριαμβεύω, enlarges the picture of public exposure to that of a triumph procession after a military victory, in which the defeated enemies were paraded into Rome.¹³¹

In summary, in three passages in Colossians the author speaks of evil angels, and strongly emphasises Christ's superiority and victory over them in the context of the Colossian opposition and of ascetic practice designed to placate them. While the Jewish

Himself?" *CBQ* 23 (1961) 306-12; Lincoln, *Paradise Now*, 121; Martin, *Colossians*, 81; Harold Weiss, "The Law in the Epistle to the Colossians," 302.

¹²⁷ With respect to the phrase τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας in v. 15, as well as θρόνοι εἶτε κυριότητες in 1.16, Carr says these terms "are not mentioned for any intrinsic interest in them, either by Paul or by the Colossians. Both references occur in passages which, if not hymnic-credal fragments, nevertheless within the epistle function more as emotive descriptions of Christ and his work than as theological statements" (*Angels and Principalities*, 76). Carr gives no support for saying they are more emotive descriptions of Christ than theological statements. An examination of the context in fact reveals the opposite, for the inferential use of the conjunction οὖν in v. 16 shows that the theological basis for not allowing anyone to be one's judge with respect to adherence to ascetic rules is the message of vv. 14-15. In other words, Christ has already defeated and triumphed over the cosmic forces (2.14-15), hence the believer should not submit to ascetic rules designed to placate these demonic powers (2.16).

¹²⁸ Since the other chief interpretation of Christ stripping off the powers necessitates an abrupt change in subject (from God to Christ) and creates a very awkward reading (there is no contextual indication that Christ was clothed with the powers) I am taking ἀπεκδυσάμενος as a middle voice participle with an active sense. This tendency in NT Greek to give an active meaning to the middle voice is noted by various grammarians (Blass and DeBrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §316; Robertson, *Grammar*, 804-805).

¹²⁹ Pace Carr (*Angels and Principalities*, 52-66) and Van Broekhoven ("Wisdom and World," 189-92) who argue that principalities and powers in Col 2.15 refer to heavenly angels who join in celebrating Christ's victory, not demonic spirits Christ triumphed over.

¹³⁰ See also *Asc. Isa.* 3.13 which reads "For Beliar harbored great wrath against Isaiah on account of the vision and of the exposure with which he had exposed Samuel" (Lohse, *Colossians*, 112, n. 139).

¹³¹ See Delling, "θριαμβεύω," *TDNT* 3.160; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 129-29; Lamar Williamson, "Led in Triumph," *Interp* 22 (1968) 317-32. Rory Egan's attempt ("Lexical Evidence on Two Pauline Passages," *NovT* 19 [1979] 34-62) to argue that θριαμβεύω in this passage means "reveal" is very unlikely in the light of the immediate context.

apocalyptic literature has much to say about demons, the language found in Colossians goes well beyond the Jewish literature and strongly evidences a pagan influence.

b. Elements of the World (2.8, 20)

In addition to the principalities and powers mentioned in 1.16, 2.10 and 2.15, the phrase στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου also occurs twice in ch. 2, and gives further evidence of pagan influence upon the Colossian opposition. Various suggestions have been given for the meaning of this difficult phrase in Col 2, though there are three predominant ones. The noun στοιχεῖον probably comes from στοιχος, which was originally used in military contexts and indicated "belonging to a series," thus "a row" or "a line."¹³² Later it came to indicate the letters of the alphabet, and then the basic knowledge of a subject or fundamental principles.

Thus several exegetes and one major translation (NIV) give "fundamental principles" as the meaning of στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου in Col 2. This is in keeping with the use of στοιχεῖα in at least one other New Testament passage (Heb 5.12). This meaning of elements could refer to the basic principles of Jewish law (De Wette),¹³³ or to the traditions common to Jewish and Gentile religions (Bandstra, Burton, Lightfoot, Moule¹³⁴), traditions that the Colossians should no longer be under since they had received Christ. Bandstra in a detailed study of στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου (particularly its use in Gal 4 and Col 2) concludes that it refers to law and flesh as the two cosmological forces enslaving humanity.¹³⁵ This interpretation of στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου harmonises neatly with Francis' and Sappington's model of the Colossian opposition as essentially Jewish, but is subject to at least five major criticisms.¹³⁶

(1) Bandstra's thesis is derived primarily from Galatians, and does not recognise the dissimilarities between the two epistles.¹³⁷ For example, the the role of

¹³² G. Dellling, "στοιχέω," *TDNT* 7.666-67.

¹³³ *Kurze Erklärung der Briefe an die Kolosser, an Philemon, an die Epheser und Philipper* (Leipzig: Weidemann, 1847), cited by O'Brien, *Colossians*, 130.

¹³⁴ A. J. Bandstra, *The Law and the Elements of the World. An Exegetical Study in Aspects of Paul's Teaching* (Kampen: Kok, 1964); Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920) 213-14; Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 75; Moule, *Colossians*, 92. Harold Weiss ("The Law in the Epistle to the Colossians," 294-96) lists several other older exegetes who held this view, including Jerome, Calvin, Luther, W. DeWette, H. Meyer, C. Ellicott, and W. Knox.

¹³⁵ *The Law and the Elements*, 60.

¹³⁶ The first four objections are also voiced by O'Brien (*Colossians*, 131).

¹³⁷ Even Dellling, who also believes στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου refers to the foundational religious principles outside of Christ, acknowledges that the use of στοιχεῖα in Col 2 is independent of its use in Gal 4, (*TDNT* 7.685).

law and circumcision is quite different between the two epistles. (2) Bandstra's thesis ignores the growing evidence from pagan as well as Jewish sources of the role it was believed angels played in the forces of nature.¹³⁸ (3) One must strain to understand law and flesh as structural entities outside of Christ. This is an abstract construct which is not found in Galatians or Colossians.

(4) In the context of Col 2, the elements are described in a personal manner, not as impersonal fundamental principles.¹³⁹ In 2.8 for, instance, στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου is juxtaposed with two other personal entities. Sappington argues that the broader context of v. 8, especially the phrase "κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων" is impersonal, and militates against a personal interpretation of στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου.¹⁴⁰ This is not a strong rebuttal, however, for the context reveals that the emphasis in the phrase παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων is clearly on τῶν ἀνθρώπων. The writer does not condemn tradition as such, in fact he has just admonished the Colossians to live out the Christian life in a manner commensurate with the gospel traditions they had received (2.6). The problem is that the Colossians were being seduced into following human traditions. Thus traditions coming from other humans and elements of the world are set in contrast to Christ.¹⁴⁰ The personal aspect of στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου is also seen by the descriptions of Christ's victory over the principalities and powers, which are best understood as virtually synonymous with στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου.

(5) A final difficulty with identifying στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου with Mosaic law is found in vv. 21-22, where three specific injunctions connected with submission to στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου are issued. This threefold quotation from the opponents (μὴ ἄψη μὴδὲ γεύση μὴδὲ θίγῃς) forbids handling, tasting, and touching, yet Mosaic law does not place an emphasis on not handling or touching. Even with respect to the third prohibition, Mosaic law centres not on abstinence from tasting but abstinence from eating. Additionally problematic is the description of the regulations in v. 22 as "according to the commandments and teachings of men." This is a very odd description

¹³⁸ See Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1.231-41; Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 94-113; Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 135-46, 182-204.

¹³⁹ See Bo Reicke for a development of the view that the στοιχεῖα in Gal 4 and possibility Col 2 have personal characteristics ("The Law and This World according to Paul: Some Thoughts Concerning Gal 4.1-11," *JBL* 70 (1951) 259-76). Reicke identifies them with the angels of Gal 3.19 (261-62). Unfortunately, Van Broekhoven seems to have concluded *a priori* that in the light of Mary Douglas' Grid-Group social structure paradigm (*Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* [New York: Pantheon, 1973] 54-64) στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου in Colossians is impersonal, and cannot refer to cosmic spirits. He states regarding the phrase στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου in Col 1-2 "and even if the text were ambiguous and might be read as referring to a heresy that was concerned with spiritual powers, the high-grid, low-group profile of the writer's rivals would argue against that interpretation" ("Wisdom and World," 193-94). In fact, the text gives a very personal description of στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, and also thematically connects it with principalities and powers, which are also personal.

¹⁴⁰ *Revelation and Redemption*, 167-69.

if Mosaic law is in view, for in the Pauline literature Mosaic law is described as holy, righteous, and good (Rom 7.12; Gal 3.21), a blessing originating from God (Rom 3.1-2), and that which leads individuals to Christ (Gal 3.24-25). It makes much more sense to understand Col 2.21-22 as a description of general ascetic behaviour based on pagan antipathy toward the material world and toward the physical body.

The Greek philosophers used στοιχεῖα to refer to the basic elements of which the universe was made, specifically the four elements earth, fire, water, and air. Thus the task of the physician was to promote the proper admixture of elements. This cosmology in which the universe is composed of mixtures of the four elements can be seen in the account of the death of Jesus in *Acts of Thomas* 165, where the soldiers lead Jesus to the place of execution and before putting him to death remind him of the four elements from which he originated. This view of the elements was common in Hellenistic Judaism.¹⁴¹ Thus the second major interpretation of στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου in Col 2 is the elements out of which the universe is made, which is certainly the meaning of στοιχεῖα in 2 Pet 3.10. This interpretation is preferred by two translations (KJV, ASV), and is cogently argued by Schweizer and more recently by D. Rusam.¹⁴² Schweizer believes that "elements of the universe" is the way in which this phrase would have been understood in secular Greek literature of the first century, thus it is best to understand it this way in Col 2 and Gal 4.

Schweizer cites numerous first-century pagan and Jewish texts to show that this definition of στοιχεῖα was widely used. He also shows from these texts that human existence was felt to be in jeopardy unless the elements were in proper harmony. He quotes Ovid, who around the time of Christ's birth, spoke of the conflict among the elements making up the universe, saying,

The air is hung over all, which is as much heavier than fire as the weight of water is lighter than the weight of earth. There did the creator bid the mists and clouds to take place...[but] they can scarce be prevented ...from tearing the world to pieces. So fiercely do these brothers strive together.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ 4 Macc 12.13; Wis 7.17; Philo, *De Cher.* 127; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.183.

¹⁴² Schweizer, "Slaves of the Elements"; Rusam, "Neue Belege zu den στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου." Rusam used the TLG database and examined evidence in Galen, Marcus Aurelius, Sextus Empiricus, Alexander of Aphrodisias, and the Chaldean Oracles. His work sheds light on the subject, but it appears his research was too narrow in scope to draw the firm conclusions he has drawn regarding the meaning of στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου in Col. 2.

¹⁴³ "Slaves of the Elements," 458-59.

The world comprised of the elements is pictured as a world of continual change which can ensnare the soul. Ovid quotes Pythagoras, who after discussing the danger of eating meat which could contain the souls of one's ancestors says,

Do you not see the year assuming four aspects, in imitation of our own lifetime...Our own bodies also go through a ceaseless round of change...Even those things which we call the elements do not persist...In the eternal universe, there are four elemental substances...These elements, although far separate in position, nevertheless are all derived each from the other, and each into the other falls back again.¹⁴⁴

The necessity of purifying the soul while living on the earth so that at death it would not be ensnared in the elements is described by Plutarch around the end of the first century in *The Face of the Moon*. He declares,

All soul[s], whether without mind or with it, when it has issued from the body is destined to wander [in] the region between earth and moon but not for an equal time. Unjust and licentious souls pay penalties for their offences; but the good souls must in in the gentlest parts of the air [one of the elements], which they call 'the meads of Hades' pass a certain set time sufficient to purge and blow away pollutions contracted from the body as from an evil odour.¹⁴⁵

The souls which are impure will be cast off and sink down into the elements, being ensnared for a period of time. Again in *The Face of the Moon* Plutarch says "many, even as they are in the act of clinging to the moon, she thrusts off and sweeps away; and some of these souls too that are on the moon they see turning upside down as if sinking again into the deep."¹⁴⁶

Schweizer links this fear of enslavement in the elements (which he believes is specifically referred to in Gal 4.3, 9) to the description of the Colossian opponents, who were practising asceticism and worshipping angels (those who had already ascended beyond the elements).¹⁴⁷ He believes this identification of the opponents also explains the author's emphasis on the believer already being raised with Christ. He cites a little known first century BCE text by Alexander Polyhistor describing the beliefs of the Pythagoreans. After discussing the elements of the universe, Alexander comments

¹⁴⁴ "Slaves of the Elements," 459. Other Pythagorean texts are cited and linked to the Colossian opposition by Schweizer in "Christianity of the Circumcised and Judaism of the Uncircumcised. The Background of Matthew and Colossians," in *Jews, Greeks, and Christians: Religious Cultures in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Robert Hamerton-Kelly and Robin Scroggs (Leiden: Brill, 1976) 245-60.

¹⁴⁵ "Slaves of the Elements," 463.

¹⁴⁶ "Slaves of the Elements," 463.

¹⁴⁷ "Slaves of the Elements," 467.

on those who had ascended through the elements and reached the highest place. He says,

The whole air is filled by souls, and these are considered to be the demons and heroes...To them go purifications, averting sacrifices, all oracular practice, prayers and similar [rites and worship]...Purity is [reached] by purifications and baths and besprinklings and by being clean from sexual connexion and marriage bed and all defilement, and by abstaining from eatable animal-corpses, meat, mullets, blacktails, eggs and egg-laying animals, beans and other things about which orders are given to those who accomplish the initiations in the temples.¹⁴⁸

The similarities between the Pythagorean philosophy described in this text and the Colossian opponents are quite impressive. The link between the elements of the universe, asceticism, and angel worship in Col 2 and the authorial response in which the writer of Colossians affirms: the present heavenly position of the believer, the creation of everything in heaven and earth by Christ, the reconciliation of the creation by Christ,¹⁴⁹ and the fulness of deity manifested by Christ, support Schweizer's thesis of the Colossian opponents and his interpretation of the elements of the universe.¹⁵⁰ This Pythagorean text could also be used to support the final interpretation of elements as angels or cosmic spirits.

In time the elements came to be associated with the stars, as the stars were commonly understood to be composed of fire, the chief and finest element.¹⁵¹ Since the stars were composed of the elements and were understood to control the universe as

¹⁴⁸ "Slaves of the Elements," 458.

¹⁴⁹ This theme will be developed in our exegesis of Col 1.15-20, but a summary statement by R. Martin on the polemical significance of reconciliation in Col 1 is in order. Martin identifies the cosmological alternatives Paul is responding to in Colossians by asking "In a word, is this a world still at the mercy of uncontrolled forces of cosmic proportions, or is it 'reconciled' to a holy God who in Christ the son has entered its lifestream, purified it and made it a home for the people of God?" (*Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989] 113-14).

¹⁵⁰ Richard DeMaris offers the most specific critique of Schweizer's model of the Colossian opponents. DeMaris criticises Schweizer's model as being too reliant on Pythagorean texts which he believes led Schweizer to conclude incorrectly that the Colossian opponents were in fear of the cosmic elements (*The Colossian Controversy*, 88-97). Thus DeMaris also rejects the connection between στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου and asceticism in Colossians. Instead of a syncretistic Pythagorean influence on the Colossian opponents, he argues for a syncretistic Middle Platonic influence (98-133). Unfortunately, he ignores the various non Pythagorean texts which paint a negative picture of the στοιχεῖα. A much more serious (in my opinion, fatal) omission is his failure to deal with the relationship between ἀρχαὶ and ἐξουσίαι and the Colossian error. DeMaris' reconstruction of the Colossian error is seriously flawed based on a methodological approach in which he limits his textual evaluation to Col 2.8, 16-23, asserting *a priori* that these verses are the polemical core. This assertion is erroneous, for syntactically and thematically 2.8, 16-23 are connected with the rest of ch. 2, esp. vv. 6-7, 8-15. Furthermore, other verses in ch. 2 are clearly polemical, esp. vv. 2-4, 15. Admittedly, at the end of the monograph DeMaris does give ten pages of treatment to the polemical significance of verses outside his identified core (135-45), but it is too little too late.

¹⁵¹ Delling, *TDNT* 7.679.

well as human destiny, it is not surprising that the twelve signs of the zodiac were identified as the "twelve elements."¹⁵²

At this point we can see how the second definition of στοιχεῖα (elemental components of the universe) led to a third more personal interpretation of στοιχεῖα as angelic or cosmic powers, for eventually στοιχεῖα came to be used of stellar spirits, sometimes identified as demons, which were believed to inhabit the stars. This view is actually quite similar to the previous interpretation proposed by Schweizer, in that it posits a very similar cosmology in which astral forces control human destiny, and necessitate specific kinds of cultic ritual and ascetic practice. This view best accords with the textual evidence in Colossians.

The cosmic spirits were understood to be malevolent and powerful, exercising control over human affairs. In *Testament of Solomon*, spirits seen by Solomon identify themselves saying "we are the thirty-six elements, the world-rulers of the darkness of this age."¹⁵³ This widespread ancient cosmology¹⁵⁴ in which the elements were identified with the stars and with astral spirits who controlled human destiny logically resulted in the effort to cooperate with and placate the elements. Lohse comments on the ancient response to the elements which controlled human affairs, noting that it was necessary,

not only to possess knowledge about the elements, the movements of the stars, and the powers of the cosmos; man must also become part of the cosmic order insofar as he proffers the powers and principalities the requisite reverence and submits to the laws and prescriptions they impose upon his life.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Diogenes Laertius 6.102.

¹⁵³ 18.2, also 8.2. It is recognised that the dating of *T. Sol.* is quite problematic, though most scholars place it in the first to the third centuries CE. Even if it was written or edited in the second or third century, as D. C. Duling notes "there is general agreement that much of the testament reflects first-century Judaism in Palestine" (*Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1.942).

¹⁵⁴ On the widespread understanding of fate being connected with the stars and cosmic spirits, see Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1.237-43; E. Lohse, *The New Testament Environment*, trans. by John E. Steely (London: SCM, 1976) 226-32; Jean Pépin, "Cosmic Piety," in *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality*, ed. by A. H. Armstrong (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986) 408-35. MacGregor believes the rapid spread of astral fatalism in the Hellenistic world followed the collapse of popular anthropomorphic religion. He reasons that once the anthropomorphic gods ceased to exist, the basis for causality in the universe also vanished, and humans were left with a universe determined by fate ("Principalities and Powers," 20).

¹⁵⁵ *Colossians*, 98. Martin similarly notes "to the very real problem of man's relation with the cosmic powers in the first century, represented by the cult of astrology, one answer was given in terms of a placating of the star-deities and a purification by ascetic practices. These 'regulations' (cf. 2.20) held out the possibility for a person to escape the mesh of inevitability and to break from the imprisonment in 'matter' and ascend to the higher regions of 'spirit'" (*Colossians*, 11-12).

This interpretation of στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου as angelic or cosmic powers is accepted by the RSV, NEB, and NRSV.¹⁵⁶ Some interpreters understand these entities to be angelic powers, a view which is explained based on the reverence given to angels for their role as mediators of the law, and as those agents who control access to God.¹⁵⁷ Other exegetes view these entities in broader terms as cosmic powers, which would include evil angels or demons.¹⁵⁸

The latter interpretation of the elements as cosmic powers best harmonises with the description of the opponents given in Colossians, particularly the ascetic practices which are directly linked to submission to the elements (vv. 20-22), and angel worship (2.18), which were attempts by the opponents to placate the cosmic powers. Christ's victory over the cosmic powers (2.15) and creation of all earthly and heavenly powers (1.16), is thus stressed by the author as a response to the fear inducing cosmology of the opponents in which malevolent astral powers required placation. The author's statement of the fulness of deity dwelling in Christ (2.9, cp. 1.15) also harmonises with the interpretation of elements being angelic powers, for the opponents, in keeping with ancient cosmology, may have given the cosmic powers a semi-divine status. Percy additionally notes the antithesis indicated in 2.8 between the elements and Christ, indicating a conflict between personal beings, the spirit-forces of this world, as opposed to the heavenly Christ. Thus "it is the contrast between Greek and early Christian understandings of existence."¹⁵⁹

The most persistent objection to this interpretation of elements is that there is no unambiguous text earlier than the second century CE reflecting this meaning of στοιχεῖα.¹⁶⁰ Carr declares "the increased interest in astrology paved the way for the later understanding of στοιχεῖα as astral elements, but at the time of Paul, there is no

¹⁵⁶ See also Robinson Radjagukguk, "Ta Stoicheia Tou Kosmou and Life with Christ: An Exegetical Study of Col 2.6-3.4," Th.D. Thesis, Lutheran School of Theology, 1991. Radjagukguk concludes that the Colossian opponents viewed the στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου as cosmic spirits, which like the principalities and powers, tyrannised humans. Thus he asserts the author of Colossians emphasises the lordship of Christ over the cosmic powers.

¹⁵⁷ Bruce, *Colossians*, 99-100; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 132; Percy, *Die Probleme der Kolosser*, 160-67; Reicke, "The Law and this World," 261-63.

¹⁵⁸ Those interpreting the elements as cosmic powers include Bornkamm, "The Heresy of Colossians," 125-29; Lähnemann, *Der Kolosserbrief*, 90; Lohse, *Colossians*, 96-97; Martin, *Colossians*, 12-16; MacGregor, "Principalities and Powers," 21-22.

¹⁵⁹ *Die Probleme der Kolosser*, 167, quoted by Martin, *Colossians*, 13.

¹⁶⁰ *Angels and Principalities*, 74. See also Josef Blinzler, "Lexikalisches zu dem Terminus τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου bei Paulus," in *Studiorum Paulinorum Congressus Internationalis Catholicus, 1961*, *Analecta Biblica* 18, ed. by Cesario D'Amato (Rome: E Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1963) 432-39; Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption*, 167.

evidence to support this sense."¹⁶¹ While this is a formidable objection to the angelic or cosmic powers interpretation of στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, it is not insurmountable.

There is no question that στοιχεῖα did come to mean cosmic spirits within a century after the New Testament era.¹⁶² Given the cosmology of Hellenistic Judaism in which astrology was increasingly prominent,¹⁶³ in the light of the syncretistic pagan religion of the first century in which impersonal astral elements or personal cosmic forces played a significant role in human destiny, often requiring placation, and given the description of the Colossian opponents, it is not unreasonable to assume that the second-century definition of cosmic or angelic spirits was in fact in use in the first century.¹⁶⁴

It is also important to note that while there is no unambiguous text earlier than the second century CE which specifically identifies στοιχεῖα as angels or cosmic spirits, there are texts which demonstrate that the term στοιχεῖα was beginning to take on personal qualities by the first century. Philo, for instance, though denying the validity of the activity, notes that some individuals worshipped the elements which were identified with various deities. He says that some individuals "revere the elements, earth, water, air, fire, which have received different names from different peoples...Hephaestus...Hera... Poseidon...Demeter."¹⁶⁵ Josephus, also in the first century, shows the close relationship perceived between elements and personal cosmic spirits, for he says some human souls are turned into spirits which inhabit the astral element ether, and influence human affairs. He says every virtuous man knows,

those souls which are severed from their fleshly bodies in battles by the sword are received by the ether, that purest of element, and joined to that company which are placed among the stars; that they become good demons, and propitious heroes, and shew themselves as such to their posterity afterwards.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ *Angels and Principalities*, 74.

¹⁶² See Dibelius and Greeven for a listing of some of the texts which use στοιχεῖα to indicate cosmic or angelic spirits, *An Die Kolosser, Epheser, an Philemon*, HNT 12 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1953) 27-28.

¹⁶³ While there is no certain evidence of angel worship in normative (non-sectarian) Judaism around the first century CE, James H. Charlesworth ("Jewish Astrology in the Talmud, Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Early Palestinian Synagogues," *HTR* 70 [1977] 183-200) refutes the claim by M. R. Lehmann ("New Light on Astrology in Qumran and the Talmud," *RevQ* 32 [1975] 599-602) that astrology never secured a foothold in Judaism, emerging only as a sectarian phenomenon at odds with mainstream Judaism. Charlesworth cites numerous texts to demonstrate that beginning in the second century BCE, numerous astrological ideas, beliefs, and symbols permeated into many sectors of Judaism from within as well as outside of Palestinian Judaism (183).

¹⁶⁴ Lohse, *Colossians*, 99.

¹⁶⁵ *Vit. Cont.* 3-4, quoted by Schweizer, "Slaves of the Elements," 460.

¹⁶⁶ *Wars of the Jews*, 6.1.5.

In view of the first century textual evidence indicating στοιχεῖα was beginning to take on personal qualities by the first century, there is solid evidence for interpreting στοιχεῖα in Colossians as angels or astral spirits, in keeping with its use in the second century. This again supports a Jewish/pagan influence on the Colossian opposition.

III. Conclusion

We have attempted to avoid the imbalanced models proposed by numerous exegetes which explain the Colossian opposition as essentially Jewish or pagan in origin. We have concluded that it represented some sort of Jewish/pagan syncretistic cult, typical of the syncretistic religions of its day. Francis and Sappington have shown the relevance of Jewish apocalyptic literature to the Colossian opposition, but the bondage depicted to the elements of the universe and to the principalities and powers evidences a pagan mystery influence.

Without attempting to give this opposition a specific place in the history of religions (a feat we believe to be impossible with the given data) we can give a functional description of the opposition, noting that it placed great emphasis on the performance of ascetic practices designed to placate the cosmic powers, purify the flesh, and attain a fuller spirituality, in part through experiencing heavenly visions. These visions were a means of attaining divine revelation, and hence the author emphasised the fulness of God's revelation in Christ. The Colossians' submission to ascetic rules and probably the worship of angels led them to devalue Christ's role, which was a challenge to his supremacy. According to the author, Christ rules over the powers, and yet the Colossians were through ascetic practices submitting themselves to those very powers subservient to Christ. The author's response is that Christ is the fulness of deity, not the cosmic powers. Submission to ascetic rules was also a challenge to Christ's soteriological victory, for through his death and resurrection the Colossian believers had been made spiritually complete (2.10, 2-3). Any attempt to gain a fuller spiritual experience through ascetic practices, heavenly visions, and submission to cosmic powers was ultimately a denial of the sufficiency of the Christ event.

In the next chapter we will demonstrate the applicability of this model of the Colossian opponents to the Colossian hymn.

Chapter Three

The Hymn: Colossians 1.15-20

Colossians 1.15-20, which has traditionally been called the Colossian hymn, is cited or alluded to several times in ch. 2 in the context of the opponents (vv. 9-10, 19), and in the context of paraenesis (1.21-23; cp. 2.6). Thus to understand better the polemical matrix in which the Colossian paraenesis is given, as well as the Colossian paraenesis itself, it is necessary to examine carefully the Colossian hymn. While a great deal has been written on Col 1.15-20,¹ much of the research has been atomistic, treating the hymn in isolation from the rest of the epistle.² While this atomistic tendency is due, in part, to the fact that many 20th-century exegetes believe Col 1.15-20 to be the

¹ The following are among the more significant recent works relevant to this passage: J. Balchin, "Colossians 1:15-20: An Early Christian Hymn? The Arguments from Style," *VoxEv* 15 (1985) 65-94; E. Bammel, "Versuch zu Col 1. 15-20," *ZNW* 52 (1961) 88-95; Baugh, "The Poetic Form of Col 1.15-20"; P. Beasley-Murray, "Colossians 1:15-20"; P. Benoit, "L'hymne christologique de Col 1. 15-20," in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults*, ed. by J. Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1975) 1.226-263; E. Best, *One Body in Christ: A Study in the Relationship of the Church to Christ in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul* (London: SPCK, 1955) 115-38; C. F. Burney, "Christ as the ARXH of Creation," *JTS* 27 (1925-26) 160-77; F. B. Craddock, "All Things in Him: A Critical Note on Col 1:15-20," *NTS* 12 (1966) 78-80; R. Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967) 143-55; J. D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 1989) 187-96; Jarl Fossum, "Col 1:15-18a in the Light of Jewish Mysticism"; Stephen Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus*, JSNTSup 36 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990) 103-54; J. G. Gibbs, *Creation and Redemption: A Study in Pauline Theology*, NovTSup 26 (Leiden: Brill, 1971) 93-113; L. Helyer, "Colossians 1:15-20: Pre-Pauline or Pauline?" *JETS* 26 (1983) 167-79; M. Hengel, "Hymn and Christology," in *Studia Biblica 1978: Papers on Paul and Other New Testament Authors*, JSNTSup 3, ed. by E. A. Livingstone (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978) 173-97; E. Käsemann, "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy," in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. by W. J. Montague (London: SCM, 1964) 149-68; N. Kehl, *Der Christushymnus im Kolosserbrief. Eine motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Kol 1: 12-20*, SBM 1 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1967); Ralph P. Martin, "An Early Christian Hymn (Col 1:15-20)," *EvQ* 36 (1964) 195-205; *Reconciliation. A Study of Paul's Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989) 111-26; "Some Reflections on New Testament Hymns," in *Christ the Lord. Studies Presented to Donald Guthrie*, ed. by H. H. Rowland (Leicester: IVP, 1982) 37-49; W. McCown, "The Hymnic Structure of Colossians 1:15-20," *EvQ* 51 (1979) 156-62; J. C. O'Neill, "The Source of Christology in Colossians," *NTS* 26 (1979-80) 87-100; W. Pöhlmann, "Die hymnischen All-Prädikationen in Kol. 1.15-20," *ZNW* 64 (1975) 53-74; J. M. Robinson, "A Formal Analysis of Col 1:15-20," *JBL* 76 (1967) 270-87; Christopher Rowland, "Apocalyptic Visions and the Exaltation of Christ in the Letter to the Colossians," *JSNT* 19 (1983) 73-83; J. T. Sanders, *The New Testament Christological Hymns*, SNTSMS 15 (Cambridge: CUP, 1971) 75-87; E. Schüssler Fiorenza, "Wisdom Mythology and the Christological Hymns of the New Testament," in *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. by R. Wilkin (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975) 17-41; B. Vawter, "The Colossian Hymn and the Principle of Redaction," *CBQ* 33 (1971) 62-81; Wright, "Poetry and Theology in Col 1:15-20." For a survey of earlier research on this passage, see J. Gabathuler, *Jesus Christus, Haupt der Kirche-Haupt der Welt. Der Christushymnus Kolosser 1,15-20 in der theologischen Forschung der letzten 130 Jahre* (Zürich: Zwingli, 1965).

² Fowl makes the same observation regarding research on NT hymns in general. He asserts that all of the studies he surveys in his introduction "have concentrated on abstracting these passages from their present context in order to explore some aspect of the history of these passages. Very little attention has been devoted to understanding these passages within the context of the epistles in which they appear" (*The Story of Christ*, 19).

quotation or adaptation of a pre-existing hymn, this tendency is unfortunate, since the vocabulary³ and themes found in the hymn link it to other portions of the epistle. An analysis of the Colossian hymn reveals that the hymn is an integral element in the author's polemic, and is foundational to some of the author's ethical discussion.

I. The Identity and Characteristics of Early Christian Hymns

A. General Hymnic Characteristics

Col 3.16-17, Eph 5.19-20, and 1 Cor 14.26 indicate that the early church developed a liturgical worship in the form of songs of worship, though little is directly stated in the NT about these songs. Most contemporary commentators believe no sharp distinction can be made between "psalms," "hymns," and "songs," as there appears to be no strict differentiation in their use in the NT or in the LXX.⁴ Martin Hengel believes the hymns to Christ developed from the earliest worship of the Christian community, utilising the messianic psalms of the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly Psalms 110 and 8, as well as newly created Spirit songs considered to be part of the new eschatological era.⁵ In terms of content, the song to Christ "recounted the work, being, and destiny of the crucified and exalted Lord."⁶

The logical and vexing question raised by the observation that the Christological hymns of the early church extolled the person, work, and destiny of Christ is, what specifically engendered the Christological hymns recorded in the Pauline epistles? While it would be tautological to say simply that the Pauline Christological hymns served in the musical worship of the early church, since hymns by definition are part of

³ On the lexical links between the hymn and the rest of the epistle, see C. Burger, *Schöpfung und Versöhnung. Studien zum liturgischen Gut im Kolosser- und Epheserbrief*, WMANT 46 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975).

⁴ Dellling, ὕμνος," *TDNT* 8.499; Hengel, "Hymn and Christology," 175; Lohse, *Colossians*, 151; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 209; Sanders, *New Testament Christological Hymns*, 4; contra Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 224-25. Sanders believes that although Deichgräber essentially distinguishes between "hymn" and "prayer" he would not have considered illegitimate the broader use of the term "hymn" to refer to religious songs (*New Testament Christological Hymns*, 4). Hengel believes these three terms are the most important terms used in the LXX for religious songs, and are interchangeable, though he says the placement of ψαλμός first in Col 3.16 is significant. He believes ψαλμός would have been understood in a Judaistic sense, not of the memorised psalms of the Hebrew Scriptures, but of "a new song inspired by the Spirit." This is different from the Greek "hymn to the gods" which employed a strict metrical arrangement ("Hymn and Christology," 173-75).

⁵ "Hymn and Christology," 193. Hengel ("Hymn and Christology," 191) and Martin ("New Testament Hymns," 41) also note that the joy or gladness of the early Christian community (which was expressed in part in songs of praise to Christ) has been shown by Rudolf Bultmann ("ἀγαλλιάομαι, ἀγαλλίασις," *TDNT* 1.19-21) to have been essentially eschatological (cf. Acts 2.46-47).

⁶ Hengel, "Hymn and Christology," 193.

the cultic liturgy of worship,⁷ the specific manner in which the Christological hymns served in the worship of the early church is not conspicuous. For example, why did the hymns develop the way they did? What specific role did they play in terms of their *Sitz im Leben*?

Ralph Martin suggests the presence of gnostic thought in the communities of the Pauline churches best explains the form and purpose of the Pauline Christological hymns.⁸ He argues that in view of gnostic dualism in which God is separated from the cosmos, Christ's pre-existence and pre-temporal role in creation is made the "frontispiece" of the hymns. His identification with the Father and eschatological victory (including his work as redeemer, his resurrection and ascension) are foundational elements of the bodies of the hymns. Thus the hymns communicated to the early Christian communities who were threatened with the possibility of rival cosmic-powers that Christ's lordship "was no theoretical possibility, nor even a part of their creedal profession; it was the living assurance they needed to face their contemporary world with its many 'gods and lords' (1 Cor 8.5f.)."⁹ While it is very difficult to say more than Martin has regarding the original life setting for the hymns, since very little concrete information is available to us, I will seek at least to establish the relevance of the hymn to the Colossian opponents, most notably to the supposed rival cosmic powers confronting the Colossian believers. In doing so, it may be discovered that Martin's comments are applicable to the Colossian hymn, which clearly exalts the person and work of Christ in the face of rival spiritual powers.

One of the unresolved questions regarding NT Christological hymns is the specific identification of the hymns, for the exact number of NT hymns is keenly disputed. G. Schille, for example, identifies 30 hymns in the NT, locating all of them in the context of early church baptismal or eucharistic services,¹⁰ while R. Deichgräber is more conservative in his hymn identification, identifying six hymns (Rom 11.33-36; Phil 2.5-11; Col 1.15-20; 1 Tim 3.16b; Heb 1.3; 1 Pet 2.21f.) and several hymn

⁷ While there is no universally accepted definition for hymn, Martin notes that many authorities on hymnology appeal to Augustine's definition of hymn, which is "a song with praise to God" (*The Worship of God* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982] 43). Gunkel, in a technical study primarily of Hebrew hymns, defines hymn in similar terms, saying it is "a song of praise to God," as evidenced by Biblical hymns such as Psalms 8, 9, 29, 96, 98, 111, 113, 145-50 (*Einleitung in die Psalmen*, 2nd ed. [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966/1933] 32-35). Gerhard Delling describes a NT hymn as "an expression of thanks to Him [God], offered in the name of Jesus, that is on the basis of God's saving deed in Christ" (*Worship in the New Testament*, trans. by Percy Scott [London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1962] 87).

⁸ Martin, "New Testament Hymns," 45-49.

⁹ "New Testament Hymns," 48.

¹⁰ *Frühchristliche Hymnen* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1962).

fragments (Rom 11.33-36 being a hymn to God, the rest hymns to Christ).¹¹ Most scholars agree that in the Pauline corpus Phil 2.6-11, Col 1.15-20, and 1 Tim 3.16 are Christological hymns.¹²

A few exegetes have recently objected to classifying Col 1.15-20 as a hymn. In light of the form of Col 1.15-20, J. Balchin argues that it is not a hymn. More specifically, he asserts that the text does not fall into a hymnic pattern (in terms of specific parallelism as well as general strophic arrangement) without considerable editing, and does not evidence contextual dislocation, and thus it is best explained as a sermon composed by the writer of the rest of the epistle. The parallelisms found in Col 1.15-20 are said to be the result of the author's Semitic mindset, and therefore reflect not an early Christian hymn, but a Pauline sermon.¹³ Balchin summarises his arguments declaring,

When all the editorial work has been done, and when the residual material has been rearranged, the 'hymn' which remains follows no known meter. We have no actual [stylistic] parallel anywhere in ancient literature, Christian, Jewish, or pagan which justifies our using the description of 'hymn' for this passage.¹⁴

¹¹ *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus*, 60-87.

¹² On Phil 2.6-11 being an early church hymn, see J. Coppens, "Une nouvelle structuration de l'hymne christologique de l'épître aux Philippiens," *ETL* 43 (1967) 197-202; B. Eckman, "A Quantitative Metrical Analysis of the Philippians Hymn," *NTS* 26 (1980) 258-66; J. M. Furness, "The Authorship of Phil 2.6-11," *ExpTim* 70 (1958-59) 240-43; K. Gamber, "Der Christushymnus im Philipperbrief in Liturgiegeschichtlicher Sicht," *Bib* 51 (1970) 369-76; D. Georgi, "Der vorpaulinische Hymnus Phil 2,6-11," in *Zeit und Geschichte*, FS R. Bultmann, ed. by E. Dinkler (Tübingen: Mohr, 1964); O. Hofius, *Der Christushymnus Philipper 2,6-11*, WUNT 17 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1976); R. P. Martin, *Carmen Christi. Philippians 2.5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); "The Form Analysis of Philippians 2.5-11," *TU* 87 (1964) 611-20; V. H. Neufeld, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, NTS 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1963); L. D. Streiker, "The Christological Hymn in Phil 2," *LQ* 16 (1964) 49-58.

On 1 Tim 3.16 being an early church hymn see W. Metzger, *Der Christushymnus 1 Tim 3,16* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1979); W. Stenger, *Der Christushymnus 1 Tim 3,16. Eine strukturanalytische Untersuchung* (Frankfurt: P. Lang, 1977); K. Wegenast, *Das Verständnis der Tradition bei Paulus und in den Deuteropaulinen*, WMANT 8 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1962); K. Wengst, *Christologische Formeln und Lieder des Urchristentums*, SNT 7 (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1972); H. Windisch, "Zur Christologie der Pastoralbriefe," *ZNW* 34 (1935) 213-38.

¹³ Balchin, "Colossians 1:15-20," 67. Balchin fails, however, to give any concrete examples of NT Pauline "sermons" which evidence similar literary characteristics to Col 1.15-20. J. C. O'Neill also objects to classifying Col 1.15-20 as a hymn, asserting that it lacks the parallelism (either a complete lack of parallelism or else well developed parallelism) characteristic of a hymn ("The Source of the Christology in Colossians," 87-91). He also believes the unusual grammar and language of the passage reveal that it is not a hymn, but rather contains excerpts from the "public language" of a religious community (91, 99). O'Neill does not articulate, however, exactly how a hymn and and structured public religious language differ. This is significant, since it is argued that the line distinguishing early Christian hymns and confessions can be quite fluid; see Delling, *Worship in the New Testament*, 88.

¹⁴ "Colossians 1:15-20," 87. Balchin's argument is undercut, however, if one recognises that Col 1.15-20 follows the Hebrew hymnic pattern which exhibits chiasmic structure, not necessarily tight metre (cf. esp. Baugh, "The Poetic Form of Col 1.15-20" who notes similarities between Col 1.15-20 and the Qumran hymn 1QH9.29b-36b).

Balchin has benefitted the discussion of Col 1.15-20, since he has surveyed a large amount of material and has raised questions which merit consideration. At the same time, he has defined hymn too narrowly, as if a piece must have very uniform strophes and precise parallel structure to qualify as a hymn,¹⁵ but this is not necessarily true of Hebrew hymns, and need not be true of all early church hymns. Furthermore, some of the arguments Balchin rebuts are not requisite to establish Col 1.15-20 as an early church hymn.¹⁶

Stephen Fowl, on the other hand, acknowledges certain unique stylistic features which distinguish Col 1.15-20 from the rest of the chapter, but does not believe it can properly be called a hymn. He accepts Deichgräber's and Schille's observation that stylistic characteristics link Phil 2.6-11, Col 1.15-20, and 1 Tim 3.16 with one another, and distinguish them from the surrounding verses in their respective epistles. He denies, however, that these can formally be called hymns (which he defines as "a formalized expression of praise from the worship of the earliest church") since the life setting of these texts cannot be reconstructed.¹⁷ Thus in calling these three texts "hymnic material," as he does in the subtitle of his book, Fowl is merely agreeing that "these passages represent reflection on an exalted figure in language that could justifiably be called poetic."¹⁸

Fowl has also raised some significant questions. It is very difficult to reconstruct the life settings of these texts, since there is no direct information about the life settings in the epistles themselves, and there are few, if any, undisputed examples of early church hymns or baptismal liturgies against which to measure texts in question.¹⁹ At the same time, it does not seem necessary to establish a precise *Sitz im*

¹⁵ Note for example the following statements expressing dubiety regarding the hymnic structure of Col 1.15-20: "the parallels are not exact" (Balchin, *Colossians 1.15-20*, 67); "if parallelism is so important in our understanding of the passage...what is parallel to the hinge-verse (17ab, 18a)? It stands by itself" (82); "what is an embarrassment and unexpected, if we are looking for a passage which is completely balanced in its statements" (82). Certainly some types of hymns, particularly some of the Psalms, exhibit a fairly predictable, uniform structural arrangement. Gunkel notes that these hymns begin with an introductory phrase which calls for praise, then moves to the body which recounts God's saving deeds and character, and end with some type of concluding formula (*Einleitung in die Psalmen*, 33, 42, 56, cited in Fowl, *The Story of Christ*, 34-36). While several of these Psalms are given the description ὕμνος (cf. 53.1; 66.1; 136.3; 148.14—LXX), other praise songs called ὕμνοι lack this specific form, being general songs of praise to God (cf. Isa 42.10). Thus one should not expect all hymns to have a precise, balanced structural arrangement.

¹⁶ The clearest example of this is the three page section entitled "Christological Statements," where Balchin argues against the notion that Col 1.15-20 is a hymn because it is a Christological passage (*Colossians 1.15-20*, 75-78). Few, in fact, would argue that this is a hymn primarily or exclusively because it contains lofty Christology.

¹⁷ *The Story of Christ*, 16.

¹⁸ *The Story of Christ*, 16-17.

¹⁹ James Charlesworth, with respect to the origin of early Christian hymns, laments "when a hymn or prayer is isolated as a source borrowed by the author of a New Testament document, we have no clear-cut paradigm or set of categories with which to judge if it was originally Jewish or Jewish

Leben to accept this as a Christological hymn of the early church.²⁰ It will be noted in the following section that Col 1.15-20 exhibits numerous marked hymnic characteristics, though scholars are unable to reconstruct the exact manner in which it was used in the early church. Thus I call it a Christological hymn, and note that it reflects praise directed toward Christ by the early Christian community, though I am unsure of the exact manner in which it was used in the cultus of the early Christian church.²¹

B. The Hymnic Characteristics of Colossians 1.15-20

E. Norden did one of the earliest critical examinations of Col 1.15-20 in terms of its structure as well as content, and concluded that it was "undoubtedly old traditional material."²² Numerous exegetes since then have concluded that it is an early Christian hymn, citing numerous stylistic evidences for this identification.

Martin *lí stá* . . . several hymnic characteristics pertinent to Col 1.15-20.²³ (1) A relative clause is often used to open a hymn (ὅς ἐστίν—Col 1.15; cf. Phil 2.6; 1 Tim 3.16). (2) The structure of the pericope evidences hymnic characteristics through couplets which are parallel in form or concept, known as *parallelismus membrorum*.²⁴ This includes the arranging of words and lines so that strophes can be arranged, chiasm

Christian" ("The Jewish Background of the Hymns in the New Testament," *JJS* 33 [1982] 280). With respect to strophic arrangement, J. C. O'Neill argues that creating parallel strophes in the original hymn by positing editorial glosses inserted by the writer of Colossians "would only be admissible if we could be sure of the rules by which an original liturgist would have worked, but that is just the question at issue" ("The Source of Christology in Colossians," 88).

²⁰ Fowl may in part be over-reacting to K. Wengst, who starts from the premise that early Christianity was not monolithic, so various creedal or hymnic formulations should be evaluated in terms of their historical and theological background. Thus Wengst sought to ascertain if a given hymn came from a Greek-speaking Jewish church, Aramaic-speaking Jewish church, or a Greek-speaking Gentile church (*Christologische Formeln*, 11, cited in *The Story of Christ*, 18-19). It should be noted that few exegetes attempt to link the early church hymns to specific life settings in such a rigorous manner.

²¹ Deichgräber reaches a similar conclusion, though one cannot affirm with certainty that Col 1.15-20 was an early Christian song. He believes that Col 1.15-20, as well as the other hymnic texts he analyses, are clearly cultic songs, but cannot be given a concrete *Sitz im Leben* (an exact place in the cult). He asserts in conclusion "Wie bei den übrigen bisher behandelten Christushymnen so ist es auch hier: Daß sie kultische Lieder sind, wird man kaum bestreiten können, aber welchen Platz sie genau im Kultus hatten, läßt sich nicht mehr feststellen" (*Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus*, 155).

²² *Agnostos Theos: untersuchungen zur formengeschichte Religiöser Rede* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1913/1956) 253.

²³ *New Testament Foundations*, 2.260-61. W. H. Gloer gives helpful criteria for the identification of NT hymns and homologies, though his list is essentially a compilation from other works on NT hymns ("Homologies and Hymns in the New Testament: Form, Content and Criteria for Identification," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 11 [1984] 115-32). Unfortunately he has not sought to defend the hymnic criteria against recent critics who question the identification of passages such as Col 1.15-20 as hymnic.

²⁴ Beasley-Murray asserts that *parallelismus membrorum* is the most distinguishing hymnic mark of this passage ("Col 1:15-20," 169).

("in heaven and on earth" in v. 16a and "on earth or in heaven" in v. 20),²⁵ and the repetition of key words (see the use of *πᾶς* throughout this text²⁶). *Parallelismus membrorum* is present in the Colossian hymn in the arrangement of two primary strophes, vv. 15-16 and vv. 18b-20, which are parallel in form, both beginning with *ὅς ἐστιν*, and both containing key terms or phrases such as *πρωτότοκος* (vv. 15, 18), *ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ* (vv. 16a, 19), *δι' αὐτοῦ* (vv. 16, 20a) and *τὰ πάντα* (vv. 16, 20). (3) The use of rare terms, i.e., rare to that particular author. This may indicate that the hymn was written by someone other than the author of the epistle, or that the author himself wrote the hymn choosing words he would not normally use due to metrical or rhythmical considerations.

Lohse gives a good summary of rare words found in this passage.²⁷ He notes that *εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ* (v. 15) is used only in 2 Cor 4.4 as a Christological predicate, *ὄρατός* (v. 16) is a NT *hapax*, and the adjective *ἀόρατος* (v. 15b) is rare (Rom 1.20; 1 Tim 1.17; Heb 11.27) and is never used in contrast to *ὄρατός*. In the Pauline literature *θρόνοι* (v. 16) is not found elsewhere, *κυριότης* (v. 16) is used only in Eph 1.21, and the intransitive form *συνεστηκέναι* (v. 17) is unique. In Pauline Christological contexts, Christ is described as *ἀπαρχή* (1 Cor 15.20) but not *ἀρχή* (v. 18). The verbs *πρωτεύειν* (v. 18) and *εἰρηνοποιεῖν* are NT *hapax legomena*. The verb *κατοικεῖν* (v. 19) is found in the Pauline literature only in Col 2.9 and Eph 3.17, and *ἀποκαταλλάσσειν* (vv. 20, 22) only in Eph 2.16. The blood of Christ is said to be cited in the Pauline literature only in connection with traditional Christian phrases which relate to Christ's vicarious death (Rom 3.25; 1 Cor 10.16; 11.25, 27; cf. Eph 1.7), making the phrase *αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ* "without parallel."²⁸

One final piece of hymnic evidence is the shift from the first and second person in the section preceding the hymn, to the exclusive use of the third person in vv. 15-20, to the return to the second person in v. 21.

In response to those such as Wright and Batchelor, who contest the hymnic characteristics of Col 1.15-20, it is conceded that some stylistic characteristics such as the use of a relative clause at the beginning of v. 15, the change of person, and the use of rare words do not in themselves provide irrefragable hymnic evidence. However, the aggregate hymnic evidence is strong, particularly when the various stylistic

²⁵ Baugh in particular notes the chiasmic structure of Col 1.15-20, which he argues is evidence of it being an early Christian hymn ("The Poetic Form of Col 1:15-20").

²⁶ Pöhlmann labels this as the hymnic *Allprädikationen* ("Die hymnischen Allprädikationen in Kol 1,15-20," 53-74). Norden refers to it as the *Allmachtsformel* (*Agnostos Theos*, 240).

²⁷ *Colossians*, 42.

²⁸ *Colossians*, 42.

characteristics are combined with the presence of numerous strands of carefully crafted *parallelismus membrorum*. Certainly, the characteristics of Col 1.15-20 support Fowl's conclusion, that it represents "reflection on an exalted figure in language that could justifiably be called poetic." While one cannot be dogmatic, since there are no certain examples of extant Pauline hymns and no means of establishing a precise *Sitz im Leben*, the structure of this passage as well as its contents suggest that it was used in some manner in the worship cultus of the early church, and was probably an early church hymn.

II. The Nature and Structure of the Colossian Hymn

A. Origin of the Colossian Hymn

An evaluation of the origin of the Colossian hymn might appear to be superfluous, since one could argue for the relevance of the hymn to the situation of the church in Colossae regardless of its ultimate source, since the author chose to use it whatever its origin. Since the origin of the hymn does, in some models, have significant bearing on the relevance of the hymn to the rest of the epistle, this issue warrants treatment.

1. Pre-Christian Gnosticism

Many exegetes believe the style and content of this passage evidence its composition before the rest of the epistle.²⁹ Some, however, argue the hymn is not only "pre-Colossians" but pre-Christian. Thus Herold Weiss boldly asserts "the pre-Christian origin of the hymn has been now well established."³⁰ Various scholars such as Bultmann, Sanders, Käsemann, and Weiss have argued for a pre-Christian origin of the Colossian hymn via early gnosticism.³¹

²⁹ Cannon, for example, believes the strongest evidence for the hymn being written before the rest of the epistle is the confessional nature of vv. 12-14. Stylistically, he notes that vv. 12-14 are linked to the hymn by a relative clause, and vv. 12-14 serve as a "sort of introit" (*Traditional Materials*, 28).

³⁰ "The Law in the Epistle to the Colossians," 306.

³¹ Bultmann, *Theology*, 176-79; Käsemann, "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy," 149-68; Sanders, *The New Testament Christological Hymns*; H. Weiss, "The Law in the Epistle to the Colossians," *CBQ* 34 (1972) 294-316. In a modified manner J. Jervell also supports this view of the origin of the hymn. He believes the first strophe of the hymn (1.15-18a) is not Pauline, but evidences pre-Christian gnostic thought (*Imago Dei* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960] 209-11). While Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza does not specifically exegete Col 1.15-20, her discussion of Christological hymns is in general agreement with this view of the origin of the Colossian hymn, for she asserts that "the christological hymns are part of a trajectory of "reflective mythology in Hellenistic

Working from a general *religionsgeschichtlich* framework,³² Sanders and Weiss assert the Colossian hymn began as a hymn which reflected a gnostic myth which had been developing within Judaism. Martin Dibelius, on the other hand, says the "cosmic speculation" and "soteriological concept" found in this hymn reflect pre-Pauline ideas and are best explained by looking to the gnostic ideas reflected in the Mandaean literature.³³ Dibelius and Sanders believe one of the strongest evidences for a gnostic origin of this hymn is seen in the paradox of the "All" having a prior existence in Christ, and yet being reconciled by Christ. Thus Sanders says "it is this paradoxical situation that finally points to Gnosticism, since in Gnosticism the concept of the All as 'a giant human being' is combined with that of a cosmic redeemer."³⁴

Käsemann has probably been the most influential proponent of a pre-Christian gnostic origin of the hymn, arguing that if only 8 of the 112 words in vv. 15-20 are bracketed (τῆς ἐκκλησίας in v. 18a, and διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ in v. 20), the hymn loses all uniquely Christian character, and instead a supra-historical drama of the gnostic redeemer is revealed.³⁵ Even the phrase "first-born from the dead" is said to reflect not Christian but gnostic motifs. Käsemann argues that this title cannot be understood as Christian by anyone who has studied gnostic terminology, in which "the Redeemer, acting as the path-finder and leader of those who are his, makes a breach in death's domain."³⁶ Thus the hymn in 1.15-20 is said to be a Christian redaction of an earlier pre-Christian gnostic hymn based on an "Archetypal Redeemer Man" myth.

With regard to the setting of the hymn, Käsemann follows Bornkamm's suggestion that the "Son" predication is rooted in primitive baptismal confession. The use of this predication in v. 13, combined with the language of kingdom transference

Judaism and Gnosticism" ("Wisdom Mythology and Christological Hymns," in *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. by Robert Wilken [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975] 37).

³² Sanders, for example, sets forth his presuppositions in the preface of his monograph and acknowledges "A basic premise of this inquiry should be expressed here at the outset. It is simply this, that the concepts found in the New Testament material that will be discussed here were not created *de novo* by the Christian community" (*The New Testament Christological Hymns*, xi). After surveying the themes of the various Christological hymns in the NT he notes "It may reasonably be assumed that this mythical drama has some background in the history of religions, that the way was already prepared in the general (or in some particular) religious milieu of early Christianity for the formulation of this particular myth" (25). The *a priori* assertion that the key to understanding the early Christian hymns is to be found entirely in pre-Christian religions is contestable. S. Kim, for example, demonstrates the uniqueness of Paul's gospel, which he believes Paul derived not from the religions of his day, but from his revelatory experience on the Damascus Road (*The Origin of Paul's Gospel*, WUNT 2, Reihe 4 [Tübingen: Mohr] 1981).

³³ *An die Kolosser, Epheser, an Philemon*, 3rd ed., HNT 12 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1953) 14-17.

³⁴ *The New Testament Christological Hymns*, 76; Dibelius, *Kolosser*, 14, 16.

³⁵ "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy," 155.

³⁶ "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy," 154.

and the statement of the believers' redemption and forgiveness from sin (v. 14), as well as the total content of the epistle, are said to put the thesis that the hymn served as an early Christian baptismal confession beyond question.³⁷ This reconstruction, however, has won few adherents. The hymn simply does not contain clear baptismal language. Deichgräber concurs with Käsemann that the new creation concept lies at the heart of the early church's understanding and description of baptism, particularly as evidenced in Rom 6, but notes that "new creation" or "renewal" terminology is not found in the Colossian hymn text, and the bare occurrence of creation/redemption language is not adequate to establish a baptismal setting.³⁸ Though baptism is mentioned in 2.12, it is not predicated on or directly linked to 1.15-20.

Many have criticised Käsemann's model of the origin of the Colossian hymn. As will be noted in the evaluation of the specific content of the hymn, the Christian character of the hymn cannot be so easily dismissed, and the gnostic connotations of the vocabulary of this passage cannot be so easily proven. Pöhlmann, for example, believes the hymn began as an early Christian composition, and had no pre-Christian, gnostic *Dasein* as Käsemann and others claim.³⁹ To support this claim, he cites numerous non-gnostic Jewish and Hellenistic texts which contain *All-Prädikationen* formulas similar to those found in Col 1.15-20. His conclusion is logical: "Wenn die beschriebenen Prädikationsformen eine lange Geschichte hinter sich haben, dann sollte man ihr Auftreten in Kol 1,15-20 nicht redaktioneller Arbeit zuschreiben, sondern sie zum ursprünglichen Bestand des Hymnus rechnen."⁴⁰

With respect to the supposed gnostic language employed in the hymn, I will evaluate the various terms in the analysis of the text, but a short comment on πλήρωμα will illustrate the point that the terminology of Col 1.15-20 is not necessarily as gnostic as it might appear *prima facie*. It has repeatedly been asserted that πλήρωμα was a technical gnostic term, and strongly evidences a gnostic origin of this text. If πλήρωμα in Col 1.19 is rooted in gnostic liturgy, one would reasonably expect later Gnostics to appeal to this text in support of their doctrines. P. D. Overfield, however, cogently demonstrates that while in Valentinianism πλήρωμα did become a technical Gnostic term

³⁷ "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy," 159-62.

³⁸ *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus*, 154. Deichgräber agrees that baptism is in view in vv. 12-13, but declares "die Frage nach dem Sitz im Leben muß für den Christushymnus unablässig von seinem Kontext gestellt werden" (154).

³⁹ Pöhlmann asserts "Der Hymnus hat von Anfang an nur als christliche Komposition existiert" ("Die hymnischen All-Prädikationen," 54).

⁴⁰ "Die hymnischen All-Prädikationen," 74.

for the unity of aeons, the Gnostics themselves did not interpret Col 1.19 and 2.9 this way, and, in fact, πλήρωμα is never used this way in its 17 appearances in the NT.⁴¹

Other elements of the hymn which evidence Christian, not gnostic origins, are: "first-born from the dead" (v. 18); "to be pleased" (v. 19), which may originate in the OT concept of divine election; the creation language, which corresponds with that found in the Hebrew Scriptures and Jewish tradition.⁴²

2. Christian Hellenism

According to this view the hymn began in a heterodox sect of early Christianity. This view is similar to the previous one, differing particularly in terms of chronology and sect identification. E. Schweizer espouses this view, and asserts that a Hellenistic group of Christians took Paul's "body of Christ" language, which in Pauline thought dealt with human responsibility to God and other humans, and reinterpreted it to reflect Hellenistic cosmological categories. This heterodox Christological hymn thus asserted "Christ is the world-soul permeating and ruling the whole cosmos; as such he—and not Zeus or Ether or any god of a mystery religion—became, in his ascension, the head of the universe."⁴³

Schweizer believes the writer of Colossians (Paul or a close associate like Timothy) thus used this Hellenistic heterodox hymn, and, by redacting four phrases of it, gave it an orthodox reinterpretation. In its redacted form the hymn declares that Christ is Lord over the world, but not just in a physical sense, for in the church (Christ's body) Christ permeates the world.⁴⁴ In subsequent discussion the improbability of the author of Colossians quoting a heterodox hymn will be discussed. Given the manner in which the writer uses the hymn and the emphasis he places on adherence to tradition, it seems unlikely that he would use a heterodox hymn to combat what he considered heterodox Colossian opponents.

⁴¹ Overfield's forceful conclusion merits quoting, for he says "the use made by the Gnostics of the Colossian texts coupled with the fact that they do not appear to use any other of the fifteen NT πλήρωμα texts suggests to this author that the Gnostics failed where many an NT exegete has succeeded: they failed to recognize incipient Gnosticism in these πλήρωμα texts" ("Pleroma," 396). Thus he concludes "the NT use of the πλήρωμα term is then without exception related to the use of the term in secular literature; in no instance is the NT use of the word in any way related to or influenced by Gnosticism" ("Pleroma," 396).

⁴² Lohse, *Colossians*, 45.

⁴³ "The Church as the Missionary Body of Christ," *NTS* 8 (1961-62) 10.

⁴⁴ "The Church," 10-11.

3. Judaism

Instead of a gnostic or Hellenistic origin, some exegetes affirm a Jewish background to the Colossian hymn. J. C. O'Neill asserts that the author of Colossians in 1.9-23 and 2.6-15 gathered his Christological statements "direct from Jewish sources."⁴⁵ O'Neill argues that Col 1.9-23 reflects pre-Christian, Jewish meditation on two OT serpent stories, the temptation of Eve and the brazen serpent lifted up by Moses. Barnabas 5.13 cites Ps 119.20 in the context of Christ having to suffer on a tree, and Barnabas 12.7 draws parallels between the two "trees." If "cross" in Col 2.14 was originally "tree," then the writer of Colossians may have been "applying a revered example of pre-Christian scriptural meditation to the death of Christ on the cross."⁴⁶ This interesting proposal has gathered few followers, probably in large part due to the difficulty in supporting such a position when there is no extant pre-Christian Jewish text to support the claim that Barnabas was "probably appealing to standard exegesis of the OT in order to prove his case."⁴⁷

Other exegetes argue that the hymn was written by the writer of the Colossian epistle but was inspired and developed directly from Jewish sources, either Rabbinic or OT. Burney and W. D. Davies suggest that in Col 1.15-20 the author is giving a detailed, Rabbinic style exposition of the first word in Genesis, *Berêshîth*, applying it to Christ.⁴⁸ This interpretive model is contingent upon the connection of *rêshîth* in Gen 1.1 and Prov 8.22, for in Rabbinic Judaism *rêshîth* in Prov 8.22 was used to explain Gen 1.1. Thus the world was understood to have been created "by wisdom." It is furthermore suggested that in describing Christ as the "firstborn of all creation," the author was identifying him with the *rêshîth* of creation. The various phrases describing Christ in the Christological hymn are said to relate Christ to *rêshîth*. From this specific

⁴⁵ "The Source of the Christology in Colossians," 87. Charlesworth ("The Jewish Background of the Hymns," 284) gives an example of a Jewish hymn (Hellenistic Synagogal Hymn 5.1-7) which he says was redacted by early Christians. While it is a noticeably different hymn from the one in Col 1.15-20, it is interesting to note that there are several themes common to both hymns. The following phrases from the two hymns (the Colossians phrases are listed first) show similarities, for both refer to: the creation of the cosmos through Christ ("for in [by] him all things were created"/"You created (the) cosmos through Christ"), the death and resurrection of Christ ("the first born from the dead"/"he died and arose by your strength"), the suffering of Christ for those he created ("making peace by the blood of his cross"/"he suffered for us"), the divine identity of Christ ("he is the image of the invisible God"/"he who appeared is God and man"). If one believes the Colossian hymn starts with v.13, then an additional common theme is found: deliverance of the believer from darkness through the work of Christ ("he has delivered us from the dominion of darkness"/"the one who conquered death, having brought to light life and immortality").

⁴⁶ "Christology in Colossians," 98.

⁴⁷ "Christology in Colossians," 98.

⁴⁸ Burney, "Christ as the APXH," 160-77; W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 4th ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 150-52. Wright has also recently championed this view in "Poetry and Theology in Col 1:15-20," 448.

application of *Berêshîth* to the hymn, it is concluded that "Christ fulfils every meaning which may be extracted from *Rêshîth*."⁴⁹

Burney's model necessitates a pervasive Rabbinic influence in the Colossian church, otherwise the hymn's intent as a rabbinic type of commentary on Gen 1.1 would not be perceived. There is, however, inadequate evidence for such a Jewish presence in the Colossian church. While some OT allusions are made in the epistle (most notably circumcision and Sabbath keeping), there are no direct appeals to the OT by way of quotation or illustration (cp. Eph 2.17; 4.26; 5.31; 6.3), and the law is not directly mentioned. The writer presumes a general understanding of the OT by his readers, as is evidenced through the use of words or phrases such as "first-born" (1.15) and "image of its creator" (3.10), but there is no evidence that this congregation would have had the detailed knowledge of Rabbinic exegetical methodology requisite to appreciate such an implied exegesis of Gen 1.1.⁵⁰

4. The Author of Colossians

Various scholars believe the hymn was written by the author of Colossians.⁵¹ Those holding this view question the evidence which is used to identify 1.15-20 as stylistically different from the rest of Colossians and from the Pauline literature. They note for example, that while chiasmus is one of the evidences given for Col 1.15-20 being hymnic and pre-Pauline, scholars are beginning to recognise a significant amount of chiasmus throughout the Pauline literature and in the rest of the NT, not just in material believed to be hymnic.⁵² John Welch, for example, demonstrates chiastic structure in numerous individual paragraphs and sections in the Pauline corpus,

⁴⁹ Burney, "Christ as the APXH," 176.

⁵⁰ Wright asserts that this model does not require a background of Rabbinic Judaism, for Hellenistic Judaism could have engendered it ("Poetry and Theology in Col 1:15-20," 455-56). It seems very unlikely, however, that even a Hellenistic Jewish background would enable the recipients to understand a detailed midrashic exposition of Gen 1.1.

⁵¹ Balchin, "Colossians 1:15-20" 67-94; Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 150-52; Dibelius, *Kolosser*, 14-16; Fowl, *The Story of Christ*, 37-45; Helyer, "Colossians 1:15-20: Pre-Pauline or Pauline?," 167-79; Hooker, "Were There False Teachers?," 316-17; Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel*, 144-47; Kümmel, *Introduction*, 342-43; Moule, *Colossians*, 60-62; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 34-36. Dibelius, Kümmel, Moule, and O'Brien acknowledge, however, that the author of the epistle may have utilised traditional material when composing the hymn. Benoit argues that the first stanza is borrowed, but the second reflects the author's own ideas ("L'hymne christologique de Col 1. 15-20," 229). Robinson advocates a similar position ("A Formal Analysis of Col 1:15-20," 284-87).

⁵² See G. Howard, "Stylistic Inversion and the Synoptic Tradition," *JBL* 97 (1978) 375-89; J. Jeremias, "Chiasmus in den Paulusbrieffen," *ZNW* 49 (1958) 145-56; Ronald Man, "The Value of Chiasmus for New Testament Interpretation," *BSac* 41 (1984) 146-57.

including some in portions of Colossians other than the hymn.⁵³ Thus it is said that the chiasms in the hymn do not necessarily indicate that it was written by an earlier author. In response to this argument, it is acknowledged that chiasmus in itself does not give potent evidence that this is a preformed hymn. However, the combination of characteristics, particularly the parallel members, does give strong evidence that this is preformed, not *ad hoc* material.

The unique vocabulary found in the hymn, another stylistic argument given to support a different author for the hymn, is re-assessed by those who say that 1.15-20 was written by the author of the rest of the epistle. They assert that it would not be unusual to have a higher number of rare terms in the hymn if it were written by the author of the epistle, since he might need to use less frequent terms to accommodate the rhythm and metre of the hymn. Of the seven Pauline *hapax legomena* forms found here (θρόνοι, κυριότητες, πρωτεύων, κατοικήσαι, ἀποκατάλλασαι, εἰρηνοποίησας, συνέστηκεν) two have similar, though not identical, uses elsewhere in the Pauline literature.⁵⁴ Balchin notes that six of these seven words are found in the LXX, and would thus have been familiar to the author.⁵⁵ He also notes that Paul often used unusual terms, evidenced by 269 *hapax legomena* in the 433 verses of Romans, 226 in the 437 verses of 1 Corinthians, 83 in the 149 verses of Galatians, 67 in the 104 verses of Philippians, and 10 in the 25 verses of Philemon. Evaluations of Pauline, non-hymnic passages reveal a similar frequency with respect to rare words. For example, in the 30 verses of the first chapter of Philippians, there are 25 words which are used three or less times in all the Pauline *homologoumena*. While Paul does show a marked tendency to use rare words in his epistles, it is essential to note that Col 1.15-20 contains a much greater proportion of rare and unique terms than is typically found in the Pauline *homologoumena*. Again the vocabulary in 1.15-20 does not provide overwhelming evidence in itself, but is one of several strands of cumulatively strong hymnic evidence.

⁵³ "Chiasmus in the New Testament," in *Chiasmus in Antiquity. Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*, ed. by John Welch (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981) 211-49. Welch and all others writing on Chiasm in the NT are of course indebted to Nils Lund, who almost single-handedly drew attention to the presence and significance of chiasmus in the NT (*Chiasmus in the New Testament. A Study in the Form and Function of Chiastic Structures* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942] 207-15).

⁵⁴ Though Col 1.17 is the only place συνίστημι is used intransitively in the Pauline literature, it is used transitively to mean "present," "recommend," "introduce," or "demonstrate," in Rom 16.1; 2 Cor 5.12; 6.4; 7.11; and Gal 2.18. The verb ἀποκατάλλασσω is found only in Col 1.20, 22 and Eph 2.16, but καταλλάσσω is found in Rom 5.10; 1 Cor 7.11; 2 Cor 5.18, 19, 20. The use of prepositions, particularly ἐκ, ἀπό, κατά, and διά to intensify or modify the force of verbs is well attested in the NT and in the Pauline literature.

⁵⁵ "Colossians 1:15-20," 72, 90. See also R. Morgenthaler, *Statistik des neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes* (Zürich: Gotthelf, 1972) 160-62.

Other stylistic peculiarities of the hymn which are used to support non-Pauline authorship are re-evaluated by those who believe 1.15-20 was written by the author of the epistle. For example, the phrase ὅς ἐστιν is said to be relatively common in the Pauline literature, for it appears eight other times in the Pauline *homologoumena* (Rom 1.25; 4.16; 5.14; 16.5; 1 Cor 3.11; 4.17; 2 Cor 4.4; Gal 3.16) and three other times in Colossians (1.7; 2.10; 4.9). Four of these uses are Christological (1 Cor 3.11; 2 Cor 4.4; Gal 3.16; Col 2.10; cf. also Eph 4.15) and in one the antecedent is God the Father (Rom 1.25; cf. also 1 Tim 4.10). Thus some argue that the presence of the two ὅς ἐστιν clauses in the hymn does not argue against Pauline authorship. However, the parallel use of two ὅς ἐστιν clauses in a pericope is a *novum quid* in the Pauline literature, and evidences a parallelism not typically found in Pauline non-hymnic material.

A final issue taken up by those who believe 1.15-20 to be written by the author of Colossians is the question of the hymn's theological incongruity with the other Pauline literature.⁵⁶ Those who believe the hymn to be a pre-Christian or Hellenistic gnostic paean espouse the hymn's theological incongruity with Pauline theology or advocate the presence of "heterodox ideas" (as compared to the teachings of Paul and the author of Colossians) in the hymn. Käsemann, for example, says with respect to the hymn that "heresy in Colossians is combatted by a confession of faith, the formulation of which has itself been very strongly conditioned by heterodox views."⁵⁷ In my exegesis of the hymn itself, it will be noted that while the hymn does present some new theological emphases, it is not incongruous with the teachings of the other Pauline literature.

The argument that the hymn is redolent with heterodox theology and thus was not written by Paul or the author of Colossians is improbable in view of the strong appeal to Christian tradition in this epistle. Paul did not establish the church in Colossae (1.3-4), so the writer cannot appeal to the original εὐαγγέλιον Paul preached to them as Paul did when writing to other congregations he had founded when they faced what he believed to be false teaching or spiritual misdirection (cf. 1 Cor 2.1-2; 3.10-11; 15.1-5, 12; Gal 1.6-12; cp. 2 Thess 2.2-5, 15). The author can, however, appeal to the received Christian traditions as the plumb line for spiritual orthodoxy. In 2.6-7 he calls the Colossians back to the Christological traditions as the basis for Christian

⁵⁶ See Käsemann, "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy," 153, 158-59; Lohse, *Colossians*, 55.

⁵⁷ "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy," 164. See also Schweizer who says that behind the hymn there lies "a Hellenistic conception of a cosmic Christ, fascinating and dangerous at the same time" (*The Church as the Missionary Body*, "6).

behaviour.⁵⁸ This is set in contrast to the false, empty traditions of men (2.8). In 1.23 the Colossians are warned to continue in the faith they had heard and received. The phrase τῆ πίστει is used here as a technical term meaning faith in the sense of *fides quae creditur*, or the body of doctrine accepted, and is virtually synonymous with tradition.⁵⁹ Thus the gospel tradition which the Colossian believers had earlier accepted is strongly appealed to as a spiritual antidote to the opposition with which they were confronted. In this context of strong appeal to established Christian tradition, it is difficult to see how a Christian apologist would appeal to heresy, even in a sanitised form, to defeat what he considered heresy. This would be illogical in the light of his other statements about tradition, and would undermine the very doctrinal plank upon which he sought to protect and guide the Colossian believers.

Looking at this from a slightly different angle, Vawter notes that the very manner in which the hymn is used argues strongly against Käsemann and Schweizer, for the hymn is cited in an authoritative manner, not simply as the recitation of a previous Christian formula which happened to be familiar and available for homiletical use by the author as he wrote this epistle.⁶⁰ Note, for example, the way in which the hymn provides the basis for the admonitions to adhere to the faith in vv. 21-23.

5. An Earlier Christian Author

With respect to the authorship of the hymn, the essential issue is the degree of dissimilarity between the theology of the hymn and that found in the rest of Colossians and in the Pauline literature. Balchin and others who believe the hymn was written by the author of Colossians are correct to criticise Käsemann and Schweizer for saying the hymn is incongruous with Pauline theology and contains vestiges of heterodox theology, but the unusual vocabulary and theological ideas in the hymn must be accounted for. The presence of theological concepts which differ from (though not contradicting) those found in the rest of the Pauline literature—such as Christ being the head of the body, the church, and Christ making peace "by the blood of his cross," as well as terminology different from that found in the rest of Colossians and in the Pauline literature argues in favour of pre-Pauline authorship of the hymn. It appears the

⁵⁸ See also Cannon, *Traditional Materials*, 31.

⁵⁹ O'Brien comments "'the faith' in this context is another description for the apostolic gospel rather than the subjective response of the Colossians to that gospel" (*Colossians*, 69). This objective use of πίστεις to indicate the accepted body of doctrine believed is found in Rom 1.5; Gal 1.23; 1 Tim 4.1; 2 Tim 4.7; Jude 3.

⁶⁰ "The Colossian Hymn," 80.

hymn was written by an earlier Christian author, and was quoted by the author as he wrote his letter to the Colossians. This does not, however, preclude the possibility of redaction by the author, but he would most likely have been redacting to clarify the hymnic message, not to defuse theological aberration.⁶¹

In summary, there are numerous theories regarding the origin of the Colossian hymn, ranging from pre-Christian gnostic sources, pre-Christian Hellenistic sources, Jewish sources, and even Paul himself. The unique vocabulary and theological ideas in the hymn support the view that the hymn was written by a different author before the composition of Colossians, though the authoritative manner in which the author uses the hymn and the forceful way in which he appeals to Christian tradition indicate that he was in agreement with the hymn he cited.

B. Structure of the Colossian Hymn

As one attempts to analyse early Christian hymns, formidable problems quickly arise. There are many desiderata which at present are impossible to obtain with certainty, resulting primarily from the scarcity of extant early church hymns to serve as paradigms against which to measure other possible hymns (in order to analyse stanza length, redactions, etc).⁶² Thus it is not surprising to find that the structure of the Colossian hymn is still greatly contested. Gibbs' *caveat* regarding the definitive identification of the hymnic structure of Col 1.15-20 is worth recounting. He says "the fact is that scholarship has developed no consensus about the number and content of strophes in Col 1.15-20, or about possible Pauline additions, so that one may safely speak only of certain parallels...no single reconstruction is fully persuasive."⁶³

⁶¹ This is similar to the view expressed by R. Schnackenburg, and affirmed by B. Vawter. Schnackenburg asserts that the author of Colossians found a hymn which expressed a Christology he was basically in agreement with, but one which he felt needed to be modified to speak a language he was more at home with ("Die Aufnahme des Christushymnus durch den Verfasser des Kolosserbriefes," in *Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum NT. Vorarbeiten Heft 1*, ed. by J. Blank [Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1969] 33-50, cited by Vawter, "The Colossian Hymn," 74). Scroggs succinctly comments "had Paul disagreed with these hymns [Phil 2.5-11 and Col 1.15-20] he would hardly have quoted them; they can be used to determine his thought" (*The Last Adam* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1966] 62).

⁶² Charlesworth says "We do not know the exact length of most hymns quoted in the New Testament, whether they are complete or fragmentary, or whether they originate with the author, his community, or with an earlier anonymous Jew or Christian. We are convinced that many—if not most—of the hymns and prayers have been expanded or interpolated but the extent of such editorial activity is not clear. We have no refined sieve with which to isolate and remove a quoted hymn" ("The Jewish Background of the Hymns in the New Testament," 280).

⁶³ *Creation and Redemption*, 98-99. Though Sanders believes the general structure of the original hymn is discernible, he admits "the original formal structure of this passage may never be fully explained" (*New Testament Christological Hymns*, 13). See also Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus*, 150.

There are numerous models of the strophic structure of the Colossians hymn, ranging from two to five strophes, though most commentators argue for the existence of two or three strophes.⁶⁴ James Robinson posits a model in which the Colossian hymn contains two strophes (vv. 15-17; vv.18-20) containing three redacted phrases ("the church," v. 18a; "in order that he might be pre-eminent in everything," v. 18c; "making peace by the blood of his cross, through him whether things upon the earth or in heaven," v. 20b, c) and two major transpositions.⁶⁵ Käsemann suggests the Colossian hymn consists of two uneven strophes (vv. 15-18a and vv. 18b-20) and two redactions ("head of the Church," v. 18 and "through the blood of his cross," v. 20).⁶⁶ This model is set in contrast to Lohmeyer's, which also contains two strophes, but very different verse divisions (vv. 13-16e and vv. 16f-20).⁶⁷ McCown and Wright offer yet another model, suggesting that vv. 15-16 form stanza one, vv. 18b-20 stanza two, and vv. 17-18a the refrain.⁶⁸ Schweizer believes there are three strophes in the hymn, the first dealing with creation, the second with preservation, the third with redemption.⁶⁹ The second strophe points back to the first strophe, for Christ's pre-existence and work of preservation (v. 17) are a logical extension of his creative work affirmed in v. 16. His headship over the church (v. 18a) anticipates his work of reconciliation (v. 20). The second strophe thus serves not as a refrain, as McCown suggests, but as a bridge between the two major strophes.

In terms of hymnic structure, Schweizer's model of three strophes, with the second serving as a summary and bridge between the other two primary strophes, makes the most sense of the parallelism between the elements of vv. 15-16 and vv. 18b-20, and best accounts for the lack of parallelism and the specific content of vv. 17-18a.

⁶⁴ For a concise listing of the views of various exegetes with respect to strophic arrangement and redacted elements of the hymn, see Balchin, "Col 1:15-20," 78-79.

⁶⁵ "A Formal Analysis of Col 1:15-20," 284-87.

⁶⁶ Käsemann, "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy," 150-52.

⁶⁷ *Colossians*, 43-44.

⁶⁸ Wright, "Poetry and Theology in Col 1:15-20" 444-68; cf. also McCown, "The Hymnic Structure of Colossians 1:15-20," 156-62. Wright and McCown posit very similar models, though Wright says he arrived at his independently of McCown (447).

⁶⁹ "The Church as the Missionary Body," 6-7. This model is also accepted by Benoit, "L'hymne christologique," 226-63; Bruce, *Colossians*, 65; Martin, *Colossians*, 55-56; Sanders, *New Testament Christological Hymns*, 13.

C. Rhetorical Purpose of the Colossian Hymn

Ultimately, no matter what the precise form of the original hymn was, the most important point is that the hymn was affirmed by the author of the epistle, and used (possibly with some editorial insertions of his own) to further his rhetorical purposes.⁷⁰ These purposes centre upon the defence of the gospel, particularly the person and work of Christ, in the face of the Colossian opponents. Thus I agree with Marxsen who states that the Christology found in Colossians, particularly that articulated in the hymn (which he believes was adapted from a pre-existing secular hymn) "was created from the ideas and the conceptual world that occur in the interaction with the heretics."⁷¹ Furthermore, the author of Colossians developed the Christology found in the hymn "on the basis of the specific situation with which he was confronted."⁷²

Many exegetes functionally divorce this hymn from the whole of the epistle. Even when attempts are made to relate it to the rest of the epistle it is sometimes claimed that the hymn is not strongly polemic. Fowl, for example, asserts that the hymn

is not used to support one christological statement over another, since in vv. 15-20 Paul merely states his position and makes no effort to defend it. Nor does he attack any other christology. He assumes that the assertions he makes in 1.15-20 will be accepted without dispute.⁷³

This assertion is similar to ones made by Evans, Francis, and Sappington regarding the overall polemic in Colossians. They argue that the overall polemic is not patently Christological, for the Colossian opponents were not directly attacking Christ, but were instead advocating heavenly ascent and worship like the angels as a means of spiritual enrichment.

Elsewhere Fowl acknowledges a qualified polemical function in the Christological hymn, saying it serves as an exemplar which contains two truths: Christ is superior to the elemental spirits, and Christ is the dwelling place of all fulness. These two truths are said to be developed and made ethically significant in ch. 2.⁷⁴ While the author does not overtly refute the Christology of the Colossian opponents point by

⁷⁰ Thus Bruce ends his preliminary comments on the hymn by commenting on the two main strophes "if one or both of them did have an earlier existence, then one or both may have been expanded to suit the argument of the letter. The presence and identity of such expansions must be even more speculative. Our concern, in any case, is with the text as it lies before us, in the only context in which it has come down to us" (*Colossians*, 57).

⁷¹ *Christian Ethics*, 278.

⁷² *Christian Ethics*, 278.

⁷³ *The Story of Christ*, 123. Van Broekhoven also accepts this line of reasoning, and boldly declares regarding the writer of Colossians and the opponents "we may assume that they both agree on the application of the wisdom cosmology to Jesus Christ" ("Wisdom and World," 135). An examination of the text reveals that this is a gratuitous assumption.

⁷⁴ *The Story of Christ*, 152-53.

point in the hymn, or quote the hymn at length in his response to the opposition in ch. 2,⁷⁵ its Christological force is seriously underestimated by Fowl. The verses which immediately follow the hymn clearly reveal the polemical use of the hymn, and contradict Fowl's assertion that the hymn would be unanimously accepted by the Colossians. They thus give firm evidence of the gravity of the Christological threat posed by the Colossian opponents.

Note, for example, the warning in 1.23 given in the form of a first class conditional clause (εἴ γε ἐπιμένετε τῇ πίστει) whose apodosis found in v. 22b (παραστήσαι ὑμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους καὶ ἀνεγκλήτους κατευώπιον αὐτοῦ) implies the distinct possibility of some of the Colossians falling away from the hope of the gospel.⁷⁶ The use of εἴ γε here to indicate conditionality is sometimes debated, since it is not a common phrase in the NT, being found only four other times (2 Cor 5.3; Gal 3.4; Eph 3.2; 4.21), and can indicate either doubt or confident assumption.⁷⁷ Most exegetes correctly understand this verse to be a warning to the Colossians of the real danger of straying from the faith. When the author refers to the believers' future presentation before God in vv. 28-29, he simply states this in terms of the goal of his apostolic labour, not speculating on the degree of success he would experience. In ch. 2 the author warns the Colossians against the dangers of being deceived with beguiling speech (2.4), and of being made a prey through empty philosophy (2.8). It is significant that both warnings are given in a Christological context. These factors lead us to believe the warning in 1.23 is real, and that the Colossians are being called to Christological allegiance, expressed in terms of the "hope of the gospel."

Three factors suggest that the "gospel" in 1.23 has Christological content, and thus indicate that 1.23 is a call to Christological allegiance: (1) The use of εὐαγγέλιον in the Pauline literature is clearly Christological, and is related to the person and work of Christ (Rom 1.1-4; 1 Cor 9.12; 15.1-4; 2 Cor 2.12), which are two dominant themes of the Colossian hymn. (2) The immediate context of this warning is still the

⁷⁵ This point is emphasised by Sappington, who says "many of the specific points made in the hymn are passed over in the polemical and expositional sections of Colossians 2. It is possible, therefore, that the author's purpose in citing the hymn was more general than is usually assumed" (*Revelation and Redemption*, 176).

⁷⁶ Contra O'Brien, *Colossians*, 69. While O'Brien asserts "the Greek construction εἴ γε, translated, 'provided that,' does not express doubt," he admits that its use in Gal 3.4 may do so (for a further discussion of Gal 3.4, and a defence that it does express doubt regarding the possibility of the Galatians suffering in vain, see Judith Gundry Volf, *Paul and Perseverance*, WUNT 2.37 [Tübingen: Mohr, 1990] 214-16). This instance out of only five uses is certainly enough to indicate that context must determine the meaning of the phrase.

⁷⁷ Moule asserts "εἴγε means 'if,' 'that is,' or 'if, indeed,' and it depends upon the context whether or not such a strengthened 'if' implies doubt or confident assumption" (*An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. [Cambridge: CUP, 1959] 164). See also Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 173.

hymn, as is evidenced by the reconciliation theme linking vv. 21-22 to v. 20b. (3) The author affirms his ministry of gospel proclamation in this verse, and a few verses later (vv. 27-28) he clarifies his ministry of proclamation, and indicates that it was thoroughly Christocentric. It is Christological in content (ὄν ἡμεῖς καταγγέλλομεν) and scope (ἵνα παραστήσωμεν πάντα ἄνθρωπον τέλειον ἐν Χριστῷ). The latter phrase may be seen to be an application of 1.16b, where all creation is said to be "for him."

Thus Col 1.21-28 indicates the author used the hymn as part of his polemic against the Colossian opponents, a polemic which was strongly Christological. Apparently the author felt the teaching of the opponents jeopardised the Colossians' understanding of the person and work of Christ. It is therefore logical for the author to quote this hymn which praises Christ for who he is and what he did, since the Colossians would presumably have been familiar with the hymn, quite possibly because it was one of the hymns they used to teach and admonish one another (3.16). At the same time, the hymn would have been appropriate as part of the author's polemic even if they were not familiar with it.

The contents of the hymn will now be surveyed in order to ascertain the author's theological affirmations. In the following thesis chapter I will show how those affirmations are used to provide a basis for Christian behaviour.

III. The Content of the Colossian Hymn

In examining the Colossian hymn, some Christological issues will be given little or no treatment, for the discussion of the role of Wisdom language,⁷⁸ and the presence

⁷⁸ James Dunn in his historical study of the incarnation argues that Jewish Wisdom and logos speculation in the context of monotheism provided the matrix for NT incarnational Christology (*Christology in the Making*, 2nd ed. [London: SCM, 1989] 163-212). The personification of Wisdom is well attested in ancient Jewish literature, and can very plausibly be linked to the Christological predications in passages such as Col 1.15-20 (for example, note how Wisdom is personified and linked to creation and pre-existence in Baruch 3.9-4.4; Prov 8.22-30; Sir 1.1-4; 24.9-10; Wis 7.22-26; 9.4, 9). The critical issue, however, is the extent and manner in which Wisdom speculation governs Pauline Christology. Dunn argues that Paul (and the writer of Colossians) utilised the language and philosophical constructs available to him, so that "Wisdom, whatever it meant for his readers, is now most fully expressed in Jesus" (195). Furthermore, Dunn acknowledges that in using Wisdom language, Paul and the author of Colossians introduce Christological statements and terminology, which "when read apart from the original context of Wisdom and Adam christology would be understood as ascribing to Christ himself pre-existence and a role in creation," though Dunn denies that the authors had this type of ontological Christology in mind (255). Others, however, note that in the Wisdom literature Wisdom is described in ideal terms, as merely the personification of the divine attributes of Torah, whereas in the Colossian and Philippian hymns Christ is a real human being with a distinct personal existence. Bruce notes, for example, that even in Philo the *logos* would never have taken on a personal form (*Colossians*, 59). Thus Balchin contends that when Dunn, based on his understanding of the Pauline use of Wisdom language, denies that Col 1.15-20 teaches Christ's pre-

of ontological versus functional Christology⁷⁹ in the Pauline literature is highly nuanced and quite complex,⁸⁰ and ultimately requires the evaluation of numerous Pauline texts.⁸¹ My concerns in this chapter are more modest, for I will evaluate the hymn and discuss the Christology it reflects with a view to understanding better the application of the hymn to the polemic and paraenesis of Colossians, particularly chs. 1-2. This task does not necessitate a determination of functional versus ontological Christology

existence and creation of the universe, he "simply does not do justice to the text" which speaks of Christ in personal terms which exceed Jewish Wisdom teaching ("Paul, Wisdom, and Christ," in *Christ the Lord*, ed. by H. H. Rowdon [Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982] 215). In a major study of wisdom in Jewish literature and Colossians, Van Broekhoven also argues against Dunn, and charges that he forces a false unity on the wisdom material, and inappropriately limits the wisdom cosmology in Col 1.15-20 to functional Christology, when in Van Broekhoven's opinion it is clearly ontological ("Wisdom and World," 21-22).

⁷⁹ Dunn believes Paul (and the writer of the Colossian hymn) uses Wisdom language to describe God's actions in Christ (functional Christology), not to communicate ontological Christology. For example, he asserts that the Wisdom figure in pre-Christian Jewish writings and later in Pauline literature was a "poetic description of divine immanence, of God's self-revelation and interaction with his creation and his people; it was a way of speaking of divine agency rather than of a divine agent distinct from God in ontological terms" (*Christology in the Making*, xx).

Larry Hurtado, on the other hand, strongly believes the Pauline epistles (and Colossians) affirm ontological Christology. Hurtado essentially utilises a history of religions methodology and attempts to explain the problem of the early church's rejection of Graeco-Roman polytheism, affirmation of monotheism, and divine reverence of Jesus (*One God One Lord. Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* [London: SCM, 1988]). He believes the fundamental question is: "How did the early Jewish Christians accommodate the veneration of the exalted Jesus alongside God, while continuing to see themselves as loyal to the fundamental emphasis of their ancestral tradition of one God?" (100). He answers this by developing the thesis that the early Christians drew upon sources in ancient Judaism, particularly the divine agency tradition, but mutated these Jewish traditions in their religious devotion to Christ. He contends there are six features of the early church's devotion to Christ which evidence these mutations including: prayer, the use of the name of Christ, the Lord's Supper, confession of faith in Jesus, prophetic pronouncements of the risen Christ, and hymnic practice (101-104). Hurtado believes the worship of the risen Christ is assumed in the Colossian hymn, which glorifies Christ through celebrating God's redemption in Christ. The hymn is thus said to reflect ontological binitarian Christology (101-104). I. H. Marshall also argues against Dunn's interpretation, though he does not specifically speak of "ontological Christology" but argues that the hymn affirms "the personal pre-existence of the divine Being incarnate in Jesus" ("Incarnational Christology in the New Testament," in *Jesus the Saviour: Studies in New Testament Theology* [London: SPCK, 1990] 172).

⁸⁰ I. H. Marshall's comment on the development of the concept of "Lord" in the early church is instructive regarding the complexity of NT Christology and the danger of reading 20th-century theological constructs into first-century texts. He states "to have asked an early Christian, 'Do you believe that Jesus is divine?' would have been to use a category that was not part of his thinking. To say that Jesus was Lord was, however, to ascribe to him supreme authority under God, and to go beyond anything that might be done on a mere literary level with a figure of the past." Consequently "it could not be long before the ontological implications of such an affirmation were realized" (*The Origins of New Testament Christology*, 2nd ed. [Leicester: Apollos, 1990] 107).

⁸¹ C. E. B. Cranfield strongly criticises Dunn for the alleged fallacy of selective appeal (ignoring evidence which contradicts his hypothesis), and argues that numerous texts in Romans which contradict Dunn's thesis and in all likelihood affirm the pre-existence of Christ and even Trinitarianism (esp. 1.3-4; 8.3, 9-11; 9.5; 10.6-10, 12-14) are virtually ignored or given very inadequate treatment ("Some Comments on Professor J. D. G. Dunn's *Christology in the Making* with Special Reference to the Evidence of the Epistle to the Romans," in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament. Studies in Christology in Memory of G. B. Caird*, ed. by L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987] esp. 268-69, 272). For Dunn's defence of his methodology, in which he asserts that the only *a priori* assumption he made was that the NT documents evidence some evolution in the early church's understanding of the incarnation, see "Some Clarifications on Issues of Method: A Reply to Holladay and Segal," *Semeia* 30 (1984) 98.

(though it will be briefly discussed in v. 15), for these issues do not appear to be integral to the author's use of the hymn in the rest of Colossians. Rather, the author draws on the hymn in a more general manner to affirm the supremacy of the person and work of Christ to a Christian community which was contemplating the placation and possibly the veneration of spiritual entities other than Christ.

A. First Strophe—vv. 15-16

The first strophe of the hymn begins by affirming the person of Christ (the image of God) and then proceeds in the next verse to affirm his role in creation. In v. 15a Christ is described as "the image of the invisible God," an arresting phrase as one contemplates how the invisible can be made visible (cf. John 1.18; 14.8-9; Heb 1.3). There is little doubt that, in this first strophe, Jewish Wisdom speculation is being applied to Christ.⁸² Wis 7.26, for example, speaks of Wisdom's revelatory role using very similar language, and says that Wisdom "is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image [εἰκὼν] of his goodness." While few exegetes would disagree with Schweizer's explanation that the phrase εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ is an assertion that Christ is the "manifestation of God,"⁸³ it is much more difficult to ascertain the nature of this manifestation, and the relationship indicated between Christ and the invisible God. Kleinknecht asserts that the use of εἰκὼν in this text has functional as well as ontological significance. He says,

Image is not to be understood as a magnitude which is alien to the reality and present only in the consciousness. It has a share in the reality. Indeed, it is the reality. Thus εἰκὼν does not imply a weakening or a feeble copy of something. It implies the illumination of its inner core and essence.⁸⁴

While Kleinknecht's interpretation does find support in Plato and Philo,⁸⁵ the metaphysics these two authors espouse and those of the writer of Colossians are so different that they shed little light on the meaning of εἰκὼν in Col 1.15. In the LXX and NT there are numerous instances of εἰκὼν used functionally of idols as well as the

⁸² Kim argues, however, that Adam and Wisdom Christology come from εἰκὼν Christology, which in turn came from Paul's Damascus Road experience (cf. esp. 2 Cor 4.4), and not *vice versa* (*The Origin of Paul's Gospel*, 193-268, see also Bruce, *Colossians*, 57).

⁸³ *Colossians*, 66. Lohse has a similar understanding of the phrase, saying it emphasises Christ as "the one in whom God reveals himself" (*Colossians*, 48).

⁸⁴ TDNT 2.389; contra Gibbs, *Creation and Redemption*, 102.

⁸⁵ In Plato's writings (*Tim.* 92c) the universe is spoken of as "itself a visible Living Creature embracing the visible creatures, a perceptible God made in the image [εἰκὼν] of the Intelligible." Philo often links εἰκὼν with the *logos* (*Spec. Leg.* 1.81; *Conf. Ling.* 97, 147; *Fug.* 101).

images on coins (Ex 20.4; Lev 26.1; Matt 22.20; Mark 12.16; Rom 1.23; Rev 13.14). In the creation account in which humans are said to be created in the image of God (Gen 1.26; 1 Cor 11.7) there is a reference to a general manifestation of God, for while God is invisible, humans in some manner reflect him. In the Pauline literature there are three passages which hint at an ontological meaning of *εικὼν*, for they deal with the manner in which the believer is the image of God in the context of participationism.

Believers are declared conformed into the image of Christ in the context of being indwelt by Christ (Rom 8.9-10, 29). Believers shall bear the image of the man of heaven, but this is made possible by believers being made alive in Christ (1 Cor 15.22, 49). Believers are in the process of being "changed [transformed] into his likeness, from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor 3.18). These three passages give credibility to Kleinknecht's interpretation of image as a sharing of essence, for believers are said to have been united with Christ and to have Christ dwelling in them, though the image of God in Christ and in human believers are quite different, as is obvious by Christ's distinction from and supremacy over the created world, including human believers (Col 1.15b-17).

While the emphasis of image of God in v. 15a is functional and somewhat general, indicating the revelatory role Christ plays in manifesting God, the use of *εικὼν* in the three other Pauline passages noted above as well as the next two Christological predicates in vv. 15b and 16a ("first-born of all creation" and "by him all things were created") imply that Christ reveals God in a unique manner, since the latter Christological predications absolutely distinguish Christ from the rest of creation, placing him above the created order. His distinction from and superiority over creation, following the statement about his being the image of God, imply that his essence is to be identified with God, not with creation. In summary, Christ being the image of God is a reference to Christ's unique and specific manifestation of God.

In v. 15b the hymn moves from Christ's relationship with God to his relationship with creation, for Christ is called the "first-born of all creation" (*πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως*). The adjective *πρωτότοκος* is used 130 times in the LXX, usually to indicate temporal ranking, such as a first-born child or animal (Gen 4.4; 25.25; Ex 11.5). Since in Hebrew culture (and in antiquity in general) the first-borns were given special honour and importance (Gen 25.29; Ex 22.28; Num 18.15; Deut 21.16-17), it is understandable that *πρωτότοκος* came to be used in a non-temporal sense to indicate superiority or specialness. Thus Israel was called God's first-born son (Ex 4.22; cp. Deut 32.8), and God is said to promise to make King David

"the first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth" (Ps 89.27). Of the eight times πρωτότοκος is used in the NT, all but one occurrence refer to Christ (Heb 11.28, a plural reference, is the exception). Again, πρωτότοκος has both temporal (Luke 2.7; Rev 1.5) and honorific (Heb 1.6) connotations. While Prov 8.22 asserts that God created Wisdom "at the beginning of his work" (cf. also Sir 1.4) the context of Col 1.15 shows πρωτότοκος does not indicate simply temporal priority in the sense of Christ being created first. The causal phrase ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα in v. 16a rules this out, and explains the first-born predication by clarifying his relationship to the created order. This relationship is affirmed as one of absolute disjunction and superiority. He himself created all things; he is the agent of creation. This indicates that the predication πρωτότοκος affirms Christ's hierarchical relationship to creation.⁸⁶

A temporal meaning for πρωτότοκος is not ruled out altogether in the sense that there may be an affirmation here of Christ as the pre-existent one, distinct from creation, who existed before anything was created (cp. Wis 9.4, 9). While the context of Christ's relationship with creation in v. 16, especially that of all creation being made for him, supports the hierarchical meaning of πρωτότοκος in v. 15, it is possible the author had both ideas in view, since they are quite complementary concepts.⁸⁷ The clause "he is before all things" in v. 17a supports this view, since v. 17a (at the beginning of a new strophe) recapitulates some of the affirmations in the first strophe, and clearly indicates Christ's superiority over creation by affirming his temporal pre-existence.

Christ's relationship with creation is further clarified in v. 16 through the use of the prepositional phrases ἐν αὐτῷ, δι' αὐτοῦ, and εἰς αὐτόν. There are parallels to this threefold predication of Christ using these three prepositions or equivalents in the Pauline literature, indicating this was a NT formula (see Eph 4.6 for a slightly different formula). In 1 Cor 8.6 parallel predications are made of the Father and of Christ. All things, including Paul and the Corinthian believers, are said to be by them (ἐξ, δι') and

⁸⁶ See W. Michaelis, *TDNT* 6.878-79. L. Helyer also confirms this interpretation of πρωτότοκος πύσης κτίσεως in v. 15, for he concludes this phrase "is predicated of the pre-existent Christ; its thrust is to ascribe to him a primacy of status over against all of creation" ("The *Prototokos* Title in the New Testament," Ph.D. Thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1979, 269).

⁸⁷ Several commentators, including Moule (*Colossians*, 65) and O'Brien (*Colossians*, 44), assert that both ideas are probably intended here.

for them (εἰς). Rom 11.36 applies these same predications⁸⁸ to God's relationship with creation.⁸⁹

There is little disagreement that δι' αὐτοῦ refers to Christ's agency in creation (cf. John 1.3), and εἰς αὐτὸν is generally recognised as having teleological significance, affirming Christ as the goal or the "final end toward which all the creation is moving."⁹⁰ This is similar to the affirmation in Eph 1.9-10 that God's purpose in Christ is "to unite all things in him, things in heaven and on earth." The use of the preposition ἐν, however, is vigorously debated. Norden references Marcus Aurelius, and calls it a Stoic *Allmachtsformel*, but Craddock has effectively refuted the notion of Stoic influence on this verse.⁹¹ Others such as Lohse argue that ἐν αὐτῷ is synonymous with δι' αὐτοῦ, and repeats the idea of Christ's agency in creation.⁹² Lohse argues that parallel statements in John 1.3 and 1 Cor 8.6, the use of similar phrases in Jewish Wisdom literature, and the phrase δι' αὐτοῦ placed later in 1.16 support this interpretation. This reasoning is sound, though there are several commentators who argue for a locative meaning which would indicate "the sphere within which the work of creation takes place."⁹³

There are no real parallels in the Jewish Wisdom literature to the statement that all things were created "for him" (εἰς αὐτὸν).⁹⁴ Philo uses language similar to the predications found in Col 1.16b, and states that for anything to be brought into being

⁸⁸ Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1988) 704. One slight distinction, however, is that ἐξ αὐτοῦ is found in Rom 9.36, instead of ἐν αὐτῷ which is in Col 1, but they are synonymous phrases, both indicating agency.

⁸⁹ In both passages the phrase τὰ πάντα is the object of the predications, though Käsemann argues that in Rom 11.36 the τὰ πάντα formula is corrected by the dropping of the prepositional phrases ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, since Paul was not concerned with "a sympathy between the heavenly and the earthly" as was the Stoic sage who wrote the hymn quoted in Col 1.15-20 (*Commentary on Romans*, trans. by Geoffrey Bromiley [London: SCM, 1980] 321). Instead of appealing to remote Stoic cosmology to explain the fact that τὰ πάντα is further modified by ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, τὰ ὁρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα, εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι, it makes perfect sense to assert that the early church faced oppositional situations like that in Colossae, where the placation of cosmic or demonic spirits was advocated, and thus a Christian hymn was written reminding Christians that Christ, like the Father, rules over all heavenly and earthly creation.

⁹⁰ Martin, *Colossians*, 58.

⁹¹ Craddock, "All things in Him," 78-80; Fowl, *The Story of Christ*, 108; Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 240f.

⁹² *Colossians*, 50.

⁹³ O'Brien, *Colossians*, 45. See also Fowl, *The Story of Christ*, 109; Schweizer, *Colossians*, 69. Thus Bruce summarises this portion of the hymn "They were created *in* him, because all the Father's counsels and activities (including those of creation) are centred in the Son; they were created *through* him, because he is the divine agent in creation; they were created *for* him, because he is the goal to which they all tend" (*Colossians*, 64).

⁹⁴ For a listing of the Greek and Jewish texts relevant to the three prepositional phrases in 1.16, see Lohse, *Colossians*, 50-51 and Pöhlmann, "Die hymnischen All-Prädikationen," 58-66. Lohse agrees, however, that there are no parallels for the phrase εἰς αὐτὸν in Jewish Wisdom literature (*Colossians*, 52, n. 138) as does Martin (*Colossians*, 58) and O'Brien (*Colossians*, 47).

there must conjointly be the "by which" (ὃφ οὖ), the "from which" (ἐξ οὖ), the "through which" (δι οὖ), and the "for which" (δι ὅ).⁹⁵ Several lines later (127) Philo explains what these four entities are, saying the "by which" (the cause) is God, the "from which" (the material) is the four elements, the "through which" (the instrument) is the word of God, and the "for which" (the end) is the goodness of God (not Wisdom). Thus the hymn reflects a significant advance over the Jewish concept of describing the divine Wisdom as playing a part in creation, for in the hymn Christ is not only the agent, but the goal of creation. The affirmation of Christ as the goal of all creation has significant ethical implications. For the believer, the logical implication is that one should honour Christ in everything, which in fact is exactly what the author of Colossians teaches in the paraenesis (3.11, 17).

The elaboration of τὰ πάντα in v. 16 identifies the entire creation as created by and for Christ. The description uses four different nouns (θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι). From the use of these terms elsewhere in the NT and in Jewish texts, it is clear they refer to angelic beings, probably good as well as evil (cf. Eph 1.21; 6.12; 1 Pet 3.22).⁹⁶ The context of the verse itself also supports this view, for the point here is that every created being is under the lordship of Christ. The use of ἀρχαὶ and ἐξουσίαι in 2.15 also supports this interpretation, for in ch. 2 these are viewed as hostile angelic powers who were conquered by Christ.⁹⁷

In terms of the relevance of this stanza to the Colossian church, note that in their desire for a vision of God (2.18) some of the Colossians were jeopardising their relationship with Christ (2.19). In affirming Christ as the image of God, the author indicates that if one wants a vision of God, or an experience with the divine, the answer

⁹⁵ *Cher* 125. Dunn notes this reference without actually comparing the two passages, and argues that the specific prepositions found in the hymn are not to be understood as having exact, literal meaning, since this kind of formula would have been common in the first century (a debatable point) and was "the accepted terminology for the subject at hand, and to omit a regularly used preposition could arouse suspicion that the statement was not sufficiently comprehensive" (*Christology in the Making*, 193). Dunn surprisingly employs the example of a Lutheran theologian using the phrase "in, with and under," to describe the Lord's Supper to explain how a phrase might become accepted terminology losing some of the literal meaning of its specific prepositions. It is unlikely that Lutheran theologians would accept the idea that the meaning of these three prepositions should in some way be muted since the phrase has become a theological formula. Nor with this single reference in Philo (which does not contain all the same prepositions) does Dunn demonstrate that this was a well known, accepted formula. This is a case of special pleading; each of the three prepositions should be considered significant in the Christological affirmations of the hymn.

⁹⁶ For additional references see Lohse, *Colossians*, 51 and G. H. C. Macgregor, "Principalities and Powers," 17-28. For a response to the view that the writer is not referring to angelic beings but to human (socio-political) power structures, see O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers and their Relationship to Structures," *RTR* 40 (1981) 1-10.

⁹⁷ Thus I disagree with Fowl who says the identification of these powers as hostile or benign entities is not significant for the author, for "the emphasis is on the universal scope of Christ's superiority" (*The Story of Christ*, 110).

is not found in placating the elements, seeking mystical, heavenly visionary experiences, or abiding by the ascetic practices advocated by the Colossian opponents. Rather, one must look to Christ, for he is the image of God. Furthermore, he is the one who created the entire cosmos and every creature in it, in fact they were created for him. On the basis of the meaning of "elements of the world" in ch. 2, this portion of the hymn is quite pertinent for the Colossian believers, for it forcibly shows that they did not need to fear or placate the elements. Christ alone was the one to worship and reverence, for according to the author Christ is absolutely pre-eminent over every cosmic or angelic power.

B. Second Strophe—vv. 17-18a

The second strophe recapitulates and enlarges on vv. 15-16, particularly the affirmation of the pre-existence and cosmic superiority of Christ. The clause καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων indicates Christ's pre-existence before any of the created order. While the preposition πρὸ can be used in a hierarchical sense to indicate rank or advantage (Jos *Ant* 16.187; Jas 5.12; 1 Pet 4.8), there are no unambiguous examples of this in the Pauline or deutero-Pauline literature, where it is almost always used in a temporal sense to mean "before" (Rom 16.7; 1 Cor 2.7, 4.5; Gal 1.17; 3.23; Eph 1.4; 2 Tim 1.9). While "first-born" in v. 15 might convey pre-existence, πρὸ πάντων certainly does. In affirming that Christ is temporally before all things, this does not refer to his creation before the rest of the cosmos, for the previous verse affirms that he created all things. The scope of creation is all encompassing. The terms "in heaven" and "on earth" correspond chiasmatically to "visible" and "invisible" to encompass all created physical and spiritual entities,⁹⁸ thus demarcating Christ from everything created, placing him in a distinctly different category of existence.

In v. 17b the hymn advances beyond the affirmation of Christ's role as creator of the universe to his role as sustainer. The perfect tense of the verb συνέστηκεν points to Christ's ongoing role in sustaining the created world. There are parallels in Platonic and Stoic literature to the use of this verb⁹⁹ often in the context of the unity of the entire cosmos.¹⁰⁰ Hellenistic Jewish literature also uses συνίστημι cosmologically, attributing to God or the divine Logos the role of unifying creation.¹⁰¹ In distinction

⁹⁸ Pöhlmann, "Die hymnischen All-Prädikationen," 58-59.

⁹⁹ Plato, *Rep* 530a.

¹⁰⁰ Pseudo-Aristotle, *Mund* 6.

¹⁰¹ Philo, *Rer. Div. Her.* 23, cp. 281, 311; Wis 1.7; Sir 43.26.

from the pantheistic world soul of Stoicism, the author of the Colossian hymn (as the author of Heb 1.3) applies the role of sustenance to Christ, who is distinguished from the created world.

In v. 18a the author finally relates the supremacy of Christ specifically to the church, the body of believers. This concept is again found in 2.19 (which is surely drawn from 1.18) in which the Colossians are warned not to allow themselves to be defrauded, and thus fail to hold fast to the head of the body (i.e., Christ). Many exegetes, largely influenced by Käsemann, believe τῆς ἐκκλησίας in v. 18a is a redacted statement which did not appear in the original form of the hymn. Käsemann acknowledges the hypothesis that τῆς ἐκκλησίας was inserted in post NT times is not supported by any variant reading, but he argues on stylistic grounds that correspondence of form between vv. 15 and 18b clearly evidences it as a redaction.¹⁰² According to this view, "head of the body" would be a fitting strophic summary of Christ's cosmological role.¹⁰³ If one does accept that stylistic factors indicate it is a gloss, then this redaction means "Paul has effectively turned an original tribute to Christ...as the lord of the world into a statement praising him as head of the body, now identified with the church."¹⁰⁴

It has been argued that κεφαλή can mean either head, in the sense of ruler, or head in the sense of source (in this case, source of life).¹⁰⁵ Wayne Grudem, on the other hand, concludes in a survey of 2,336 uses of κεφαλή by 36 different authors writing from the eighth century BCE to the fourth century CE, that there are no clear uses of κεφαλή in the ancient world to mean "source," while there are various instances of κεφαλή being used to mean "ruler" or "person of superior rank."¹⁰⁶ Whatever the

¹⁰² "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy," 151. Among those who argue that τῆς ἐκκλησίας was part of the original hymn are P. Beasley-Murray, "Colossians 1:15-20," 180-81; Gibbs, *Creation and Redemption*, 105; Kehl, *Der Christushymnus*, 93, 97; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 49.

¹⁰³ O'Brien argues, however, that of the 99 times σῶμα is used in the Pauline literature, it is never used to refer to the cosmos, whereas it is used to refer to the collective group of Christians or to local congregations (Rom 12.4-5; 1 Cor 12.12-27); see also Best, *The Body of Christ*, 115-38, esp. 123, 137-8. This argument loses much of its force, however, if it is conceded that the author did not write the hymn.

¹⁰⁴ Martin, *Reconciliation*, 116.

¹⁰⁵ Several argue that Christ's headship over the church in Colossians and 1 Cor 11 refers to him being the source of life (C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [London: Black, 1971] 248; Colin Brown, "Head," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976] 2.156-63; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* [London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1971] 103; G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987] 502-504; Letha Scanzoni and Margaret Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be* [Waco, TX: Word, 1974] 30-31, 100. Most of these writers cite Stephen Bedale's seminal article, "The Meaning of κεφαλή in the Pauline Epistles," *JTS* n. s. 5 (1954) 211-15, in which Bedale argues that in 1 Cor 11.3, Eph 4.15 and Col 2.19 κεφαλή means "source").

¹⁰⁶ "Does ΚΕΦΑΛΗ ('Head') Mean 'Source' or 'Authority Over' in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples," *TrinJ* 6 NS (1985) 38-59. Grudem's title is misleading, since of the 2,336 instances, only 302 were found to be metaphorical uses, and of those, only 49 (16.2% of the metaphorical uses, 2.1%

outcome of the larger philological battle over the possible meanings of κεφαλή in the NT, the context of Col 1.17 points to the meaning "authority" in this instance.¹⁰⁷ While Christ is the "source" of the church in that he is the physical creator and spiritual reconciler, the emphasis in the previous verses is on his supremacy over the entire created world. His pre-existence as well as his work as sustainer (v. 17) demonstrate his superiority over creation. Furthermore, the predicates in v. 18 (esp. his being the first-born from the dead) are clarified by the result clause in 18b (ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων), which indicates that he was the first-born from the dead so that he might have first place (the position of authority or supremacy) in everything. Thus the context of v. 18a indicates that Christ's authority extends over his body, the church, just as it extends over the rest of creation.

C. Third Strophe—vv. 18b-20

By declaring Christ as ἀρχή,¹⁰⁸ πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν (see the pairing of ἀρχή and πρωτότοκος in Gen 49.3 and Deut 21.17), the author is again affirming his supremacy over creation. This is given, however, in the context of his relationship to the church, since the early Christians believed that Christ's resurrection provided the basis for, and would be followed by, the resurrection of all dead believers (1 Cor 15.20-23; 1 Thess 4.14-16). The noun ἀρχή indicates primacy, either temporal (Matt 19.4; Heb 1.10) or hierarchical (Rom 8.38; 1 Cor 15.24; Eph 1.21).¹⁰⁹ The temporal sense might be in view here, for Christ was the first one to be raised from the dead (cp. the first-fruit language in 1 Cor 15.20), but the overall context lends more weight to the

of the total uses) were determined to indicate authority or superior rank. Of the 49, 12 are in the NT, which is problematic, since the meaning of κεφαλή in the NT is the issue being debated. In spite of several significant weaknesses in his article, Grudem has shown that κεφαλή was occasionally used in the ancient world to indicate authority (Judg 10.18; 11.9, 11; 2 Kgs 22.44; 3 Kgs 8.1; Ps 17.43; Philo, *On Dreams* 2.207, *Moses* 2.30; Plutarch *Pelopidas* 2.1.3; *Cicero* 14.4) though he is certainly incorrect to say it is never used to mean "source" (he has overlooked, for example, Philo's use of κεφαλή in *Congr. Quae Erud. Stud.* 61 and *Praem.* 125. For other examples, see Catherine Clark Kroeger, "The Classical Concept of Head as 'Source,'" in *Equal to Serve*, ed. by G. G. Hull [Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1987] 267-83.) For a critical response to Grudem, see G. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 502-03. Since relatively few uncontested uses can be cited for the meaning "source," it seems that "authority" would have been a more natural understanding of κεφαλή in metaphorical uses in the NT, but based on secular Greek usage, both meanings are valid possibilities for the NT occurrences.

¹⁰⁷ Outside the hymn one finds this same meaning for κεφαλή. In 2.10 it clearly indicates authority, for Christ is said to be head "over all rule and authority." In 2.19 κεφαλή might mean "source," but since 2.19 draws on the concepts and wording of 1.18, it is again best to interpret κεφαλή as "authority."

¹⁰⁸ A few early manuscripts (p46, B1739) insert the article before ἀρχή, but the better attested anarthrous construction is not problematic, since the article is often lacking with abstract nouns, and is seldom present when ἀρχή is used as a predicate (Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 155; Blass and Debrunner, *Grammar*, § 258).

¹⁰⁹ See Delling, *TDNT* 1.479-84.

hierarchical sense, though the two are very closely related, as is evident with the use of πρό in v. 17a.

In the final line of v. 18 the author affirms Christ's honorific position as a result of his resurrection (cf. Rom 8.29; 1 Cor 15.20; Acts 26.23; Rev 1.5) and rank, which results in Christ having a position of first place (ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων) over everything. The use of πρωτεύω here probably refers back to πρωτότοκος in vv. 15b and 18b, and may also relate to the phrase αὐτὸς ἐστὶν πρὸ πάντων in v. 17. It thus serves to sum up several statements regarding Christ's supremacy, and indicates that "in new creation and old the first place belongs to him alone."¹¹⁰

In v. 19 further explanation for Christ's supremacy is given, for the verse begins with the causal conjunction ὅτι. Christ's supremacy is stated here in terms of all the fulness dwelling in him. This is a very difficult text, for the subject of "was pleased" (εὐδόκησεν) is unclear, as is the meaning of "all the fulness" (πάν τὸ πλήρωμα). Käsemann asserts that this verse reflects the clearest expression of the mythical character of the hymn.¹¹¹

As far as the subject of εὐδόκησεν is concerned, the preceding phrase ἐν αὐτῷ would rule out Christ as the subject, for ἐν αὐτῷ no doubt refers to Christ, its immediate antecedent ^{being} αὐτὸς in v. 18b (in order that he might be pre-eminent). The remote antecedent of this and the other third person predications throughout the hymn is "his beloved Son" (τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ) in v. 13b. Thus it would be illogically redundant to say, "in Christ, Christ was pleased to dwell." That would leave "God" (an implied noun) or "the fulness" as the possible subjects of "was pleased." The former suggestion is grammatically possible, for if "God" or "the Father" were supplied as the subject, this would agree with the masculine participle ἐληρηνοποιήσας in v. 20. This reading is given by the NASV and NIV translations, as well as several commentators.¹¹² The author's construction in 2.9 weighs against this reading, since it is essentially an expanded quotation from this verse, in which the subject of "was pleased" is not the implied noun "God," but is "all the fulness." While it is possible that the author changed the construction of the hymn in his quotation in 2.9, it is unlikely, as this would significantly weaken the rhetorical impact of the quotation.

¹¹⁰ O'Brien, *Colossians*, 51. Michaelis states that this ἵνα clause "sums up, intensifies and rounds off" what was said in 1.15 and 17 (TDNT 6.882).

¹¹¹ "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy," 158-59.

¹¹² Benoit, "L'hymne christologique" 256; Delling, TDNT 6.303; Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 158; E. Lohmeyer, *Die Briefe an die Philipper, Kolosser und an Philemon*, 13th ed., MeyerK 9 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964) 58-59.

Many other exegetes and the RSV translation opt for "all the fulness" as the subject of "was pleased to dwell." The chief difficulty with this rendering is that God seems to be the subject of the verbs ἀποκαταλλάξαι and εἰρηνοποιήσας ("to reconcile"; "having made peace") in v. 20, and having "the fulness" as the subject of "was pleased to dwell" in v. 19 would make this an awkward reading. Fowl, Mündlerlein, and Lohse suggest the difficulty in changing the subjects of the verbs from "the fulness" in v. 19 to "God" in v. 20 can be overcome if πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα in v. 19 is understood as a designation for the totality of the divine fulness, i.e., for God himself.¹¹³

Several other exegetes believe the phrase "all the fulness" is a circumlocution for God,¹¹⁴ which if correct, would mean that there is no essential difference between the two possible subjects of "was pleased to dwell." This interpretation of "all the fulness" being a circumlocution for God makes good sense, for the context of v. 19 implies God is the subject, and secondly, in 2.9 the same phrase πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα is found as the subject of the same verb κατοικέω and is modified by the genitive of description τῆς θεότητος, indicating that the fulness is in some manner identified with deity.¹¹⁵ Thus the use of the phrase τῆς θεότητος in 2.9, which is a quote from 1.19, lends additional support for the assertion that "all the fulness" in 1.19 is a circumlocution for deity.

This then leads to the second major interpretive difficulty in this verse, viz., the meaning of "all the fulness." In the NT πλήρωμα is used in a variety of ways: of a patch of unshrunk cloth "lifting up its fulness from the garment" (i.e. shrinking, Matt 9.16); of Christ's fulness from which believers have received (John 1.16), which contextually may refer to his grace; of the fulness of the Gentiles (Rom 11.12), probably a reference to their full inclusion in the believing community (the elect); of love being a "fulfilling" of the law (Rom 13.10); and of the "fulness" of time (Gal 4.4). Fowl notes that πλήρωμα also had a wide range of meanings in secular Hellenistic literature, though he asserts that it generally indicated completeness and unity.¹¹⁶ Overfield summarises the secular use of πλήρωμα as "(i) the content of an object, (ii) the fulness, completeness, unity, inclusiveness or perfection of something, and (iii) the complement of an object."¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Fowl, *The Story of Christ*, 114; Lohse, *Colossians*, 57; Mündlerlein, "Die Erwählung durch die Pleroma: Bemerkungen zu Kol 1.19," *NTS* 8 (1961-62) 272.

¹¹⁴ Houlden, *Letters from Prison*, 172; Kehl, *Der Christushymnus*, 120-23; Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 222 n. 191; Moule *Colossians*, 164-69; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 52-53; Percy, *Probleme*, 76, n. 22; Schweizer, *Colossians*, 77.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Fowl, *The Story of Christ*, 116.

¹¹⁶ *The Story of Christ*, 115.

¹¹⁷ "Pleroma," 388.

Some argue that πλήρωμα is being used here in the common gnostic sense of divine emanations.¹¹⁸ While πλήρωμα was a technical term in later Valentinian Gnosticism, and referred to the emanations which came from God,¹¹⁹ as was noted earlier, Overfield and others have shown that this is not the way in which πλήρωμα is being used in the hymn or in the rest of Colossians.¹²⁰ The repetition of the phrase in 2.9 might, however, have polemical significance in the response to the Colossian opponents who were advocating a placating of angelic or cosmic powers which were perceived as having semi-divine status, or were in some manner supernatural intermediaries. The writer, immediately after warning the Colossians not to let themselves be led astray from Christ according to the "elements of the world," quotes from the hymn, reminding them that *all* the fulness of deity dwells in Christ (and hence not in any other cosmic beings).

Rather than look to gnostic theology for the background to the term πλήρωμα in v. 19, as Gibbs notes "there appears to be no reason to go beyond a Septuagintal background for this concept."¹²¹ The idea of completeness or fulness is often seen in the use of πλήρωμα in the LXX.¹²² The verbal form πληρώω is used to refer to God's presence in the universe (Ps 71.19; Jer.23.24), and the cognate πλήρης is used to refer to God's glory filling the earth (Isa 6.3) and the temple (Ezek 43.5, 44.4).¹²³

The verb κατοικέω is used in the LXX, particularly in Deuteronomy, of God choosing a place where his name could dwell (Deut 12.5, 11; 14.23; 16.2; 26.2). There may also be a Septuagintal connection in the use of the verb εὐδοκέω, which is used of God's good pleasure (Ps 43.3; 147.11; 149.4) and of the divine election (Ps 151.5). There are some instances where the verbs εὐδοκέω and κατοικέω (found in Col 1.19) occur together (Ps 67.17; cp. Ps 131.13; Isa 8.18; 49.20).

After noting these uses of πλήρωμα, κατοικέω, and εὐδοκέω in the LXX, O'Brien observes "these three lines converge at Colossians 1.19 in the person of Christ...He is the 'place' (note the emphatic position of ἐν αὐτῷ) in whom God in all his fulness was pleased to take up his residence."¹²⁴ While 1.19 is not an easy verse to

¹¹⁸ Käsemann, for example, comments on v. 19 "Not only is God no longer actually being spoken of; there is no thought of him at all, because the Redeemer is to appear as the divine epiphany. The subject [of εὐδόκησεν κατοικῆσαι], therefore is Pleroma, the all-embracing, all-uniting fullness of the new aeon" ("A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy," 158).

¹¹⁹ For examples, see Delling, *TDNT* 6.297; Lohse, *Colossians*, 57.

¹²⁰ Moule also gives several sound arguments against this interpretation, *Colossians*, 166-67.

¹²¹ *Creation and Redemption*, 108; contra Delling who says "the statements in Col go much further than the Jewish statements" (*TDNT* 6.303).

¹²² 1 Chron 16.32; Ps 95.11; 97.17; Jer 8.16; 29.2; Ezek 12.19; 19.7; 30.12.

¹²³ O'Brien, *Colossians*, 52.

¹²⁴ *Colossians*, 53. On the use of these LXX terms in the affirmation of Christ's revelation of the fulness of God, see also J. Ernst, *Pleroma und Pleroma Christi* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1970);

exegete, apparently the author is using biblical language to affirm that in Christ, the completeness of deity is revealed (dwells) in bodily form. This then extends the Christology of the hymn well beyond the pre-existence and cosmic superiority articulated in vv. 15-18.

The hymn concludes with an affirmation of Christ's soteriological work of reconciliation.¹²⁵ I will now give a brief overview of the nature of reconciliation affirmed in v. 20, but will give a much fuller analysis of reconciliation in the next chapter in which I discuss the application of the hymn in 1.15-20 to the paraenesis in 1.21-23.

With the affirmation of reconciliation in Col 1.20, there is an implication that the created world is alienated from God. This alienation is not explained, though some Pauline passages do refer to a cosmic alienation. Rom 8.19-23 in particular (cp. 1 Cor 15.24-28) teaches that with the entrance of sin into the world through Adam, not only the human race but the entire created world "was subjected to futility" (Rom 8.20). *Ἀποκαταλλάσσω* is a rare NT term (appearing only here and in Eph 2.15), though *καταλλάσσω* is a notable Pauline term, and plays a significant role in Pauline and NT theology.¹²⁶ The compounded form found here could serve to emphasise the completeness and thoroughness of the cosmic peace Christ achieved through his work on the cross, and thus would be an emphatic use of the preposition.¹²⁷ Another

Kehl, *Christushymnus*, 123; Lohse, *Colossians*, 58-59; Munderlein, "Die Erwählung durch die Pleroma," 260-72.

¹²⁵ On the doctrine of reconciliation in Colossians and the Pauline literature in general, see Cilliers Breytenbach, *Versöhnung. Eine Studie zur paulinischen Soteriologie*, WMANT 60 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1989); F. Büchsel, "καταλλάσσω, ἀποκαταλλάσσω," *TDNT* 1.254-59; Bultmann, *Theology*, 285-87; J. Dupont, *La Réconciliation dans la théologie de Saint Paul* (Paris: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1953); Joseph Fitzmyer, "Reconciliation in Pauline Theology," in *No Famine in the Land*, ed. by James Flanagan and Anita W. Robinson (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975) 155-77; Ernst Käsemann, "Some Thoughts on the Theme 'The Doctrine of Reconciliation in the New Testament,'" in *The Future of Our Religious Past*, ed. by James M. Robinson, trans. by C. E. Carlston and R. P. Scharlemann (London: SCM, 1971) 49-64; Johann Michl, "Die 'Versöhnung' (Kol 1,20)," *ThQ* 128 (1948) 35-42; I. Howard Marshall, "The Meaning of 'Reconciliation,'" in *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology*, ed. by Robert Guelich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 117-32; R. P. Martin, *Reconciliation*, esp. 48-67, 111-26; P. T. O'Brien, "Col 1:20 and the Reconciliation of All Things," *RTR* 33 (1974) 45-53; Vincent Taylor, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation. A Study in New Testament Theology* (London: Macmillan, 1952) 70-98.

¹²⁶ Martin believes reconciliation lies at the centre of Pauline theology (*Reconciliation*, 3-6, 235-42). Vincent Taylor in his classic work on the atonement states "The best New Testament word to describe the purpose of the Atonement is Reconciliation...Reconciliation has the advantage of including in its meaning all that is covered by the words 'redemption' and 'forgiveness,' and, at the same time, of emphasising the thought of the restoration of personal relationships, which have become distorted and broken, and of their permanent security in an ever deepening fellowship between God and men" (*The Atonement in New Testament Teaching*, 3rd ed. [London: Epworth, 1958] 191).

¹²⁷ On the emphatic use of *ἀπο* in this verb, see Blass and Debrunner, *Grammar*, 166, § 318; Bruce, *Colossians*, 74; M. Harris, *Colossians*, 50; Stanley Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994) 141.

explanation for the use of the unusual compound verb ἀποκαταλλάσσω is that the preposition ἀπό indicates a change back to a former condition.¹²⁸

There are numerous views regarding the nature of the reconciliation in v. 20. Some see a universal reconciliation of all humans articulated in this verse.¹²⁹ It is important to note, however, that when the hymn is applied in 1.21-22 to the Colossian believers, nothing is stated regarding redemption for unbelieving humanity, and in the admonition to continue in the faith (v. 23) it is inferred that if they do not continue in the faith, the blessings of a holy and blameless presentation before God (v. 22b) will not be experienced. An additional argument against a universal salvation reading of v. 20 is the announcement of the coming (future) wrath of God because of fleshly vices (3.5-6). The clear implication is that God's wrath will someday fall on those whose lives are characterised by such behaviour (note that the Colossians who were formerly in the group destined for wrath are characterised as once "walking" and "living"¹³⁰ in those sins). It is quite unlikely that the author would have quoted the hymn in this form if it taught a universal salvation which he later denies in the same epistle.¹³¹

Schlier on the other hand, argues that the reconciliation of v. 20 applies only to the evil cosmic entities, for 2.15 indicates that they are the ones disarmed through the cross, and are thus the alienated beings in need of reconciliation.¹³² This intriguing interpretation fails to adequately account for the description of the objects of reconciliation in 1.20, viz., "all things." Since this reconciliation is said to apply to both the things on earth and the things in heaven (v. 20b), it is not possible exegetically to limit the reconciliation to angelic or cosmic beings.

Other exegetes note that since καταλλάσσω is normally applied only to persons (though occasionally it is applied in the context of logic or accounting), it is a self-limiting verb, and indicates nothing more than the reconciliation of those beings which can be reconciled. The "things on the earth" then refers to humans, the "things in heaven" refers to angelic beings.¹³³ This model does not solve all of the difficulties created by this text, for other NT passages speak of human beings, not angels being

¹²⁸ P. Beasley-Murray, "Col 1:15-20," 178-79; Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 159-60.

¹²⁹ Joseph Sittler, "Called to Unity," *The Ecumenical Review* 14 (1961-62) 177-87.

¹³⁰ The imperfect form ἐζήτε emphasises the on-going nature of this behaviour. O'Brien says the use of ζάω here "draws attention to a continuing state with its fixed attitudes" (*Colossians*, 186).

¹³¹ See also W. D. Crockett, "Universalism and the Theology of Paul" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Glasgow, 1986). Crockett also concludes that this text does not support universalism, and argues that the hymnic redactions and the judgment language elsewhere in Colossians restrict the cosmic scope of reconciliation in 1.20. For a helpful survey of universal redemption and Col 1.15-20, see Schweizer, *Colossians*, 260-76.

¹³² *Principalities and Powers*, 14-15.

¹³³ Michl, "Die Versöhnung," 442-62.

reconciled. It also seems to stretch the limits of τὰ πάντα, for if the author had intended to identify only humans and angels, this is a very unusual phrase to use to do so.

Yet other exegetes have suggested that reconciliation is being used in a broader sense than it is in the Pauline literature, for in Pauline texts reconciliation is applied to human beings, not to the whole of creation (Eph 1.10 is cosmic, and is probably based on Col 1.20). Given the fact that Paul indicates the whole of creation was "subjected to vanity" and enslaved at the fall (Rom 8.18-24), implying cosmic alienation and disruption of the created order, several exegetes believe reconciliation in v. 20 refers to the restoration of the original cosmic order. This is said to be a restoration in which heaven and earth are "returned to their divinely created and determined order" through the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, and the universe is again placed under its proper head, Christ.¹³⁴ Other NT passages indicate that the cosmic alienation will be alleviated. In the Christological hymn in Phil 2.10-11, which draws on Isa 45.23-24, the author asserts that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. 1 Cor 15.24-27 says the end will come when all things are put in subjection under Christ.

In 1.20 the entire cosmos is said to be reconciled to God based on Christ's work on the cross. This involves a return of the creation to its original order, which involves having Christ in his rightful place as head. That this also involves an anthropological reconciliation is seen in vv. 21-23, where the author reminds the Colossians that not only is the universe out of order and some cosmic spirits alienated from God (cp. 2.15), but they themselves were formerly alienated from God, but have subsequently experienced reconciliation achieved by Christ through their acceptance of the gospel. The message of cosmic and personal reconciliation accomplished by Christ which is affirmed in 1.20 is quite pertinent to the Colossian opponents. The Colossian believers needed to follow no other cultic rituals to appease God or the cosmic powers. On the contrary, full provision for reconciliation of the cosmic powers as well as human beings is said to have been made by Christ.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ O'Brien, *Colossians*, 54-55; also Beasley-Murray, "Col 1:15-20," 178-79; Bruce, *Colossians*, 74-75; Moule, *Colossians*, 71; Schweizer, *Colossians*, 79-81. Beasley-Murray argues that the preposition ἀπό used here with the verb καταλλάσσω indicates "a restoration or re-establishing of the relationship which was lost." He points to a similar use of ἀπό in Acts 3.21 ("Col 1:15-20," 178-79).

¹³⁵ There is a certain eschatological tension here, as is also seen in 3.1-4, for in some sense the cosmos and humans are said to have been reconciled, but at the same time the author speaks of the Colossians' experience of alienation toward God as being a very recent experience, occurring after the death and resurrection of Christ. The cosmic powers are also spoken of as being disarmed at the cross (2.15), but the ultimate restoration of cosmic order and submission to Christ is elsewhere conceived as

The reconciliation affirmed in the hymn has clear ethical implications. Since Christ is supreme over all creation, and through his work on the cross has reconciled the entire created order, putting it back into its place under his rulership, human believers should be living under his lordship. In fact, the author of Colossians applies this portion of the hymn to the Colossians in 1.22-23, and repeatedly calls them to live under the lordship of Christ (1.10; 2.6; 3.11, 17, 22-23).

In terms of the use of Jewish Wisdom speculation in the Colossian hymn, it should be noted that reconciliation is not attributed to Wisdom in the Jewish literature. In *I Enoch* 42 and 49.1-4 Wisdom is described as present at the beginning of creation, but not finding a dwelling place on earth she returned to heaven to dwell permanently with the angels. In the last times she reappears and her spirit will dwell in the Son of Man who will execute judgment. Lohse notes these texts and their supposed relevance to the imagery of Col 1.15-20. He says *I Enoch* 49.1-4 indicates "Wisdom is not only the mediatrix of creation but also of salvation, and cosmology and soteriology are related to one another in the myth of Wisdom."¹³⁶ Again, there are very significant differences between Wisdom and Christ which Lohse fails to note. Cosmologically, Wisdom did not (or could not, possibly owing to neo-Platonic metaphysics which deprecated the physical world) dwell with the creation, whereas Christ not only came to earth, but accomplished reconciliation through the rudest of physical entities, namely the cross (v. 20b). Additionally, while in *I Enoch*, Wisdom does have a role in apocalyptic judgment (as does Christ), this is very different from the salvific role Christ played in reconciling the creation. Wisdom is pictured as enacting cosmic judgment, Christ as producing cosmic peace.

IV. Summary

In this chapter it is argued that part of the author's response to the Colossian opponents is found in the use of the Christological hymn in 1.15-20. While the exact nature of early church hymns is disputed due to numerous gaps in our knowledge of early church liturgy, this pericope does exhibit hymnic characteristics, particularly evidenced in the parallel members in the two primary strophes (vv. 15-16, 18b-20) which flank a middle bridge strophe (vv. 17-18a). The precise origin of the hymn is

future (Rom 8.21-4; 1 Cor 15.24-8; cp. Col 3.6.). Similarly, Eph 1.10 declares that Christ unites all things in himself, and yet the Ephesian believers are told they must continue in the present to fight against the demonic powers (6.12).

¹³⁶ *Colossians*, 48.

difficult to determine, but may well have been written before the rest of the epistle, and is quoted (and possibly altered for clarity) because it was true to the Christological tradition the Colossians had received and accepted, and would provide an anchor against which to avoid spiritual defection in the face of the Colossian opposition (1.22-23).

The hymn itself, through a series of predications, affirms and praises the person and work of Christ. The hymn uses Jewish Wisdom language in the first strophe to affirm Christ as physical manifestation of God, his pre-eminence over creation, his pre-existence, and his role in creating the entire created world. The second strophe again praises Christ's pre-eminence and probably his pre-existence, expanding on the first strophe by affirming his role as sustainer of all things and detailing his sovereignty not just over the cosmos, but also over the church. The third strophe again affirms Christ's pre-eminence, but carries the praise to Christ considerably farther by affirming him as the one in whom all the divine fulness dwells, and through whom the entire cosmos is reconciled. This involves a restoration of the original order of creation, which in a universal sense applies to the forced surrender of all cosmic and human entities. In anthropological terms, it also relates to the peace with God experienced by human believers as a result of their acceptance of the gospel.

These Christological predications regarding the person and work of Christ were evidently considered germane to the Colossian situation, for the Colossian believers needed to be reminded that if they wanted a revelation of God, it was to be found not in the placating of the cosmic spirits or angels, or through mystical heavenly ascent, but in Christ. In him the fulness of deity dwells in bodily form. Furthermore, they did not need to fear, placate, or seek the mediation of any cosmic beings, for Christ is absolutely pre-eminent over all earthly and cosmic entities. The relevance of the hymn to the Colossian opponents is most apparent in the polemical section of ch. 2, where Paul specifically uses themes from the hymn in his response to the Colossian opponents, most notably in 2.9 (cf. 1.19—Christ is the fulness of deity), in 2.10 (cf. 1.16-18—Christ is pre-eminent over all cosmic and earthly powers), in 2.15 (cf. 1.20—Christ triumphed over the cosmic powers, re-establishing the original world order), and in 2.19 (cf. 1.18a—Christ is the head of the body, the church). Thus while the hymn was probably written by an earlier author, it is used in such a way by the writer of Colossians that it is integral to his response to the Colossian opponents.

Though some exegetes see little relationship between the hymn and the Colossian paraenesis, the reconciliation affirmed in the hymn has clear ethical

implications. Since Christ is supreme over all creation, and through his work on the cross has reconciled the entire created order, putting it back into its place under his rulership, human believers should be living under his lordship. The author of Colossians does apply this portion of the hymn to the Colossians in 1.22-23, and repeatedly calls them to live under the lordship of Christ (1.10; 2.6; 3.11, 17, 22-23).

Chapter Four

Christology and Ethics: Colossians 1-2

I. Christology and Ethics: Introduction

In this chapter the ground and shape of paraenesis in Col 1-2 will be evaluated. In keeping with our definition of NT paraenesis as the broad range of moral exhortation, Col 1.9-12 and 2.6-7 is accepted as paraenetical, and will be examined. Col 1.21-23 is not direct moral exhortation, but has distinct ethical implications, and thus will be examined. A few other passages in ch. 2 (vv. 8, 16, 18, 20-22) might also be described as paraenetical by our definition, since they are hortatory and seek to influence behaviour, but their focus is on cultic behaviour so they are examined in the evaluation of the Colossian opponents.

An analysis of Col 1-2 reveals that each of the paraenetical sections has a clear Christological basis. The Christological bases are described in terms of who Christ is (1.9-12; 2.6-7), as well as soteriologically in terms of what he has done (1.20-23). There are also sections in chs. 3-4 in which paraenesis has a Christological grounding (3.13-17; 23-25; 4.1), but they will be treated in subsequent chapters since they are given in a matrix of traditional material (vice/virtue lists and household codes) which warrant separate attention.

A. Christology and Ethics in the Pauline Literature

It is now generally acknowledged that in the Pauline epistles, including Colossians and Ephesians, Christology and ethics are inextricably linked, for the Christ event provides the basis for spiritual life and moral conduct. Schrage asserts that "the starting point and basis for Paul's ethics is the saving eschatological event of Jesus' death and resurrection, in which God acted, eschatologically and finally, to save the world."¹ Otto Merk, in his detailed monograph *Handeln aus Glauben: die Motivierungen der paulinischen Ethik*, forcefully seeks to demonstrate the foundational role of Christology for Pauline ethics. He concludes that the Pauline ethical foundation is thoroughly Christological, being nothing more than the unfolding of the justifying

¹ *The Ethics of the New Testament*, trans. by David Green (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988) 172.

and reconciling acts of God in Christ.² H. D. Wendland reaches a similar conclusion regarding the foundational role of Christology in the Pauline ethic, for he summarises Pauline theology with the phrase "Das Christus-Heilsgeschehen als Grund und Ziel der Ethik."³

Other authors emphasise the role Christology plays not just in the starting point (i.e., the Christ event and justification), but also in the implementation of Christian ethics. A. B. Alexander notes that "power" is a reoccurring, pivotal theme in the Pauline writings. He argues that spiritual and moral power comes from Christ, initially at salvation, and progressively during sanctification. He says,

It is through the dynamic of the living Christ that the divine life in the Christian first begins; and it is by the same divine energy interfused through the whole personality and dominating at every moment the entire man that the Christian is made forceful and vigorous...But this quality of power is not only the root but also the fruit of the new life.⁴

Alexander goes on to argue that what makes the Pauline ethic unique in the ancient world is the fusion of moral idealism (the behaviour called for) and dynamic force (the power to live out the moral ideals), both of which are Christologically governed.⁵ L. H. Marshall strongly emphasises the foundational role of Christology for the latter (dynamic force) in the Pauline ethic. He states that at the centre of Paul's religious thinking lies the question: "How can I become a genuinely good man?"⁶ He believes the Pauline answer to this question is thoroughly Christological, for all of Paul's ethical teaching arose from his experience of moral and spiritual renewal in Christ. Thus "God's revelation in Christ was the root of his life as a Christian man and of all the demands which he made on others as a Christian apostle and teacher."⁷

R. E. O. White is reluctant to summarise or identify foundational principles of the Pauline ethic, for he believes the richness of Pauline thought renders such attempts at best artificial.⁸ After acknowledging this perceived difficulty, he asserts that the clue to understanding the "changing continuity" of the Pauline ethic is found in Paul's

² "Alles Begründen ethischer Weisungen ist für den Apostel nichts anderes als die Entfaltung des rechtfertigenden und versöhnenden Handelns Gottes [in Christus]," 247-48.

³ *Ethik des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978) 49.

⁴ *The Ethics of St. Paul* (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1910) 354.

⁵ *Ethics of Paul*, 356. Thus he concludes "the 'Christ in me' is at once the ideal and the spring of the new life" (357).

⁶ *The Challenge of New Testament Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1950) 246.

⁷ Marshall, *New Testament Ethics*, 246.

⁸ *Biblical Ethics* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1979) 157.

development of the "mind of Christ."⁹ He describes the ethical significance of the "mind of Christ" as follows:

The Christian goes forward into new situations, to face novel problems, striving to be loyal to the Christ of history, but walking in the company of the ascended Lord, prompted always in mind and moral judgment by the indwelling Spirit of Jesus.¹⁰

Thus while White questions the validity of categorising the Pauline ethic, he has given a description which is Christological in terms of both the ethical goal and the energising force. As the same time, White illustrates the fact that scholars have quite different understandings of what "Christological" means.

Furnish also emphasises the diversity of Pauline thought, and maintains that the Pauline ethic cannot be neatly summarised or descriptively labelled.¹¹ He does, however, concede that Christology is integral to Paul's ethical teachings, which he describes as "compounded of the apostle's theological, eschatological, and christological convictions."¹² Allen Verhey argues in a similar vein that the Pauline ethic cannot be summarised, since Paul gives no clear analysis of moral decision making.¹³ He does venture to say that "discernment is always done in view of God's eschatological action in Jesus, his gift and demand of a new life."¹⁴ Hence one can say little more than that the Pauline ethic is always found within the ambit of Christology.

Others argue that while the Pauline literature is quite diverse and occasional, broad ethical principles can still be discerned relative to the foundation for Christian ethics. One means of evaluating the basis for ethics in the NT is to examine the specific motivational appeals in paraenetical material. Prosper Grech did such a study, and identifies eleven categories of motivation in Paul's ethical statements, including appeal to common sense, appeal to a sense of shame, social reasons, reward or punishment, pleasing and displeasing God, scriptural authority, appeal to the believer's present state,

⁹ It is curious that White places such significance on a phrase (*νοῦς Χριστοῦ*) which is found only once in the entire New Testament (1 Cor 2.16).

¹⁰ *Biblical Ethics*, 187.

¹¹ Furnish arrives at this conclusion for two reasons. First of all, he notes that the Pauline epistles are thoroughly occasional, and always offer *ad hoc* exhortations. Secondly, Paul does not develop a systematic theology or ethic, and fails to give "a systematic analysis of the ground, motives, forms, or goals of Christian conduct" (*Theology and Ethics*, 210-11). While Paul does not offer a "systematic analysis" in the sense of a casuistic ethical scheme, and his epistles are thoroughly occasional, it seems that Furnish has prematurely aborted the search for broad principles giving coherence to the Pauline ethic, for the ground, motives, forms, and goals of Christian conduct are given with repetition in various epistles which have widely differing occasions.

¹² *Theology and Ethics*, 213.

¹³ *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 111.

¹⁴ *The Great Reversal*, 111.

redemptio-historical, eschatological, ecclesiological, and Christological motivations.¹⁵ He demonstrates that the latter Christological motive (which he defines as a motivation to ethical action by direct reference to the person of Christ, either based on the believer's relationship to Christ or based on the believer's imitation of Christ) is widespread and deep-seated in the Pauline literature.¹⁶ Hieronymous Cruz also evaluates motivation in Pauline paraenesis, but restricts his study to the Christological motives. He concludes that of all the motives employed by Paul, the Christological motives are the most numerous, fundamental, and weighty. He believes that the Christology developed in Rom 6.4-10; Col 2.11-14, 20; 3.1-4; and Phil 2.5-11 provides the fundamental motives for the entire paraenetical section of these three epistles.¹⁷

Working in a broader framework, Ferdinand Hahn examines the Christological foundations given for the paraenetical material throughout the NT epistles.¹⁸ He summarises his findings by asserting that there is direct continuity between early and later (later canonical that is) Christian paraenesis, with the later paraenesis expounding on earlier instruction to Christians regarding life in faith with its consequent responsibilities. Most importantly, he says that in earlier and later canonical material, the early Christian paraenesis was always given in the context of the preaching of the gospel, and thus always had a Christological foundation.¹⁹ While most would acknowledge the Christological foundation of ethics in early Christian writings in which the parousia or imminent kingdom of God are dominant themes, Hahn asserts that various passages, particularly Eph 4-6, demonstrate the foundational role of Christology in the present ("der wiederkommende Christus ist der gegenwärtige Herr"²⁰). Thus Hahn contends that Christology is consistently foundational to early Christian ethics. Hahn's thesis will be evaluated in this chapter through the examination of the role of Christology in the ethic of Col 1-2.

¹⁵ "Christological Motives in Pauline Ethics," in *Paul de Tarse, Série Monographique De Benedictina, Section Paulinienne*, ed. by Lorenzo De Lorenzi (Rome: Abbaye de St. Paul, 1979) 542-58. Grech includes Colossians and Ephesians in this study, for he believes they are Pauline.

¹⁶ Texts demonstrating an ethical motivation based on the believer's relationship with Christ are said to include: 1 Cor 1.13; 3.23; 5.7; 6.12-20; 7.21-24; 8.11-13; 10.14-22; 11.5; 2 Cor 5.13-15; 6.1. Texts demonstrating an ethical motivation based on the believer's imitation of Christ are said to include: 1 Cor 10.32-11.1; 2 Cor 1.17-22; 8.9; 13.2-4; Rom 15.2-6, 7-9; Eph 4.32-5.2; 5.21-32; Phil 2.1-6; 4.8; Col 3.13.

¹⁷ *Christological Motives*, 438-39.

¹⁸ "Die christologische Begründung urchristlicher Paränese," *ZNW* 72 (1981) 88-99.

¹⁹ "Sie entfaltet nur, was in der christlichen Unterweisung für ein Leben in Glauben und Verantwortung von Anfang an implizit oder teilweise auch schon explizit enthalten war. Eine Paränese hat es im Urchristentum ohne Zusammenhang mit der Botschaft des Evangeliums und somit ohne eine christologische Begründung nie gegeben" ("Die christologische Begründung," 99).

²⁰ "Die christologische Begründung," 94.

B. Christology and Ethics in Colossians

Varied proposals have been given regarding the relationship between Christology and ethics in Colossians. J. T. Sanders strongly contradicts Hahn, Grech, Merk *et al.*, for Sanders sees little or no relationship between theology and ethics in Colossians, be it Christology or soteriology.²¹ Few now agree with Sanders' radical disjunction between Christology and ethics in Colossians. Conversely many exegetes assert that Christology plays an even larger role in the paraenesis of Colossians than it does in the Pauline *homologoumena*.

Siegfried Schulz, for example, concludes that Colossians stands in the Pauline tradition, but says that in spite of points of agreement with the genuine Pauline literature, Colossians evidences deviations from the Pauline *homologoumena* in terminology as well as the ethic that results from the terminology.²² With respect to Christology, Schulz asserts that the ethic of Colossians departs from the Pauline ethic in presenting Christ as the one who has already attained victory over the rulers and authorities, and thus the members of his body are already participating in cosmic triumph. This is said to depart from the foundation of Paul's ethic in which the Spirit creates, constitutes, and holds together the Christian life.²³ Thus Schulz believes Colossians contains an ethic that is even more Christologically grounded than the ethic found in the undisputed Pauline literature.

Schrage does not see as many dissimilarities between the ethic of Paul and the author of Colossians, but also states that the latter places a greater emphasis on the present lordship of Christ than did Paul. He asserts that Christology "plays an important role not only in laying a foundation but also by establishing guidelines."²⁴

As I exegete several ethical texts in Colossians I will seek to demonstrate my agreement with Schrage that Christology plays a pivotal role in the foundation and

²¹ *Ethics*, 68-81. Sanders states "the main theme of Colossians is the opposition of 'heresy' (2.8-23). Thus there is in Colossians no inner coherence between theology and ethics as it appears in Ephesians" (*Ethics*, 79). It is amazing that Sanders identifies "opposition to heresy" as the theme of Colossians and then fails to acknowledge the Christological defence given in view of the "heresy," for the author's defence forms a solid link between theology and ethics in Colossians.

²² "Zwar ist nicht zu leugnen, daß die Theologie des Kol. in der paulinischen Schultradition steht, aber der tiefgreifende Wandel von Paulus zum Kol. hat seine Spuren hinterlassen. Trotz aller Berührungspunkte mit den Paulinen hat diese in der Sache abweichende Terminologie auch ihre Konsequenzen für die Ethik des Kol" (*Neutestamentliche Ethik, Züricher Grundrisse zur Bibel* [Zürich: Theologischer, 1987] 560).

²³ *Neutestamentliche Ethik*, 558.

²⁴ *Ethics of the NT*, 249.

shape of ethics. Since my focus is on the paraenetical material in Colossians and not in the other Pauline or deutero-Pauline epistles, I will not attempt to validate or disprove the assertion that the Colossian ethic is more Christological than the ethic of the undisputed Pauline epistles. It should be noted in passing, however, that if my characterisation of the Colossian opponents is correct, and the opponents (from the author's perspective) threatened Christian practice and in some manner Christology itself, then one would expect the epistle to give significant treatment to ethics and Christology, and even to link them. This is precisely what is found in Colossians, for Christology and moral behaviour are directly linked in 1.9-10, 20-23; 2.6-7; 3.13-17, 23-25.

The vast majority of commentators who have written on NT ethics discuss the obvious ethical injunctions in 3.5-4.6, and most note the theological basis for ethics found in the dying/rising with Christ motif in 2.12-13 and 3.1-4. A much smaller number, however, detail the Christological foundation given to ethics in the remainder of Col 1-2.²⁵ Hence I will place a special emphasis on Col 1-2, and will begin my examination of the relationship of Christology and ethics in Colossians by looking at the ethical implications of 1.9-10.

II. Exegetical Examination of Paraenetical Passages in Colossians 1-2

A. A Worthy Walk: 1.9-12

This text occurs in the thanksgiving portion of the epistle. Epistolary research has shown that the Pauline epistles (including Colossians and Ephesians) largely follow standard Greco-Roman epistolary structure and normally contain five structural components: salutation, thanksgiving, body, paraenesis, and closing.²⁶ Paul Schubert and P. T. O'Brien, who have written the most significant monographs on the Pauline

²⁵ For example, Otto Merk in his comprehensive study of Pauline ethics deals exclusively with Col 3.1-4.6 in his chapter on the Colossian Epistle (*Handeln aus Glauben*, 201-24). Other writers on NT ethics who also fail to treat the ethical statements in the first two chapters of Colossians, include Sanders (*Ethics*, 68-81) and Rudolf Schnackenburg (*The Moral Teaching of the New Testament*, trans. by J. Holland-Smith and W. J. O'Hara [London: Burns & Oates, 1965] 261-306). Cruz, surprisingly, fails to treat the Christological motives in 1.10, 20-23; 2.6-7, yet deals with 2.11-13, a section most would not consider paraenetical (*Christological Motives*, 154-62). Though his treatment of Colossians/Ephesians is fairly brief, Schrage does not make this mistake, and deals with some of the ethical statements and foundations in the first two chapters of Colossians (*The Ethics of the NT*, 244-56).

²⁶ Robert Funk seems to have made this original observation (*Language, Hermeneutics and the Word of God* [New York: Harper and Row, 1966] 270); cf. also Cannon, *Traditional Materials*, 136-74; W. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973) 27-43; John Lee White, *The Body of the Greek Letter* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1972) 45. On the use of the thanksgiving epistolary component in Hellenistic Judaism, cf. 2 Macc 1.10ff.

thanksgivings, both emphasise the epistolary function of the thanksgiving. In other words, it serves to focus the epistolary situation by introducing the vital themes of the letter.²⁷ Important introductory themes found in the Colossian thanksgiving period include faith in Christ (introduced in 1.5, developed in 1.23; 2.5, 12), love (introduced in 1.4, developed in 2.2; 3.8, 12-14, 19), hope which is waiting in heaven (introduced in 1.5, developed in 1.23, 27; cp. 3.1-4), the true gospel they had heard and received (introduced in 1.6, developed in 1.25-29; 2.6, 8), a knowledge of God and the will of God (introduced in 1.9,10, developed in 1.26-28; 2.2-4; 4.12), and a walk worthy of the Lord characterised by good works (introduced in 1.10, developed in 1.28; 2.5-7, 18-20; 3.5-17).

Of these five themes, the final two (knowledge of God and his will and a worthy walk) are certainly the most significant in this epistle. Sappington's helpful elaboration of the significance of revelation in view of the Colossian opponents was noted in the chapter on the opponents,²⁸ along with the way in which divine revelation is highlighted in this epistle (1.9, 24-29; 2.2-7, especially the retrospective ἵνα clause in 2.4a which points back to divine revelation as the author's defence against the Colossians being led astray by the opponents). The lengthy paraenetical section clearly demonstrates the significance in this epistle of a worthy walk evidenced by good works, and three verses specifically highlight this theme using the same "walk" metaphor (2.6; 3.7; 4.5).

Both of these dominant themes (knowledge of God's will and a worthy walk) occur in the intercessory portion of the thanksgiving section. The first is found in the ἵνα clause and is probably polemical, since the revelatory language found in Colossians reflects a Jewish apocalyptic influence, similar to the ideology found in the Jewish apocalyptic literature. Apparently, the opponents were espousing visionary experiences as a means of gaining divine revelation. The use of fulness language also marks a polemical intent, as is evidenced by fulness language elsewhere in the epistle,²⁹ particularly in 2.9, 10 where the writer declares that spiritual completeness (fulness) is

²⁷ O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings*, 262; Schubert, *Pauline Thanksgivings*, 24. See also Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, 32. Utilising Aristotelian epistolary structure, J. G. van der Watt also argues that in Col 1.3-12 the author introduces the key themes of the epistle ("Colossians 1.3-12 Considered as an Exordium," *J of Theol for Southern Africa* 57 [1986] 32-42).

²⁸ Cp. the role of revelation in Wis 7.15; 16.1; Sir 14.11.

²⁹ πληρώω is used in 1.9, 25; 2.10; 4.12, 17; πληρωμα in 1.19; 2.9; πληροφορία in 2.2; πάντες οἱ θεσάυροι; in 2.3. Admittedly, fulness language is not unusual in Pauline prayers (1 Cor 1.5; Phil 1.9; 4.19; 1 Thess 3.12; cp. 2 Thess 1.3) but the polemical use of this language elsewhere in this epistle, as well as the nature of the thanksgiving period itself, in which subjects are introduced which will be developed later in the body portion of the letter, lead us to conclude that the use of πληρώω here is polemical (so O'Brien, *Colossians*, 20; cf. also Pokorný, *Colossians*, 46, who says the fulness language here may be influenced by its use in ch. 2).

found only in Christ (v. 10) who is the fulness of deity in bodily form (v. 9), in contradistinction to the opponents who advocated ascetic practice and submission to the cosmic spirits as a means of attaining spiritual fulness (2.8).

In addition to introducing the dominant themes of the epistle, the other main function of the thanksgiving period noted by Schubert and affirmed by O'Brien is the paraenetical function, in which implicitly or explicitly the readers are called to a certain kind of behaviour.³⁰ This function is not surprising, since one would expect some of the author's prayer requests to reflect behavioural matters he would naturally want the readers to act on (cp. Phil 1.9-11 and 1.27; 2.1-3, 12, 15; 4.2, 8). With the introduction of the final introductory theme in Col 1.10 in the form of an infinitival clause (περιπατῆσαι ἀξίως τοῦ κυρίου), the paraenetical function is made explicit. Syntactically, this infinitival clause is used to express the result or purpose of the ἵνα clause in v. 9. In other words, the writer asks for them to be filled with a knowledge of God's will in order that or with the result that they might walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.³¹

This verse (1.10) has several important ethical implications. That it is dealing with Christian ethics is beyond dispute. The verb περιπατέω is often used metaphorically in the Pauline tradition to indicate way of life or behaviour (Rom 6.4; 8.1; 13.13; 1 Cor 3.3; Eph 2.2, 10; 4.17; Phil 3.17; 1 Thess 4.1, -12; 2 Thess 3.6). Περιπατέω is most likely a Hebraism, and is used in the LXX for translating הלך, when used of ethical conduct.³² It is a foundational ethical term in the Pauline and

³⁰ O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings*, 101; Schubert, *Pauline Thanksgivings*, 89. O'Brien also adds two other functions, viz., didactic and pastoral, though the former as he describes it does not appear to be distinct from the epistolary. Doty contends (contra Schubert) that more recent researchers have asserted not the paraenetical but the liturgical function of the thanksgiving period (esp. J. M. Robinson, "Die Hodajot-Formel in Gebet und Hymnus des Frühchristentums," in *Apophoreta*, ed. by W. Eltester [Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964] 194-235 and J. T. Sanders, "The Transition from Opening Epistolary Thanksgiving to Body in the Letters of the Pauline Corpus," *JBL* 8 [1962] 348-62). Doty has confused form and function, for Robinson's point is not that the entire thanksgiving period is liturgical, but that the end of the thanksgiving period is marked by a formula of injunction and the use of liturgical material to replace the traditional Jewish beracha at the close of the prayer (Sanders, "Opening Epistolary Thanksgiving," 361; Cannon, *Traditional Materials*, 142-48). Thus subsequent research has not replaced the paraenetical function of the thanksgiving period with a liturgical, but has added the latter.

³¹ The infinitive of purpose and the infinitive of result are similar, and it is difficult to determine which use is intended here. O'Brien (*Colossians*, 22) and the NIV and NASV translations opt for the former, while Lightfoot (*Colossians*, 137) and the JB and GNB translations affirm the latter.

³² Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 94; H. Seesemann, "πατέω," *TDNT* 5.944. In the LXX, cf. Ex 21.19; 4 Kings 20.3; Prov 6.22; 8.20; Eccl 4.15; 11.9. In the Qumran literature, cf. 1QS 1.8; 3.21. While περιπατέω is occasionally used in the LXX metaphorically to translate הלך, πορεύομαι is used in this manner much more frequently (Deut 5.33; 8.6; 10.12; 4 Kings 22.2; 23.3; Ps 100.6; 118.1; Zech 3.8). Banks believes Paul's metaphorical use of περιπατέω was influenced by Pharisaical teachings, by his own understanding of the Christian life as progressive, and by his peripatetic ministry ("Walking' as a Metaphor of the Christian Life: The Origins of a Significant Pauline Usage," in *Perspectives on Language and Text*, FS Francis I. Andersen, ed. by Edgar W. Conrad and Edward G. Newing [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987] 303-13).

deutero-Pauline literature, where it is used 31 times to describe the Christian life or moral behaviour. Joseph Holloway asserts that περιπατέω is a cardinal thematic marker for Pauline ethics, and that the themes περιπατέω introduces are central to Paul's understanding of the Christian life.³³ Our development of Col 1.10 and 2.6 will demonstrate our agreement with Holloway's thesis (at least as applied to Col 1-2).

As for specific ethical principles, several significant observations can be made. First, *the basis for ethics is revelational*, for the worthy walk is said to result from being filled with the knowledge of the divine will. The author specifically prays that the Colossians might be filled with a knowledge of God's will so that their moral behaviour might be worthy of Christ. In other words, knowledge of the divine will is described as prerequisite to Christian ethics. This stands in marked contrast to the ethical model of the opponents who advocated an ascetic lifestyle (2.16-18, 20-23) with the hope of obtaining divine revelation through the attainment of heavenly visions (2.18; cf. also 2.2-3).³⁴

The nature of this revelation also appears to be markedly different from that espoused by the opponents, for the writer speaks of knowledge in concrete, practical terms, whereas the knowledge of the opponents would probably have been esoteric, subjective, and egocentric since it is alleged to be based on personal revelatory experiences which were intrinsically unverifiable.³⁵

Secondly, the development of Christian ethics is shown to be Christological, for the desired behaviour is defined as "worthy of the Lord." There is no question that the noun κύριος used in this phrase refers to Christ.³⁶ Harris notes that as a general rule, Paul distinguishes between Christ and Yahweh when using the noun κύριος by placing the former in an articular construction, and the latter in an anarthrous (thus, ὁ κύριος = Christ; κύριος = Yahweh).³⁷ A survey of the Pauline and deutero-Pauline epistles reveals that there are 126 instances in which κύριος unambiguously refers to Christ or Yahweh. Of these 126 uses of κύριος, 21 have Yahweh as the referent. Of these 21

³³ "PERIPATEW as a Thematic Marker for Pauline Ethics," Ph.D. Thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990.

³⁴ For specific references on the qualifications for heavenly revelations in the Jewish apocalyptic literature, cf. Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption*, 63-70. On the relationship between the attainment of revelation and fasting in the ancient world, cf. P. R. Arbesmann, "Fasting and Prophecy in Pagan and Christian Antiquity," *Traditio* 7 (1949-51) 1-71.

³⁵ O'Brien, *Colossians*, 21-22.

³⁶ Contra Merk, *Handeln aus Glauben*, 211.

³⁷ *Colossians*, 31; also M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek Illustrated by Examples* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1966) § 169. Though Robertson concludes "no satisfactory principle can be laid down for the use or non-use of the article with proper names" (*Grammar*, 761) the use of κύριος (which is not technically a proper name, but in this instance is being used as such) is an exception to this rule, as a close examination of its use in the Pauline literature reveals.

uses, all are anarthrous except for three (Rom 15.11; 1 Cor 10.9, 26). Of the 105 uses of κύριος in which Christ is the clear referent, 79 are articular, seventeen are anarthrous but are modified by a preposition³⁸, and only nine are anarthrous without a preposition (Rom 10.9; 1 Cor 10.21 [two occurrences]; 12.3; 2 Cor 4.5; 12.1; Phil 2.11; 3.20; Col 3.17). If one accepts Dana and Mantey's statement in their discussion of the function of the article "the use of prepositions, possessive and demonstrative pronouns, and the genitive case also tends to make a word definite"³⁹, then only five times in the Pauline literature does an anarthrous use of κύριος clearly refer to Christ (the anarthrous uses of κύριος in 1 Cor 10.21; 2 Cor 12.1; Col 3.17 are in the genitive case). Harris' dictum is thus confirmed. In light of this marked Pauline pattern of distinguishing the referent of κύριος through the use of the article, the articular use of κύριος without a preposition in Col 1.10 refers to Christ.

This interpretation is assured by the wording of 2.6, in which the same verb (περιπατέω) is used in the same context (ethical behaviour) and is modified by the same noun (κύριος). The close similarities between these two verses make it most likely that 2.6 is an elaboration on 1.10. Hence since the articular use of κύριος in 2.6 must be Christological (it is further modified by the phrase τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν) there can be little question that the use of κύριος in 1.10 is also Christological.

The nature of the Christological development of moral behaviour is clarified with the use of ἀξίως in 1.10. The ἀξίως word group (which includes the adjective ἀξίος) is used in a wide variety of ways in the NT, often with a comparative genitive or infinitive (Matt 10.37; Luke 15.19, 21). It is used to contrast the superior future glory with the inferior present sufferings (Rom 8.18), to describe appropriate wages (Matt 10.10; Luke 10.7; 1 Tim 5.18), and to denote appropriate punishment (Luke 23.15). The adverb ἀξίως is used infrequently in the Pauline literature, and only in the paraenetical material.⁴⁰ The specific ethical statement that the Christians' behaviour should be worthy of the Lord is not found elsewhere in the Pauline literature, but there are close parallels (Phil 1.27—"let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ"; Eph 4.1—"lead a life worthy of the calling"; 1 Thess 2.12—"to lead a life worthy of God who calls you"; cf. Rom 16.2 "receive her in the Lord as befits the saints"; 1 Cor 11.27—"whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord

³⁸ Rom 1.7; 14.14; 1 Cor 1.3; 7.22; 8.6; 2 Cor 1.2; Gal 1.3; Phil 1.2; 2.19; Col 3.24; 1 Thess 1.1; 4.1, 17; 2 Thess 1.1, 2; 3.12; Phlm 3.

³⁹ *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1957) 137.

⁴⁰ Trummer ("ἀξίως," *EDNT* 1.113) speculates that this may be due to the fact that Paul understood humans to be unworthy before God (Rom 1.18-3.28; cf. Luke 15.19, 21) and thus he only used the adverb ἀξίως in paraenesis, where it is used to designate the goal and motivation of Christian behaviour.

in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord"; cp. 3 John 6-"send them on their journey as befits God's service").

The specific phrase ἀξίως τοῦ κυρίου in Col 1.10 could indicate worthiness which comes from Christ if τοῦ κυρίου is understood as a subjective genitive. This would picture the Christian walk in terms of a gift to be lived out (cf. 2 Cor 3.5-6; 4.1-2; Eph 2.8-10), for Christians are in this case called to live based on worthiness which comes from Christ. If τοῦ κυρίου is understood as an objective genitive, then the Lord would be the object of the behaviour, and thus believers are called to live in a manner which befits or honours Christ. The second interpretation (objective genitive) is indicated by the latter half of v. 10, for "lead a life worthy of the Lord" is modified by the phrase "fully pleasing to him." Thus the moral walk which is worthy of Christ is also fully pleasing to him. In both phrases, Christ is in some manner the object of the believer's behaviour. The idea here is that all behaviour should have Christ in view, it should honour and be suitable to him.⁴¹

With respect to non-canonical literature, Deissmann notes that the phrase ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ is a formula found in inscriptions in the province of Asia, and appears to have been particularly popular in Pergamum.⁴² It is possible that author and his readers were aware of this pagan ethical use of ἀξίως, though this is impossible to verify. If so, Bruce has captured the significance of the phrase περιπατῆσαι ἀξίως τοῦ κυρίου in v. 10. He says this verse, in the light of similar pagan quotations, provokes the observation,

If pagans appreciated the importance of rendering worship which was worthy of the deities whose votives they were, much more should Christians render the spiritual service of obedient lives to the living and true God and to his Son Jesus Christ.⁴³

This interpretation of 1.10 also harmonises neatly with the application of the Colossian hymn, for in the hymn Christ is presented as the one by whom and for whom all things have been created (v. 16), including the principalities and powers which were threatening the faith of the Colossian church. Hence in 1.10 and 1.16 the stated and the implied message appears to be: live a life which honours Christ, in spite of and in the light of false and base objects of veneration which compete with Christ for your loyalty.

⁴¹ Thus Foerster ("ἀξίως," *TDNT* 1.380) and Trummer (*EDNT* 1.113) assert that ἀξίως τοῦ κυρίου in Col 1.10 marks the goal and motivation of all Christian behaviour.

⁴² *Perg.* 248.7ff.; 521; 522.7ff.; *Inscription of Sestos* 87; Deissmann, *Bible Studies*, 248.

⁴³ *Colossians*, 47.

In summary, the phrase "walk worthy of the Lord" shows that ethics in Colossians is Christologically shaped or governed, for an individual's walk (moral behaviour or lifestyle) should be characterised as that which befits or honours the Lord, i.e., Christ. This is a broad statement which encompasses all behaviour. It is likely that this phrase has polemical connotations, and notes behaviour which befits Christ the true Lord, as opposed to the false gods or cosmic powers. Lohse thus correctly notes that "worthy of the Lord" in 1.10 "does not only demand behavior that is worthy and suitable; it binds the conduct of the Christian to undivided obedience to the Kyrios. He is Lord over the powers and principalities, he has received dominion over all things, and he is the Lord over his own."⁴⁴

Since the statement "walk worthy of the Lord" comes in the thanksgiving portion of the epistle, and since the thanksgiving portion typically introduces important themes of the epistle, one might expect to find the subject of the Christological development of ethics elsewhere in Colossians. In fact, this is found in 1.21-23; 2.6-7; 3.13-17, 23-25.

A third ethical principle from this passage is that *appropriate moral behaviour (a worthy walk) will have a specific fourfold expression*, viz., fruit bearing, increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthening with power, and giving thanks to God. Four parallel participles in vv. 10-12⁴⁵ are used to elaborate on the believer's walk which results from a knowledge of the divine will. The parallel structure is indicated by the presence of four consecutive participles, all in the present tense, all modified by a prepositional phrase. Grammatically, these are circumstantial participles (καρποφοροῦντες, ἀξαναόμενοι, δυναμούμενοι, εὐχαριστοῦν) which lend more specific definition to the worthy walk.

The first participle καρποφοροῦντες is probably connected with the preceding phrase ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ. Because the Colossians had accepted the gospel, they could now bear fruit in every good work (cf. 1.6). The Christians' performance of good works is a common moral theme in the Pauline and deuterio-Pauline literature (Rom 13.3; 2 Cor 9.8; Eph 2.10; 1 Thess 2.17; 1 Tim 2.10; 5.10; 2 Tim 2.21; 3.17; Tit 2.7, 14; 3.1). The Colossians' fruit bearing in the form of good works stands in

⁴⁴ Colossians, 28.

⁴⁵ So C. J. Ellicott, *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Philippians, Colossians, and to Philemon, with a Revised Translation* (London: John Parker, 1857) 118-19; Harris, *Colossians*, 28, 32 and O'Brien, *Colossians*, 23; contra Pokorný who asserts that καρποφοροῦντες is primarily connected with ἀξαναόμενοι (cf. the connection between the two verbs in 1.6) and εὐχαριστοῦν is connected primarily with δυναμούμενοι (*Colossians*, 48, 51). Lohmeyer (*Kolossier*, 35), Lohse (*Colossians*, 29), and Martin (*Colossians*, 52) also believe καρποφοροῦντες and ἀξαναόμενοι go together and refer to the source of progress in maturity.

positive moral contrast to their pre-conversion life in which they did evil deeds (1.21; cf. 3.7). The phrase ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ indicates the breadth of the divine moral call upon believers, who are to bear fruit in *every* good work (cf. 3.17).

The next participial phrase ἀύξανόμενοι τῇ ἐπιγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ probably has polemical connotations, for here growth in the knowledge of God is connected with a worthy walk, in contrast to the teaching of the opponents which connected knowledge of God and the heavenly realm with visionary experiences aided by asceticism. Pokorný avers that the knowledge of God is the instrument, not the object of growth. He says the gospel, rather, is that which grows (cf. 1.6).⁴⁶ The context argues against this, however, for in v. 9 the writer prays for the Colossians to be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom. This clearly implies growth from a state of lesser knowledge. Additionally, 2.2-4 records the writer's labour that the Colossians would have a full understanding of Christ, God's mystery. This again implies growth from a state of less complete understanding. The knowledge of God, knowledge of God's will, and knowledge of Christ are closely related, and in Col 1-2 the writer speaks of the believer's growth in each.

The third participial phrase (ἐν πάσῃ δυνάμει δυναμούμενοι κατὰ τὸ κράτος) introduces the subject of God's power, a recurring theme in Colossians and Ephesians (Col 1.29; 2.12; cf. 2.15; Eph 1.19; 3.7, 16; 6.10). The pleonastic expression "being strengthened with all power according to the might" is possibly an antipode to the statements about cosmic principalities and powers (1.13, 16; 2.10, 15)⁴⁷ and gives a basis for hope, for the Colossians' moral victory is attainable—not by their own efforts—but through the appropriation of the strength supplied by God Himself.

It is the divine power which results in "endurance and patience" (εἰς πᾶσαν ὑπομονὴν καὶ μακροθυμίαν). The two terms are nearly synonymous, both expressing steadfastness or endurance. The former term ὑπομονή is used to describe endurance in the face of difficult circumstances (Rom 5.3; 2 Cor 1.6; 6.4; James 1.3; 5.11) as well as steadfast behaviour over the course of time (Rom 2.7; 8.25; 2 Thess 3.5; Heb 12.1). In light of the repeated polemical connotations found in other terms in this passage, in this verse ὑπομονή probably refers to endurance in difficult circumstances. Lohse's definition of ὑπομονή is appropriate in this passage. He describes it as "perseverance

⁴⁶ *Colossians*, 47-48.

⁴⁷ So Pokorný, *Colossians*, 49. The primary difficulty with this suggestion is that the principalities and powers are cosmic entities, whereas the Colossian believers are humans, thus reducing the parallelism between the two.

proven in battle by holding one's position against enemy attacks."⁴⁸ The latter term μακροθυμία is used more often in the context of interpersonal relationships, indicating "endurance that does not retaliate."⁴⁹ It is used of God holding back his wrath (Sir 5.4; 4 Ezra 7.74; Rom 9.22; 1 Pet 3.20; 2 Pet 3.9) and of Christians lovingly refusing to retaliate (2 Cor 6.6; Col 3.2; Eph 4.2).⁵⁰ Thus the outworking of God's power in the believer gives patience and endurance to face difficult circumstances and difficult individuals.

The final participial phrase "giving thanks to the Father" (εὐχαριστοῦν^{TES} τῷ πατρὶ) accents the believer's grateful response to the work of God. The specific ground for thanksgiving is that they have been made participants in the divine blessings of salvation. The soteriological blessings are described in theocentric language, for the Father (not humans, or human merit) is the one who enabled, qualified (ικανόω⁵¹) the Colossians to share in the inheritance. The spiritual blessings are described with the phrase "to share in the inheritance of the saints" (εἰς τὴν μερίδα τοῦ κλήρου τῶν ἁγίων). The two nouns used here (μερίς and κληρος) are repeatedly used in the LXX of the divine blessings, and sometimes the two terms are used together (Isa 57.6; Jer 13.25; Wis 2.9). Κληρος ("inheritance") is a common OT expression for divine blessings (Deut 10.9), and is particularly connected with distribution of the promised land (Josh 13.7; LXX Ps 15.5). Later the term took on eschatological connotations (Dan 12.13; *1 Enoch* 37.4; 39.8; 48.7). In the NT it is also used to indicate inheritance (Acts 26.18) as well as "lots" used for gambling (Matt 27.35; Acts 1.26). In Col 1.12 the κληρος is the soteriological inheritance of God's people, i.e., of the saints [who will dwell] in light (τοῦ κλήρου τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ φωτι).⁵²

⁴⁸ *Colossians*, 30. Lohse appears to have committed an etymological fallacy by saying "the word μακροθυμία signifies the kind of perseverance..." implying that words have fixed meanings. While the context of Col 1-2 makes this definition of μακροθυμία likely in 1.11, a military connotation is not inherent in the term itself. See Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961) especially 107-60.

⁴⁹ Cf. Harris, *Colossians*, 33.

⁵⁰ There is an organic relationship between these two uses of μακροθυμία, for the Christians' response to evil is to be patterned after God's response (Col 3.12-13; cf. Horst, "μακροθυμία," *TDNT* 4.383).

⁵¹ Rengstorff notes that this word group is repeatedly used in the NT (1 Cor 15.9-10; 2 Cor 2.16; 3.5) of Paul and believers being spiritually insufficient, but finding sufficiency in God. He says "confession of personal incapacity is thus accompanied by confession of God as the basis of all personal capacity" ("ικανος," *TDNT* 3.295).

⁵² Some commentators argue based on 1QS 11.7 and Wis 5.5 that τῶν ἁγίων here refers to angels, thus undercutting the teaching of the opponents by indicating that believers "have attained a place shared by the angels" (Martin, *Colossians*, 54; also Lohmeyer, *Kolossier*, 39; Lohse, *Colossians*, 36). Schweizer, however, notes a serious problem with this interpretation, for in Colossians (1.2, 4, 22, 26; 3.12) and a closely related passage (Acts 26.18) ἄγιος unequivocally refers to human believers (*Colossians*, 51).

Thanksgiving is an important theme in Colossians (1.3; 2.7; 3.16) probably owing to the fact that the Colossians did not adequately understand or appreciate their soteriological blessings in Christ. Pokorný aptly comments on 1.12 "the author sees the most profound condition for overcoming the heresy in the posture of gratitude to God."⁵³

A fourth ethical principle found in this passage is that *the personal application and development of Christian ethics is viewed as progressive*. That is, the believer should grow and increase in Christian character with resultant appropriate behaviour.⁵⁴ This is seen in the choice and tense of verbs used in vv. 10-12. The verbs are in the present tense, indicating progressive action. The use of the verbs ἀξάνω and δύναμαι also brings out the ongoing, non-static nature of the development and application of Christian ethics, for these verbs denote activity which continues over the course of time. This is in contrast to the opponents who were boastful of visionary experiences (2.18). A visionary revelatory experience as described in the Jewish apocalyptic literature allows for little growth or progression, for one either has a heavenly vision or one does not.

In summary, the thanksgiving portion of an epistle introduces vital epistolary themes, which in Colossians are the knowledge of God and a worthy walk. More specifically, in 1.10 the writer indicates his desire that the Colossians walk or live in a manner worthy of the Lord. The basis for ethics given here is revelational, for the worthy walk results from knowledge of God's will. The development of ethics is shown to be Christological, for the desired behaviour is defined as "worthy of the Lord," i.e., Christ Jesus. The expression of Christian ethics is fourfold: fruit bearing, increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthening with power, and giving thanks to God. Finally, the development of Christian ethics is progressive, for the believer is called to grow and increase in Christian character.

In Col 1.9-12 the person of Christ is cardinal in the link between Christology and ethics. In the next section of our study (1.21-23) which also links Christology and ethics, the work of Christ is highlighted in the relationship between Christology and ethics.

⁵³ *Colossians*, 50.

⁵⁴ For an excellent survey of the progressive nature of Pauline ethics, see Alexander, *The Ethics of Paul*, 197-226.

B. Continuance in the Faith: 1.21-23

While many exegetes approach the Colossian hymn atomistically, and do not consider its relationship to the rest of the epistle, others go even farther, positing a disjunction between the hymn and other portions of this epistle. For example, Schrage suggests that the paraenesis of Colossians provides a necessary corrective to the lopsided enthusiasm contained in the hymn, where the powers are said to have already lost their potency.⁵⁵

On the contrary, continuity exists between the hymn and the paragraphs which follow it. While the hymn in 1.15-20 does not engender a detailed, casuistic ethic (and by definition cannot, since hymns are eulogies addressed to God/gods), it does provide the basis for ethical injunctions, though these injunctions are broad in scope. The affirmation of cosmic reconciliation in 1.20 was seen to have ethical implications, for humans are to live under the lordship of Christ, which is precisely what the writer of Colossians repeatedly urges the believers to do (1.10; 2.6; 3.11, 17, 22-23). In 1.21-23 the author gives admonitions which have clear ethical implications, and he uses the hymn, specifically 1.20 as the basis for these admonitions.

1. Reconciliation in 1.20

The crux of the relationship between the hymn and the paragraph which follows (vv. 21-23) lies in the author's use of the term ἀποκαταλλάσσω. Few exegetes deny that reconciliation through the death of Christ in v. 20 is in some manner made the basis for the Colossians' personal reconciliation in v. 22.⁵⁶ Few deny that the Colossians' personal reconciliation has strong moral overtones, for it is linked to their future moral condition as well as their present moral behaviour ("has now reconciled...in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him").⁵⁷ The precise relationship between vv. 20 and 22, however, has received inadequate attention. I will thus begin my study of this text by evaluating the specific meaning of "reconcile" in the

⁵⁵ *Ethics of the NT*, 245.

⁵⁶ Thus Pokorný titles his exegesis of 1.21-23 "Application of the hymn" (*Colossians*, 90). Houlden gives it a bolder introductory description "Paul drives home the message of the hymn" (*Letters from Prison*, 173). While few if any exegetes patently deny that 1.21-23 is based on the latter portion of the hymn, this obvious fact is typically ignored, leading to the conclusion that the hymn plays little role in the Colossian paraenesis.

⁵⁷ The clause παραστήσαι ὑμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους καὶ ἀνεγκλήτους is a purpose clause whose antecedent is the clause νῦν δὲ ἀποκατήλλαξεν. This indicates that the intended result of their reconciliation was their holy, blameless, unassailable moral character.

hymn and in v. 22, and will then analyse the manner in which the Christological statements in v. 20 provide a basis for moral behaviour in vv. 22-23.

The verb ἀποκαταλλάσσω is a compound form of the verb ἀλλάσσω. Broadly speaking, ἀλλάσσω is generally used to mean "to make otherwise or change."⁵⁸ In Classical Greek it was used to mean "to make other than it is, alter" (Parmenides 8.41); "give in exchange, barter one thing for another" (Aeschylus, *Pr.* 967); "to leave, quit" (Sophocles, *Ant.* 944); "alternate" (Empedocles 17.6); and in the passive "to be reconciled" (Sophocles, *Fr.* 997). In the Septuagint ἀλλάσσω has a similar range of meanings, and is used of Jacob's household changing clothes (Gen 35.2), a nation changing its gods (Jer 2.11), the anger of the Lord turning back (Jer 4.8),⁵⁹ exchanging or substituting an animal sacrifice (Lev 27.10), and of the weak renewing their strength (Isa 40.31).

In the New Testament ἀλλάσσω is used six times, of believers being changed or transformed at the parousia (1 Cor 15.51-52), Jesus changing the Mosaic customs (Acts 6.14), Paul changing the tone of his voice (Gal 4.20), the heavens changing like a garment (Heb 1.12) and of sinners exchanging the glory of God into the image of corruptible humans and animals (Rom 1.23).⁶⁰

The compound verb καταλλάσσω also denotes change, and is used of changing money (Plutarchus, *Arat.* 18), exchanging pleasures for pleasures (Plato, *Phd.* 69a), changing or giving away the favour or the law for the laws (Dinarchus 3.21), and of leaving life (Aelianus *VH* 5.2). A similar range of meanings is found in the LXX and other Hellenistic literature. It is used of Moab's tragic change after experiencing God's judgment (Jer 31.39 LXX). The noun καταλλαγή is used of raiment being compensated with restitution or exchange (Isa 9.5). More importantly for biblical

⁵⁸ A study of the use of ἀλλάσσω in classical and Koine literature shows that this verb was generally used to indicate "to make otherwise or change." H. Merkel correctly notes that ἀλλάσσω "designates 'change' in the broadest sense" ("ἀλλάσσω," *EDNT* 1.62). F. Büchsel, on the other hand, says "to make otherwise" is the "basic meaning" of ἀλλάσσω, and supports this by noting that ἀλλάσσω comes from ἄλλος ("ἀλλάσσω," *TDNT* 1.251). This statement appears to reflect two etymological fallacies. The first is the origin fallacy, which is the declaration that the original meaning of a word is its proper meaning. The second is the etymological fallacy which is the declaration that words have fixed real or basic meanings, when in fact words are only linguistic codes whose meaning is determined by their usage in a given context. See Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, especially 107-60; Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989) 77-128; Johannes P. Louw, *Semantics of New Testament Greek* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

⁵⁹ This is a variant reading replacing the verb ἀλαλάζω.

⁶⁰ This exchange imagery probably comes from Ps 105.20 (LXX) and Jer 2.11 (see N. Hyldahl, "A Reminiscence of the Old Testament at Romans 1:23," *NTS* 2 [1955-56] 285-88). It is evident from the argument of Rom 1.18-23 that the KJV translation for ἀλλάσσω of "change" is incorrect, for the *reductio ad absurdum* is reached in v. 23, where foolish individuals are said to exchange the imperfect copy made by God for God himself (James Dunn, *Romans 1-8* [Dallas: Word, 1988] 72).

studies, καταλλάσσω is often used of change as it relates to the relationship between two parties. It is used of changing a person from a state of hostility to friendship (Herodotus 5.29) and of individuals being reconciled to one another (Aristotle, *Oec.* 1 348b9). In the passive voice⁶¹ it is used to indicate someone being reconciled (Xenophon, *An.* 1.6.1) and of an offence being atoned for (OGI 218.105).

There are virtually no religious uses of καταλλάσσω in the Classical Greek period,⁶² though in Hellenistic Judaism it began to be used of God's relationship to his people.⁶³ More specifically, it is used several times to describe the divine/human dilemma in which God is angry with humans because of their sin. Consequently there is a need for God to be reconciled with humans.⁶⁴ For example, the youngest of seven martyred brothers tells the tyrant Antiochus "we are suffering because of our own sins. And if our living Lord is angry for a little while, to rebuke and discipline us, he will again be reconciled with his own servants" (2 Macc 7.32-33). 2 Macc 5.15-20 contains similar reconciliation theology, for although Antiochus defiled the temple, he was not immediately punished by God as was Heliodorus because "the Lord was angered for a little while because of the sins of those who dwelt in the city" (v. 17). The connection between divine punishment for sin and divine reconciliation is seen in v. 20, where the writer states regarding Jerusalem and the temple "what was forsaken in the wrath of the Almighty was restored again in all its glory when the great Lord became reconciled." In short, in 2 Maccabees God is prompted to reconcile himself, i.e., abandon his anger toward his people, as a result of their suffering⁶⁵ and prayers.⁶⁶

In the NT καταλλάσσω is found only in the Pauline literature, and of the six times it is used (Rom 5.10a, b; 1 Cor 7.11; 2 Cor 5.18, 19, 20) all but one are religious uses (in 1 Cor 7.11 καταλλάσσω is used of a woman being reconciled to her husband). The noun καταλλαγή is used four times in the NT, all in the Pauline literature in a religious context (Rom 5.11; 11.15; 2 Cor 5.18, 19). The verb ἀποκαταλλάσσω is used three times in the Pauline tradition (Eph 2.16; Col 1.20, 21), each time in a decidedly religious context. There are no pre-Pauline usages of ἀποκαταλλάσσω in the extant

⁶¹ The passive use is typically found in the aorist tense, cf. Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "καταλλάσσω."

⁶² Dupont, *Réconciliation*, 7-28. Merkel notes a unique, semi-religious use of καταλλάσσω by Plutarch, who called Alexander the Great the "reconciler of everything," the individual sent by God to unite all humanity into a united world state ("καταλλάσσω," *EDNT* 2.261).

⁶³ 2 Macc 1.5; 7.33; 8.29; Josephus *Ant.* 6.7.4 § 144. The noun καταλλαγή is used in a religious sense in 2 Macc 5.20.

⁶⁴ Thus specific statements are found in 2 Macc where it is prayed or wished that God would be reconciled to his people (1.5; 8.29).

⁶⁵ This is both collective punishment as well as representative punishment experienced by the martyrs who represented all the people. On the latter, see 4 Macc 1.11; 6.28-29; 17.22.

⁶⁶ This is essentially Marshall's conclusion ("The Meaning of Reconciliation," 121).

ancient Greek literature, and it is quite possible that the author of the hymn coined this term.⁶⁷ Its meaning is similar to καταλλάσσω, though some exegetes believe the addition of the prepositional prefix ἀπό gives the word additional emphasis, either indicating the complete and thorough nature of Christ's reconciling work,⁶⁸ or indicating a change back to a former condition.⁶⁹ Given the fact that the hymn is likely pre-Pauline, and given the fact that in 1.20 reconciliation is explained in a different manner (cosmologically instead of anthropologically), the use of a slightly different term for reconciliation in 1.20 is understandable.⁷⁰

Though καταλλάσσω and ἀποκαταλλάσσω are not always used in the Pauline literature in a consistent manner, some definite distinctions can be made between the Pauline understanding of reconciliation and that found in Hellenistic Jewish literature. In both sets of literature sin is viewed as cardinal to the state of alienation between God and humans. In Hellenistic Jewish literature, however, God is the necessary object of reconciliation, whereas in the Pauline literature God is always pictured as the initiator⁷¹ and humans are always pictured as the objects of reconciliation.⁷² Furthermore,

⁶⁷ Büchsel, *TDNT* 1.258.

⁶⁸ Blass and Debrunner call the prepositional prefix ἀπό in ἀποκαταλλάσσω a "perfectivizing" use of the preposition in which a preposition is joined with a verb to signify the action "as having reached its consummation," or "as continuing to its completion" (*Grammar*, 166, § 318). Bruce (*Colossians*, 74, n. 164) identifies ἀποκαταλλάσσω as an "intensified" form of καταλλάσσω.

⁶⁹ Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 160.

⁷⁰ Bruce, who affirms a cosmic reconciliation in 1.20 comments "if the Christ hymn is an independent composition which Paul incorporates into his argument, then the situation is intelligible. Paul leaves the word as it is; there was no need to change it, for it spoke of the peace effected by Christ through the shedding of His blood on the cross. Indeed, he goes on immediately to speak of the [anthropological] reconciliation of believers through that same death" ("Christ as Conqueror and Reconciler," *BSac* 141 [1984] 293).

⁷¹ Contrast 2 Macc 1.5, 8.29 and Josephus *Ant* 6.7.4 § 144, where prayers are offered for God to be reconciled to his people, and 2 Cor 5.19 and Rom 5.10 which indicate that God initiated reconciliation through the death of Christ.

⁷² Virtually all scholars agree that humans are the objects of reconciliation, though a few suggest based on inferences from the reconciliation texts that God was also reconciled. Bultmann eschews questions regarding who is reconciled and how it takes place. He says "the old question, 'How is God reconciled?' is wrongly put. Naturally all pagan notions that men must do something to reconcile (propitiate) God, are far from Paul's thought. It never occurs to him at all that God needed to be reconciled; it is *men* who receive the reconciliation which God conferred—not by removing their subjective resentment toward Him but by removing the objective state of enmity which, in consequence of sins, existed between Him and men" (*Theology*, 287). Others who deny that God was reconciled include Dupont (*Réconciliation*, 15), Fitzmyer ("Reconciliation in Paul," 160) and Furnish (*Theology and Ethics*, 149). Scholars who assert that God as well as humans were reconciled through the death of Christ include Büchsel ("καταλλάσσω," 257); Marshall ("The Meaning of Reconciliation," 130); Moule ("The Theology of Forgiveness," in *Essays in New Testament Interpretation* [Cambridge: CUP, 1982] 257-58); and Herman Ridderbos (*Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. by John De Witt [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975] 184-85). Much of this debate centres on one's understanding of ἐχθρός in Rom 5.10 and elsewhere, whether it is active or passive in meaning. The former would indicate the human attitude toward God, the latter would indicate the condition in which humans are viewed by God (cf. Taylor, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 73-75; A. T. Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb* [London: SPCK, 1957]). For a defence of the view that God's wrath has an active meaning, see Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 220-25. C. H. Dodd, on the other hand, argues that the wrath of God refers not to an angry emotional response against sinners, but to the impersonal destructive consequences of sin (*The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* [London: Hodder

Hellenistic Jewish literature pictures the suffering of the Jewish people or of representative martyrs as the basis for reconciliation, whereas in the Pauline tradition the death of Christ is the basis (Rom 5.10; 2 Cor 5.19, 21; Col 1.20, 22).

In most of the Pauline literature, there is a fairly uniform description of reconciliation. In the reconciliation passages found in the Pauline *homologoumena*, as well as Col 1.21-22, three common soteriological theses are readily discernible as follows:

1. God took the initiative in the reconciliation process ("but God shows his love for us...while we were enemies we were reconciled to God," Rom 5.8, 10; "God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself," 2 Cor 5.18; "he has now reconciled," Col 1.22).
2. Human beings are the objects of reconciliation ("while we were enemies we were reconciled to God," Rom 5.10; "the reconciliation of the world," Rom 11.15; "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself," 2 Cor 5.19⁷³; "and you...he has now reconciled," Col 1.21, 22).
3. The death of Christ is the means of reconciliation ("reconciled to God by the death of his son," Rom 5.10; "who through Christ reconciled us to himself," 2 Cor 5.18; "he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death," Col 1.22).

Points one and three are also affirmed in the Colossian hymn (though the third point is affirmed with a new formulation "making peace by the blood of his cross"⁷⁴), but point two poses a significant problem, revealing an ineluctable inconsistency with the concept of reconciliation in the Pauline tradition. Though in vv. 21-22 the writer

and Stoughton, 1932] 29). In spite of this debate, strictly speaking, the Pauline texts always identify humans, and not God, as the objects of reconciliation.

⁷³ Some have understood κόσμος in 2 Cor 5.19 as cosmic in scope. Fitzmyer, for instance, identifies it with "the universe of creation," arguing that the cosmic meaning in Col 1.20 supports a similar meaning in 2 Cor 5.19 ("Reconciliation in Paul," 161). While Paul does occasionally use κόσμος in the broad cosmological sense (Rom 1.20; 1 Cor 3.22; also cf. Eph 1.4), it is more commonly used anthropologically (Rom 3.6, 19; 5.12; 1 Cor 1.21; 3.19). The context of 2 Cor 5.19 makes the cosmic interpretation very unlikely, for v. 19 is a restatement of v. 18 (on the arrangement of themes in 2 Cor 5.18-21, see Marshall, "Reconciliation," 122). In v. 18 Paul says "God through Christ reconciled us to himself," whereas in v. 19 he says "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." Hence world is synonymous with "us." Furthermore, in v. 19 the nature of the reconciliation of the world is given additional description with the phrase μη λογιζόμενος αὐτοῖς τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν. The antecedent of the pronoun αὐτοῖς is the word κόσμον. Thus the κόσμος is clearly the personal world of sinful humans.

⁷⁴ The mention of "blood" with respect to the soteriological work of Christ is infrequent in the undisputed Pauline literature (only Rom 3.25; 5.9) but is much more common elsewhere in the NT (Acts 20.28; Eph 1.7; Heb 9.12-25; 10.19; 13.12; 1 Pet 1.2, 19; 1 John 1.7; 5.6, 8; Rev 1.5; 5.9; 7.14; 12.11).

identifies human beings as the objects of God's reconciliation, in v. 20, the final verse of the hymn, the writer identifies the objects of reconciliation as "all things, whether on earth or in heaven." The repeated use of the adjective *πᾶς* throughout the hymn (vv. 15, 16a, 16b, 17a, 17b, 18, 19), particularly the plural neuter forms found in 1.16, 17a, 17b, 20, relate "all things" to the person and work of Christ. As was noted in the analysis of 1.15-20, the Colossian hymn has significant polemical value in showing that Christ is superior to all living beings by virtue of his position and creative power. This superiority is particularly important as it relates to the principalities and powers that were threatening the Colossians (1.16; 2.15).

Thus the phrase *τὰ πάντα* in v. 20 describes the recipients of reconciliation in cosmic terms. This phrase is not used in a random manner, but follows the argument of the preceding five verses in which Christ is shown to be superior to all created entities. An additional argument for understanding *τὰ πάντα* in v. 20 to be a cosmic and not just an anthropological reference is the clarifying phrase *εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς*. The objects of divine reconciliation are identified as earthly things (humans) as well as heavenly things (angels, both good and evil). The chiasmic relationship between this phrase in v. 20 and the same phrase in v. 16 lends additional weight to this interpretation.⁷⁵ In v. 16 Christ's creation of all things in heaven and on the earth is affirmed. In v. 20 the reconciliation of all things in heaven and on earth through Christ is affirmed. In v. 16 two additional phrases specifically identify the earthly things and the heavenly things ("visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities"). These additional two clarifying phrases are not found in v. 20 but, given the chiasmic parallelism between v. 16 and v. 20 they are inferred, and again point to a cosmic reconciliation which involves the visible realm of humans and the invisible realm of angels.

Various solutions have been proposed to explain the discrepancy between the objects of God's reconciliation being identified as humans in Col 1.22, 2 Cor 5.18-19, and Rom 5.10-11, but all of creation, human and angelic in Col 1.20. Käsemann

⁷⁵ The structural relationship between v. 16 and v. 20 is intricate and apparently deliberate, for v. 16 contains the words *ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς*, but in v. 20 the prepositional phrase *ἐν αὐτῷ* is changed to *δι' αὐτοῦ*, and the aorist passive indicative verb *ἐκτίσθη* is changed to the aorist active infinitive *ἀποκαταλλάξαι*. In both verses the preposition is followed by the third person pronoun which is in turn followed by the main verb. In both verses the direct object of the main verb is *τὰ πάντα*, and in both verses *τὰ πάντα* directly follows the verb. Furthermore, in both verses *τὰ πάντα* is additionally identified as things in heaven and things on the earth, but in v. 16 this clarifying phrase immediately follows *τὰ πάντα*, whereas in v. 20 there is an intervening verbal clause which clarifies the nature of the reconciliation (*ἐληρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ*). Additionally, the order of the phrase is reversed in v. 20, which places the things on the earth (*τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς*) before the things in heaven (*τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς*). Cf. also Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament*, 209-10.

argues that the reconciliation motif was not original to the NT writers, but came into the early church through hymnic traditions of the Hellenistic community. Remnants of these hymnic traditions are said to be identifiable in Rom 5.10-11; 11.15; 2 Cor 5.19-21; and Col 1.20. Two different versions of the reconciliation tradition are said to be reflected in these texts, one version articulating anthropological reconciliation, the other cosmological reconciliation, though the latter is said to reflect the beginning of the tradition.⁷⁶

Käsemann furthermore believes that Col 1.20 reflects Hellenistic hymnic tradition which spoke of the cosmic All, but the writer of Colossians had to modify the hymn, lest the Christian community fall into unbridled enthusiasm and give up reflection on the future and abandon Christian service. Thus the writer alters the hymnic material and applies it to the Colossian community in terms of anthropological reconciliation in vv. 1.21-22. Joseph Fitzmyer has responded to Käsemann's proposal, and his refutations highlight several serious flaws in Käsemann's model.⁷⁷

Other exegetes such as Marshall and Büchsel insist that there is no essential conflict between the reconciliation described in 1.20 and that found in 1.21-23. Büchsel argues that εἰρηνοποιήσας is the controlling term of the passage, and that "to reconcile" is modified by "making peace," thus reconciliation in 1.20 has precisely the same meaning it has in 1.22. He concludes that in both instances anthropological, not cosmic reconciliation is proclaimed.⁷⁸ Dibelius' response to this argument is logical, for he argues that the word εἰρηνοποιήσας does not necessitate understanding reconciliation

⁷⁶ "The Doctrine of Reconciliation," 54. Hence Käsemann argues that Rom 5.10-11 is primarily concerned with cosmic, not anthropological peace. Breytenbach argues against this NT evolution in which cosmic reconciliation in the hymns developed later into anthropological reconciliation. He notes the dissimilarities between Col 1.20 and 2 Cor 5.19, and concludes that there is no organic relationship between the two texts (*Versöhnung*, 191).

⁷⁷ Fitzmyer's main arguments ("Reconciliation in Paul," 163-67; cf. also Martin, *Reconciliation*, 71-79) are as follows: (1) Käsemann does not consider the textual evidence evenhandedly, for he asserts that reconciliation in Col 1.20, 22 and Eph 2.16 is merely a catchword, whereas in Rom 5.10f. and 11.15 it acquires "terminological significance," and in 2 Cor 5.18ff. it has "theological significance." Fitzmyer correctly notes this a subtle way of writing off unwanted evidence, since Käsemann never explains what "terminological significance" really means, or what "theological emphasis" really implies. Käsemann also fails to give adequate support for the assertion that reconciliation is only a catchword in Col 1.22. (2) If Käsemann is right and the author is taking up earlier Christian motifs and using them (2 Cor 5.19-21 is said to be a pre-Pauline hymnic fragment, as is Col 1.20, 22, and Eph 2.16), why must one assume that this material does not become a part of the writer's theology? If he is using earlier Christian tradition in an approving manner, then it makes sense that it has become part of his own thinking and theology. (3) Käsemann asserts that Col 1.20-22 and 2 Cor 5.19-20 demonstrate a transition from cosmological to anthropological reconciliation, the latter being developed after the former, since cosmic reconciliation (reconciliation of the All) was a recognised theme in the Hellenistic world. The fatal flaw of this argument is its chronological improbability, for it makes little sense for cosmic reconciliation, a concept found in what are generally considered the later deuterio-Pauline writings, to be the source of anthropological reconciliation, a concept found in the earlier Pauline writings.

⁷⁸ "ἀλλάσσω," *TDNT* 1.259.

here as anthropological unless one mistakenly restricts εἰρηνοποιήσας to ecclesiastical tradition peace.⁷⁹

Marshall agrees with Büchsel that there is no difference between the reconciliation in v. 20 and that in v. 22, though he utilises different arguments from those of Büchsel. He maintains that the emphasis in v. 20 is simply on God's provision of reconciliation through Christ, i.e., no other powers in heaven or earth could provide the reconciliation Christ provided.⁸⁰ He furthermore says the stress in this passage is not on the fact of their reconciliation as much as it is on their need which only Christ could meet. The objects of reconciliation identified as "all things" (v. 20) thus refer to collective humanity, for all humans are potentially reconciled since God has taken away the ground of alienation through the death of Christ. Verse 23, however, is said to give "the terms on which reconciliation becomes a reality: it depends upon faith and acceptance of the gospel preached by Paul."⁸¹ If we accept Marshall's premises, then "we are saved from desperate attempts to give 'reconcile' a sense other than it usually bears."⁸² In other words, reconciliation in Col 1.20 is anthropological as it is elsewhere.

Though Marshall's case is well argued and insightful, it misconstrues the emphasis of the hymn and of v. 20. While the hymn's author may well have intended the readers to know that Christ and no other power could bring "peace by the blood of his cross," the emphasis throughout the hymn is not on Christ's unique soteriological role as opposed to the angelic powers, but on his superiority over all of creation, particularly over the cosmic powers. In the discussion of the hymn it was noted that Christ's superiority over the powers is seen in his being the physical manifestation of God, v. 15a; his pre-eminent position as first born, v. 15b; his creation of all earthly and angelic powers, v. 16; his position as the teleological object for whom all principalities and powers were created, v. 16b; his temporal superiority over all of creation, v. 17a; his sustenance of all creation, v. 17; his honorific position as first born from the dead, v. 18a; his position of absolute supremacy over the church and all of creation, v. 18b; his divine essence as the fulness of God, v. 19. Quite clearly, the

⁷⁹ "Dabei ist aber εἰρην. zu sehr im Sinne der kirchlichen Tradition verstanden" (*Kolosser*, 19).

⁸⁰ "The Meaning of Reconciliation," 126. Calvin R. Schoonhoven argues in a similar vein, stating "the emphasis is not that *all* will be reconciled through Christ, but that *all* will be reconciled through Christ; i.e., not the cosmic powers but *Christ* alone is the reconciler" (*The Wrath of Heaven* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966] 143).

⁸¹ Marshall, "The Meaning of Reconciliation," 126.

⁸² "The Meaning of Reconciliation," 126-27. Elsewhere in the article he says the usual Pauline sense of reconcile is "to remove the barrier caused by human sin which prevents him [God] from entering into friendly relations with the world" (130).

emphasis in the hymn is on Christ's superiority over creation, including the cosmic powers. Thus the context of v. 20, instead of supporting Marshall's model argues against it, for cosmic, not anthropological reconciliation is the logical capstone to the hymn.

Büchsel and Marshall also fail to do justice to the specific phrase τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν which is clarified as τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. The hymn writer specifically says that all things in heaven and earth were reconciled through Christ. The parallels and chiasmic structure between vv. 16 and 20 reveal that the heavenly and earthly things can be further identified as the visible and the invisible, including principalities and powers. In other undisputed Pauline texts, humans are always the objects of reconciliation. Nevertheless, Col 1.20 clearly identifies the entire created order, including earthly and heavenly beings as objects of the divine reconciliation, while 1.21-23 speaks of anthropological reconciliation.

Various scholars affirm the fact that Col 1.20 speaks of cosmological reconciliation.⁸³ Given the fact that Paul indicates the whole of creation was "subjected to vanity" and enslaved at the fall (Rom 8.18-24), implying cosmic alienation and disruption of the created order, reconciliation in Col 1.20 apparently refers to the restoration of the original cosmic order. This is a restoration in which heaven and earth are "returned to their divinely created and determined order" through the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, and the universe is again placed under its proper head, Christ.⁸⁴ This understanding of reconciliation is also supported by the compound verb ἀποκαταλλάσσω, for the preposition ἀπό can alter the meaning of a verb and indicate restoration to a former condition.⁸⁵

Other NT passages indicate that the cosmic alienation will be alleviated, and the creation will be restored to its original order under the lordship of Christ (Rom 8.19-25; 1 Cor 15.24-25; Phil 2.9-10). Such is the reconciliation of the entire creation, including

⁸³ Beasley-Murray, "Col 1.15-20," 178-79; Bruce, *Colossians*, 74-76; Dibelius, *Kolosser*, 19; Lohse, *Colossians*, 59-61; Martin, *Colossians*, 60-61; Moule, *Colossians*, 71; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 54-55; Schweizer, *Colossians*, 79-81.

⁸⁴ O'Brien, *Colossians*, 54-55; also David M. Russell, "The 'New Heavens and New Earth': Hope for the Creation in Jewish Apocalyptic and the New Testament," unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991, 211.

⁸⁵ Note the use of ἀποκατάστασις in Acts 3.21, where the preposition ἀπό changes the meaning of the noun κατάστασις from "state of being" to "restoration" (Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 160). See also ἀπολαμβάνω in Luke 6.34 and Josephus, *Ant.* 5.19, where it means "to recover," "get back." Beasley-Murray also believes ἀποκαταλλάσσω in Col 1.20 refers to the restoration of a relationship or state from which creation had fallen ("Col 1.15-20," 178-79). Leon Morris (*Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 215) also leans toward this interpretation of ἀποκαταλλάσσω, for he cites Moulton and Howard (*A Grammar of New Testament Greek* [Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1919] 298) who say ἀποκαταλλάσσω means "to effect a thorough change (perfective κατά) back."

angelic powers, referred to in Col 1.20.⁸⁶ This subjection of all powers and return to the original created order is also indicated in the term ἐιρηνοποιήσας, for the hostile powers have been overthrown and forced into a position of peace.⁸⁷

The timing of the reconciliation is problematical, however, for it is described as already having taken place, whereas the other texts (Rom 8.19-25; 1 Cor 15.24-25; Phil 2.9-10) speak of a future restoration and triumph of Christ over his enemies. It has already been noted that Colossians contains a largely realised eschatology, though some futuristic elements remain (3.4, 6, 24-25). The "already...not yet" paradox is a major eschatological motif in the Pauline literature,⁸⁸ and this is probably present in Col 1.20, though the form is a bit different with a greater emphasis on the already than on the not yet. This is evidenced by the fact that though in the hymn the complete cosmic reconciliation of all of creation is affirmed, in 3.6 the wrath of God against evildoers is pictured as yet future.

This understanding of reconciliation and peace as a restoration of creation to its former created order under the lordship of Christ best harmonises with our findings regarding the meaning of principalities and powers in 1.16 as well as 2.15. It also helps explain the applicability of the hymn to the Colossian situation, for the Colossian opponents advocated placation of evil angels or astral spirits through prescribed ascetic practice. Conversely, the hymn affirms the fact that Christ himself created everything, including the cosmic spirits, and he is superior to the entire created order. His work on the cross is viewed as the ultimate triumph over the malevolent powers. Thus Martin says the writer of the hymn,

agreed that Christ was indeed creator of all, including these cosmic agents, but he has a lively sense of the danger such a cosmology could bring with it. When these powers break free from their station as 'created orders' and claim an independent status, demanding veneration and allegiance (as evidently Col 2.18 implies) their role has been reversed...To that degree these created powers are in rebellion and need to be 'reconciled' by having their hostility drawn and neutralized.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Dibelius has been an influential proponent of this position. He states that the term ἀποκαταλλάσσω "bezeichnet also die Unterordnung des Alls (τὰ πάντα neutr.!) unter Christus" (*Kolosser*, 19). Cf. also Mussner, *Christus das All und die Kirche*, 69-71.

⁸⁷ Cf. Col 2.15. Martin notes "Christ's achievement in making peace on the cross shows how his atonement reached even those malevolent forces and secured for them a place in God's design for the universe in which, at the last, there should be no discord (Eph 1.10)" *Colossians*, 60-61.

⁸⁸ Bultmann, *Theology*, 306-52; Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, 115-35; Ridderbos, *Paul*, 44-68; Christopher Rowland, *Christian Origins* (London: SPCK, 1985) 207-14; J. Paul Sampley, *Walking between the Times. Paul's Moral Reasoning* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 7-24; Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1930) 1-41.

⁸⁹ *Reconciliation*, 123.

In summary, καταλλάσσω in Classical and Hellenistic Greek generally indicates a change in relationship. In the New Testament it is consistently used by Paul to indicate a change in the divine/human relationship in which God takes the initiative through the death of Christ to mend the relational breach and re-establish harmonious relations with sinful humans. I have termed this "anthropological reconciliation." This is the manner in which ἀποκαταλλάσσω is used in Col 1.22. In the Colossian hymn, however, ἀποκαταλλάσσω is used in a broader manner to indicate cosmological reconciliation in which the entire created order is said to be reconciled to God based on Christ's work on the cross. This involves a return of the creation to its original order, which entails having Christ in his rightful place as head.

2. Cosmic Reconciliation as a Basis for Ethics in the Colossian Community

Now that the nature of reconciliation in 1.20 has been analysed, we can turn to the crux of our interest, which lies in how 1.20 relates to 1.21-23, so that we might answer the question: "How does the Christology presented in 1.20 form the basis for ethical behaviour in 1.21-23?" Some see little systematic connection between 1.20 and 1.21-23. Stephen Fowl, in a discussion of the relationship between the Colossian hymn and the verses which immediately follow it, asserts that throughout 1.9-2.5 the writer gives a "loosely linked series of assertions" and that it is "only as the writer begins to address the 'philosophy' in 2.6ff. that we get an indication of how 1.15-20 functions in his argument and why the Colossians' connection to this story about Christ is important."⁹⁰ While Col 2.6-7 is directly linked to 1.15-20, Fowl has underestimated the link between 1.15-20 and 1.21-23, for the hymn provides the direct ethical and theological basis for the admonitions in 1.21-23.

In v. 21 the writer immediately applies the hymn to the Colossians. He begins by establishing their personal need for reconciliation. The placement of καὶ ὑμᾶς in the emphatic position at the beginning of the sentence accentuates the shift in focus from the entire created order in v. 20 to the Colossian believers in v. 21, and telegraphs the writer's application of the hymn to the Colossian believers. The supremacy of Christ

⁹⁰ *The Story of Christ*, 131.

over the cosmic powers and his reconciliation over the created order had clear, personal implications for the Colossians.⁹¹

The Colossians' former condition which necessitated reconciliation is introduced by the particle ποτέ, which is part of the traditional "then...now" motif⁹² commonly used in the Pauline literature to contrast the readers' states of existence before and after salvation.⁹³ The Colossians' pre-salvation condition is described using the phrase ὄντας ἀπολλοτριωμένους,⁹⁴ which describes their state of alienation from God, a state which necessitated reconciliation. The inclusion of the participle ὄντας, making this a periphrastic perfect construction, is probably done to emphasise the continuous state of alienation experienced by the Colossians.⁹⁵ It was this profound estrangement which necessitated reconciliation if they were to have a harmonious relationship with God.

The Colossians' estrangement is given additional description with the two phrases "hostile in mind" and "[doing] evil deeds." The adjective ἐχθρός in this context has an active meaning of "hostile" (cf. also Matt 13.28; Rom 5.10; 1 Cor 15.25) as opposed to the passive meaning of "the one hated," "enemy" (Rom 11.28). The mind is the arena in which active hostility toward God is expressed, while evil deeds are the visible expressions of alienation from and hostility toward God. Though the final phrase "[doing] evil deeds" contains no conjunction to indicate its specific relationship with alienation and hostility of mind (even if one see the καί as implied from the

⁹¹ Caird poignantly comments on v. 21 "all this talk of cosmic peace might seem like castles in the air if it were not that at one point reconciliation has already become a fact of experience" (*Letters from Prison*, 182).

⁹² There is no single formula for this motif, but several different constructions are used including: ποτέ...ὄν δέ (Rom 11.30-31; Gal 4.8-9); ποτέ...ὄν δέ (Col 3.7-8); ὄν...ὄν δέ (Rom 7.5-6); ὄν...ὄν (Rom 5.8, 9, 11). In 1 Cor 6.11 Paul simply uses past tense verbs with the conjunction ἀλλά to indicate the contrast between the reader's former and present spiritual states. For additional structural variations on this motif, cf. Gal 4.3, 7; Eph 2.1-5; Col 2.13.

⁹³ Bultmann, *Theology*, 105-06; P. Tachau, "Einst" und "Jetzt" im Neuen Testament. *Beobachtungen zu einem urchristlichen Predigtschema in der neutestamentlichen Briefliteratur und zu seiner Vorgeschichte*, FRLANT 105 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht) 1972.

⁹⁴ Lohse (*Colossians*, 62-63), Moule (*Colossians*, 71), and O'Brien (*Colossians*, 66) argue that this specific description would only be applicable to Gentiles, since in Eph 2.12 estrangement is described in terms of relationship with ethnic Israel and the covenants of promise (cf. also Eph 4.18 where Gentiles are described as "alienated from the life of God" due to ignorance). Houlden, on the other hand, implies that the alienation in Col 1.21 is descriptive of both Jews and Gentiles, since all humans are estranged from God, as is taught in Rom 1-2 (*Letters from Prison*, 173-74). While Houlden's point is theologically true, based on the two other NT usages of ἀπολλοτριώω (Eph 2.12; 4.18) one would not expect this verb to be used to describe divine/Jewish alienation.

⁹⁵ Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, § 352; Harris, *Colossians*, 56; Robertson, *Grammar*, 910. The periphrastic perfect construction does not always indicate a continuing condition (cf. Acts 26.26), but this is often its force (Luke 20.6; 2 Cor 4.3; Eph 4.18), and the context of Col 1.21 supports this sense, for the Colossians' pre-Christian life is pictured as one of persistent alienation, hostility, and evil behaviour.

previous phrase, this tells us little⁹⁶), it is logically consequential to alienation from God,⁹⁷ and probably to hostility of mind as well. Thus their alienation from God and mental hostility to him naturally resulted in the performance of evil deeds. In short, the writer has sketched a composite picture in which the Colossians' relationship with God, mental attitude, and resultant moral lifestyle reveal their overwhelming need for reconciliation, a reconciliation which had already been provided through "the blood of his cross" (v. 20).

In v. 22, the "now" portion of the "then..now" motif, the writer articulates the Colossians' present situation. The direct soteriological link with the hymn is unmistakable. In 1.20 the author speaks of cosmic reconciliation in which the entire universe is restored to a proper relationship with Christ based on his death on the cross. Cosmic reconciliation logically subsumes anthropological reconciliation, but v. 22 makes this explicit. The cosmic reconciliation proclaimed in the hymn included anthropological reconciliation, for in placing the created order back into its proper place under Christ, this includes humans individually being reconciled to God.

Whichever textual variant one accepts for the word reconciliation (the third person active form ἀποκατήλλαξεν or the second person passive form ἀποκατηλλάγητε)⁹⁸ the meaning is essentially the same. Based on the death of Christ, the Colossians had been reconciled to God by God. The means⁹⁹ of reconciliation which is described somewhat obliquely in v. 20 is given explicit description with the phrase "in his body of flesh by his death." The phrase "his body of flesh" is a Hebraism which simply means "physical body."¹⁰⁰ The emphasis here on reconciliation being brought about by means of Christ's physical body which was

⁹⁶ Dana and Mantey note that καί is usually "a mere colorless copulative giving no additional meaning to the words preceding or following," *A Manual Grammar*, 239; cf. also Robertson, *Grammar*, 1180-82.

⁹⁷ Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 161.

⁹⁸ The active form ἀποκατήλλαξεν has strong external attestation, for Å, A, C, D^c, K, and almost all the minuscules contain it. The passive reading ἀποκατηλλάγητε, though it creates a harsh anacolouthon with ὑμῶς, does have early and diverse attestation (B Hilary Ephraem, p⁴⁶, 33), and in Metzger's opinion, is preferable because it best explains the emergence of the other readings (*Textual Commentary*, 622).

⁹⁹ The preposition ἐν which begins the phrase ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ is taken instrumentally, indicating the means by which reconciliation was accomplished, contra J. A. T. Robinson who takes ἐν as locative, indicating the sphere in which reconciliation takes place, which involves the believer's mystical union with Christ (*The Body. A Study in Pauline Theology*, SBT 5 [London: SCM, 1952] 45-48). When ἐν is used in the Christological phrase "in Christ" or "in him" (cf. Col 2.11), the latter meaning is often intended (cf. M. Parsons, "In Christ' in Paul," *Vox Evangelica* 18 [1988] 25-44), but there is no evidence that mystical union with Christ is connoted in the phrase "in his body."

¹⁰⁰ The exact phrase "in his body of flesh" is found in the Qumran literature, and means physical body, cf. 1 QpHab 9.2; Lohse, *Colossians*, 64. See also Sir 23.16-17; *1 Enoch* 102.5.

crucified is probably polemical,¹⁰¹ for the opponents' world view included a neo-Platonic deprecation of the flesh evidenced by their insistence on ascetic practices. This view of the material world could logically lead to docetism, with a denial of Christ's physical incarnation and passion (cf. 1 John 4.2; 2 John 7¹⁰²). Having affirmed their reconciliation through the corporeal suffering and death of Christ, the author now gives the purpose of their reconciliation, which is expressly ethical.

The author informs the Colossians that they were reconciled to God "to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him." While the aorist infinitive παραστῆσαι could be consecutive ("so as to"),¹⁰³ or imperatival ("present yourselves"),¹⁰⁴ the telic or final use ("in order that") is preferred.¹⁰⁵ The telic use of the infinitive is much more common in the NT, smoothly fits the context of v. 22, and most significantly, is supported by v. 28. Verse 28 probably draws on v. 22, for in both the verb παράστημι is used of the believer's presentation before God in a state of spiritual maturity. The fact that παράστημι is indisputably used in a final clause in v. 28 (ὅνα with the subjunctive) strongly suggests παραστῆσαι has a final meaning in v. 22.¹⁰⁶ Thus the author argues that the Colossians' reconciliation has an ethical purpose, viz., that they would be presented to God in a state of spiritual purity. This stands in direct contrast to their former state of mental hostility and evil behaviour.

The affirmation of the Colossians' spiritual purity attained through Christ's reconciliation work may have polemical significance, for the Colossian opponents were passing judgment on the Colossian believers for their refusal to participate in ascetic practices (2.16-19). Thus Sumney contends that the author's affirmation of the Colossians' spiritual purity in 1.22 is a rejection of the opponents' judgment against them. Furthermore, in v. 23 he notes that the Colossians' spiritual position is made conditional, not on ascetic regulations or visionary experiences, but on their adherence to the gospel teachings they had received.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Bruce, *Colossians*, 212; Martin, *Colossians*, 67; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 68.

¹⁰² R. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved* (New York: Paulist, 1979) 109-23; P. Minear "The Idea of Incarnation in First John," *Interp* 24 (1970) 291-302.

¹⁰³ Moule says it "is an open question" whether παραστῆσαι is used in a final or a consecutive sense (*Colossians*, 73).

¹⁰⁴ O'Neill, "The Source of Christology in Colossians," 90.

¹⁰⁵ Harris, *Colossians*, 59; O'Brien *Colossians*, 68.

¹⁰⁶ The affirmation that vv. 22 and 28 are parallel is strengthened by the observation that "a ὅνα-clause so often serves as periphrasis for the [final] infinitive" (Blass and Debrunner, *Grammar*, §369).

¹⁰⁷ "Those Who 'Pass Judgment,'" 379-80.

The entire clause παραστήσαι ὑμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους καὶ ἀνεγκλήτους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ is said by some exegetes to have sacrificial connotations,¹⁰⁸ while others argue it has judicial connotations.¹⁰⁹ In support of the sacrificial view, ἅγιος and ἄμωμος are used of unblemished, set apart animal sacrifices.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, the verb παρίστημι is used of cultic presentation or sacrifice.¹¹¹ Supporters of the judicial view note that the third adjective ἀνέγκλητος is not used in sacrificial contexts, but judicial.¹¹² While παρίστημι is used at least once in the NT of cultic sacrifice, it is repeatedly used in the context of the parousia, often with a judicial connotation.

It is used in Rom 14.10 of the believers presentation (παρίστημι) before the judgment seat (βῆμα) of God. It is used in 2 Cor 4.14 of the believer being raised with Christ and presented with other believers. This eschatological reference probably has judicial connotations, for the future tense παραστήσει may point to a future consummation which is best explained in the context by the believer's judicial appearance before the βῆμα of Christ (2 Cor 5.10).¹¹³ In 2 Cor 11.2 παρίστημι is used of the believer's eschatological presentation to Christ the bridegroom.¹¹⁴ A similar use is found in Eph 5.27. Finally, in Col 1.28 παρίστημι is used of the writer's presentation of believers to God in a state of complete spiritual maturity (τέλειον ἐν Χριστῷ) at the parousia.¹¹⁵ Full spiritual perfection will not occur until the parousia (1 Thess 3.13; 5.23), and it is probably best to see Col 1.22, 28 in this eschatological perspective.¹¹⁶

It may be that the writer is mixing metaphors, viewing the Colossians' reconciliation and resultant moral condition from both a cultic and a legal perspective. Their presentation before God (κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ)¹¹⁷ can be seen as sacrificial, for

¹⁰⁸ Caird, *Letters from Prison*, 182; Houlden, *Letters from Prison* 173; Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 161; Moule, *Colossians*, 73; Pokorný, *Colossians*, 92.

¹⁰⁹ Lohse, *Colossians*, 65; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 68-69.

¹¹⁰ LXX Exod 29.37, 38; cf. Heb 9.14; 1 Pet 1.19; Rev 14.5.

¹¹¹ Rom 12.1; Josephus, *Bell.*, 2.89; *Ant.* 4.113.

¹¹² 1 Cor 1.8; Josephus, *Ant.*, 17.289; 3 Macc 5.31; Grundmann, "ἀνέγκλητος," *TDNT* 1.356-57.

¹¹³ Cf. Martin, 2 Corinthians, WBC (Waco: Word, 1986) 90.

¹¹⁴ The context of 2 Cor 11.2 is not necessarily legal, but is probably eschatological (cf. V. P. Furnish, 2 *Corinthians*, AB [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984] 486).

¹¹⁵ So Bruce, *Colossians*, 270; Harris, *Colossians*, 73; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 89-90.

¹¹⁶ Contra P. J. Du Plessis (*TEAEIOS. The Idea of Perfection in the New Testament* [Kampen: Kok] 1959) and Lohse (*Colossians*, 78-79, n. 80).

¹¹⁷ Lohse argues that the use of the preposition κατενώπιον indicates not future judgment but daily living in God's presence (*Colossians*, 65). The use of κατενώπιον elsewhere in the NT does not clearly support this conclusion, however. Two other times in the NT (Eph 1.4; Jude 24) κατενώπιον is used of the believer's moral condition before God using some of the same adjectives for spiritual purity as found in Col 1.22. In Eph 1.4 the author speaks of the believer being "holy and blameless before him" (ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ). While this text supports Lohse's non-eschatological interpretation, it is inconclusive for the interpretation of Col 1.22, for the author of Ephesians may have drawn on Colossians but altered or developed the material (cf. Mitton, *Ephesians*,

they were to be morally pure as were the sacrificial animals,¹¹⁸ but their presentation before God may also be viewed judicially, for at the parousia they will stand before him at the judgment morally and spiritually complete.

Several points gleaned from v. 22 can now be summarised. (1) Cosmic reconciliation in v. 20 is directly applied to the Colossian believers, for it is given as the basis for their personal (anthropological) reconciliation. (2) The personal reconciliation provided through Christ was teleologically ethical, for humans were reconciled so that they might stand morally pure before the reconciler. (3) In light of the previous two points, the hymn, with its affirmation of cosmic reconciliation, provides the foundation for Christian ethics. (4) The believer's changed moral condition has sacrificial and judicial connotations. Sacrificially, believers will be presented pure and holy as an animal sacrifice. Judicially, believers will appear morally pure before the God the judge at the parousia.

After discussing the ethical ramifications of reconciliation in v. 22, the writer issues a warning in v. 23. While the warning does not deal with specific kinds of moral practices, as does the implied warning in 3.5-6 and the "then...now" motif in 3.7-10, it is nevertheless exhortative, calling for a specific kind of behavioural response on the part of the Colossians, namely, continuance in the gospel in the face of "the siren song of the errorists."¹¹⁹ This exhortation is not surprising given the "then...now" motif found in vv. 21 and 22, for as Stählin notes "the Now of the new relation to God implies a radical and factual transformation of Christian life...the νῦν of proclamation often becomes the νῦν of exhortation."¹²⁰

82-97). Note specifically the differing uses of μυστήριον in Col 1.27 and Eph 3.3-6; ἀποκατάλλασσω in Col 1.20 and Eph 2.16; πλήρωμα in Col 1.19, 2.9 and Eph 1.10, 23, 3.9; and οἰκονομία in Col 1.25 and Eph 1.10, 3.2.) Jude 24, however, speaks of the believer's presentation without blemish before his glory (στήσαι κατενώπιον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ ἀμώμους) in an eschatological, probably judicial context (so C. Bigg, *The Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude* [Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1901] 343).

¹¹⁸ Caird gives a helpful elaboration of the possible relationship between the sacrificial metaphor in v. 22 and paraenesis. He says "when a man offered an animal in sacrifice, he laid his hand on it in order to identify himself with his offering and to express his aspirations to be himself holy and unblemished. Paul's thought then is that Christ has offered himself to God as the perfect sacrifice, and that Christians must in their turn identify themselves with his sacrificial self-giving" (*Letters from Prison*, 182). While a direct appeal to imitation of Christ as a basis for moral behaviour is found only once in this epistle (3.13), Caird's imitation of Christ interpretation of 1.22 is a viable inference based on the sacrificial connotations of ἄγιος and ἄμωμος.

¹¹⁹ Caird, *Colossians*, 183.

¹²⁰ "νῦν," *TDNT* 4.1117, 118; cf. also Rom 5.8, 9, 11; 6.1-2; 7.5-6; Gal 4.8-9; Col 3.7-8. Tachau reaches an even stronger conclusion regarding the inherent ethical implications of the "then...now" motif, arguing that no kind of antinomian misunderstanding can be drawn from it; antinomianism is already excluded, since the motif tends to draw directly on the foundation of paraenesis. He states "Das Schema 'einst—jetzt' bietet zu diesem Mißverständnis keinerlei Anlaß. Ganz im Gegenteil: Gerade dieses Schema wird gern zur Begründung der Paränese herangezogen—das aber zeigt, daß ein Mißverständnis doch wohl ausgeschlossen ist" (*Einst und Jetzt*, 128).

The warning is constructed as a first class conditional clause (εἴ γε ἐπιμένετε τῇ πίστει) whose apodosis is found in v. 22b (παραστήσαι ὑμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους καὶ ἀνεγκλήτους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ). The use of εἴ γε here to indicate conditionality or doubt is sometimes debated, since it is not a common phrase in the NT, being found only four other times (2 Cor 5.3; Gal 3.4; Eph 3.2, 4.21), and can indicate either doubt or confident assumption.¹²¹ Most exegetes believe the construction here indicates doubt, which serves as a warning to the Colossians of the real danger of straying from the faith.¹²² When the writer refers to the believer's future presentation before God in vv. 28-29, he simply states this in terms of the goal of his apostolic labour, not speculating on the degree of success he would experience. In ch. 2 the writer warns the Colossians against the dangers of being deceived with beguiling speech (2.4), and of being made a prey through empty philosophy (2.8). Both warnings are given in a Christological context. These factors lead us to believe the warning in 1.23 is real.¹²³ In short, this genuine warning indicates that the Colossians' presentation to God in a morally pure condition was contingent upon their continuance in the faith in the face of the opponents.

The admonition to continue in the faith is in effect a call to spiritual steadfastness. More specifically, the writer calls the Colossians to "persevere" or "continue" (ἐπιμένω) in the faith. Though sometimes when this verb is used figuratively the object of perseverance may connote "the realm of,"¹²⁴ that is not the case in Col 1.23, where πίστις indicates not the broad realm of faith but *fides quae creditur*, the apostolic gospel.¹²⁵ The second half of v. 23 strongly points to this interpretation, for πίστις is described in terms of the gospel they had heard proclaimed

¹²¹ Moule, *An Idiom Book*, 164; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 173.

¹²² Bruce, *Colossians*, 79; Caird, *Letters from Prison*, 182-83; Lohse, *Colossians*, 65-66; Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 163, *Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 10th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1890) 135-36; Martin, *Colossians*, 68; Pokorný, *Colossians*, 93; contra O'Brien, *Colossians*, 69 who believes εἴγε does not express doubt, though he believes εἴ γε ἐπιμένετε τῇ πίστει is a real warning.

¹²³ O'Neill's interpretation of this passage should also be noted, for he says the phrase εἴ γε ἐπιμένετε τῇ πίστει is a wish (cf. Josh 7.7; Luke 11.42), and should be translated "O that you would continue in the faith" ("The Source of Christology in Colossians," 94). Since the author gives several direct warnings in Colossians regarding what he regards as error and Christological defection (2.3-4, 8-9, 17-19), and given the paraenetical nature of the "then...now" motif, it is highly unlikely that the author is merely issuing a wish in 1.23.

¹²⁴ In Rom 6.1 ἐπιμένω may refer not just to individual sinful acts but to the realm of sin. The use of ἐπιμένω in Rom 11.22 clearly connotes the realm of God's kindness, cf. "ἐπιμένω," *EDNT* 2.31.

¹²⁵ As will be see in the next section, Col 2.6-7 strongly supports this interpretation of 1.23. On the use of πίστις to refer to body of faith or that which the early Christians believed, cf. Rom 1.5; Gal 1.23; 1 Tim 4.1; Jude 3; possibly 1 Tim 1.19; 6.21; 2 Tim 2.18, cf. also Bultmann, "πίστις," *TDNT* 6.213-14; Bultmann, *Theology*, 87-91, 314; Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 359-64; 370-74; Ridderbos, *Paul*, 237-42.

(τοῦ εὐαγγελίου οὗ ἠκούσατε), i.e., the apostolic message. It is acceptance of this gospel about Jesus Christ which brings salvation and individual reconciliation (Col 1.4-5; 2.12). Thus it was imperative for the Colossians to continue to hold fast to the gospel, for defection would imperil their salvation (pictured by their eschatological presentation to God).

The Colossians' call to spiritual steadfastness is made more explicit through the use of architectural language. The verb θεμελιόω means "to lay a foundation, establish." It is used of a house with a foundation laid on a rock (Matt 7.25; Luke 6.48), of laying the foundation of the earth (Job 38.4; Heb 1.10), and of the earth being founded by wisdom (Prov 3.19). It is used figuratively of believers being established and strengthened (1 Pet 5.10) and of believers being rooted and grounded in love (Eph 3.17). The adjective ἑδραῖος, which is best translated "firm" or "steadfast" in Col 1.23, is used repeatedly in the LXX of structures or entities which are firmly established and steadfast.¹²⁶ Its three uses in the NT are all figurative, relating to a firm faith (1 Cor 15.58; Col 1.23; 1 Pet 5.9). This building language was probably intended to impel the Colossians to steadfastness and spiritual growth in the Christian faith. They had already accepted the gospel by faith and been spiritually established.¹²⁷ Now they needed to maintain and build on that spiritual foundation.

3. Summary of Ethical Significance of 1.21-23

Unlike the Hellenistic Jewish literature, the NT, including Col 1.20 teaches that God took the initiative to reconcile humans, and he did this through the death of Christ on the cross. Unlike the Pauline texts which merely affirm anthropological reconciliation, in Col 1.20 cosmic reconciliation is affirmed. This involves the placement of every entity back into its created order. This cosmic reconciliation is shown to have personal, ethical implications, for the Colossians who were alienated, hostile, and engaged in evil deeds were in need of reconciliation and moral change. In fact, according to the author this personal reconciliation, ultimately based on cosmic reconciliation through the death of Christ on the cross, was personally appropriated by the Colossians. The purpose of the Colossians' reconciliation is expressly ethical, for they were reconciled in order to be presented to God in a state of moral completeness.

¹²⁶ Ps 88.37; 89.2, 17; 92.2; Sir 22.18.

¹²⁷ The use of the perfect participle θεμελιωμένοι is significant, for it indicates their past establishment in the faith. Harris gives a helpful paraphrase of this portion of v. 23 and brings out the force of the perfect tense. He paraphrases v. 23 "if indeed you continue exercising faith—faith in which you were once...firmly founded and now should be steadfast" (*Colossians*, 60).

Lest the readers enjoy a false security, and allow the opponents to draw them away from the apostolic gospel with the resultant fitting lifestyle, they are given a stern warning. The warning is that their very salvation at the end of the age would be threatened if they did not remain steadfast in the gospel they had once accepted.

The lofty Christology of the hymn thus provides the direct foundation for Christian moral behaviour. Christology and ethics are inextricably connected in this portion of Colossians. As Lohse correctly asserts, the headship of Christ affirmed in the hymn is not just a future apocalyptic reality, but as vv. 21-23 demonstrate, it has present ethical significance. Christ is head over the powers, as he is also head over his body which is the church.¹²⁸ The affirmation of Christ's supremacy over all of creation, including the cosmic powers, has direct bearing on the moral life of the believer. This linking of the lordship of Christ with the believer's moral life is affirmed and developed much more explicitly in the following section (2.6-7).

C. Orderly Conduct Consonant with Christian Inception: 2.6-7

1. Context of 2.6-7

Rhetorically, 2.1-5 serves to communicate the writer's involvement in the churches he had not yet visited.¹²⁹ This includes the articulation of his desire for the Colossians, viz., that they would experience spiritual growth (v. 2) and avoid being deceived by the opponents (v. 4). He establishes rapport and credibility with the Colossians in ch. 1 by informing them of his thankfulness for them (v. 3a), his prayers for them (vv. 3b, 9-12), his suffering for them (v. 24), his divine stewardship, of which they were direct beneficiaries (v. 25), and his pastoral struggle for all individuals in the sphere of his ministry (vv. 28-29), which by inference includes the Colossians. In 2.1 he continues to voice his concern for and involvement with the Colossian believers by informing them of his struggle on their behalf.¹³⁰ The *ἵνα* clause in v. 2

¹²⁸ In a discussion of the hymn's application to 1.21-24, Lohse argues "nicht erst am Ende der Abfolge apokalyptischer Ereignisse wird Christus das Regiment übernehmen, sondern bereits hier und jetzt übt er seine Herrschaft über das All aus als Haupt seines Leibes, welcher die Kirche ist" ("Christologie und Ethik," 257). For a similar assessment of the ethical implications of the hymn, cf. Tachau, "*Einst*" und "*Jetzt*," 114-15.

¹²⁹ So Schweizer, *Colossians*, 115.

¹³⁰ Various proposals have been given to explain the nature of the writer's struggle (*ἀγών*—cf. 1.29 where the verbal form is used) for individuals he had not personally met. Lohmeyer maintains that *ἀγών* is virtually a technical term for martyrdom, and thus the struggle refers to Paul's impending martyrdom (*Kolosser*, 89, 92). Caird suggests that the struggle pertains to Paul's general pastoral concern for the young churches (cf. 2 Cor 11.28), which included ones he had founded (1 Thess 3.1) and ones he had not (Rom 1.13) (*Colossians*, 187; also Martin, *Colossians*, 74). Harris modifies this proposal, and suggests that the writer's struggle refers primarily to "the spiritual warfare of wrestling in

(ἵνα παρακληθῶσιν αἱ καρδίαι αὐτῶν) signals the purpose of the writer's involvement in the community—the strengthening of their hearts. This is given further elaboration using revelatory language, which in view of the identity of the opponents, is probably polemical. The writer laboured to see the Colossians gain a full understanding of Christ, God's mystery (vv. 2-3).

In v. 4 the author issues his first overt warning of spiritual danger (the warning in 1.23 is real but indirect). He believed the opponents threatened the spiritual vitality of the Colossian believers, and could not let this threat continue uncontested. The Christological nature of the threat is apparent with the use of the clause τοῦτο λέγω ἵνα μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς παραλογίζηται. This clause is best understood as a retrospective purpose clause ("I say this in order that no one may delude you") instead of a prospective imperatival clause ("what I mean is this, do not let anyone delude you").¹³¹ O'Brien gives three cogent arguments¹³² for its being retrospective: (1) the so-called parallels in Gal 3.17 and 1 Cor 1.12 do not contain a ἵνα clause; (2) there are no New Testament instances of an imperatival ἵνα clause following a τοῦτο λέγω clause, whereas the ταῦτα λέγω ἵνα construction in John 5.34 is retrospective; (3) the presence of the conjunction γάρ in 2.5 would be quite awkward if the ἵνα clause in v. 4 is taken as imperatival, for the theme of v. 5 (his absence) ties v. 1-5 together.

Thus the ἵνα clause in v. 4 is polemical, designed to help the Colossians avoid being led astray. Apparently the writer believed the opponents' persuasive arguments regarding the ascetic placation of cosmic powers (2.14-19) and the attainment of heavenly visions threatened to delude the Colossian believers and warp their understanding of the Christian life in general and their understanding of Christ in particular.

Before the writer issues a direct corrective against the threats from the opponents in v. 6, he again links himself with the Colossians and commends their present spiritual condition in v. 5. The words ἐν καὶ are concessive,¹³³ and introduce the theme of the writer's physical absence but spiritual presence. The conjunction γάρ reaches back to v. 4 and links the writer's warning to his involvement in the Colossian

prayer," which he infers from 1.9-12 (*Colossians*, 78-79). Pfitzner builds a strong case by appealing to the context of 2.1, and argues that the writer's struggle refers to his general labour for the gospel (cf. 1.28-29), which includes both the spread and the defence of the faith. This is said to include his specific prayers, pastoral concerns, and inner struggles for the Colossians (cf. 1.24) (*Paul and the Agon Motif* [Leiden: Brill, 1967] 109-12).

¹³¹ So Moule, *Colossians*, 88.

¹³² *Colossians*, 97; cf. also Bandstra, "The Colossian Errorists," 339-40 and Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption*, 176-77.

¹³³ Luke 11.8; 18.4; 1 Cor 7.21; 2 Cor 4.16; 7.8; Phil 2.17; Thrall, *Greek Particles in the New Testament. Linguistic and Exegetical Studies*, NTTS 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1962) 79.

church.¹³⁴ Specifically, the writer contends that he is giving them a strong caution regarding being deluded in view of the fact that though he is physically absent, he is spiritually present (τῆ σαρκὶ ἀπειμι, ἀλλὰ τῷ πνεύματι σὺν ὑμῖν εἰμι). The writer's spiritual presence has been understood in various ways. Bultmann argues that it refers to Paul's spiritual presence in wish or will, in simple contrast to his physical (fleshly) presence.¹³⁵ This interpretation fails, however, to account for the force of the conjunction γάρ which links the spiritual presence with the warning in v. 4. The writer's spiritual presence in the form of a desire to be with the Colossians seems far too weak to authorise the warnings in vv. 4, 6.

Best and O'Brien relate this passage to 1 Cor 5.3-5, and assert that the writer was spiritually present with the Colossians in the sense that they were both united with Christ through the Spirit.¹³⁶ Thus "because both live with Christ, he is present in spirit with them."¹³⁷ While this interpretation is possible for 1 Cor 5.3-5, particularly in view of the role of the Spirit in incorporating believers into the body of Christ (1 Cor 12.13), it is very unlikely in this passage. Union with Christ is certainly developed in Colossians (2.12-13; 3.1-3), but the Spirit is not assigned a role in this event.¹³⁸ Furthermore, there is nothing in the context of 2.5 to suggest that the writer's spiritual presence refers to union with Christ.

Schweizer contends that spiritual presence in v. 5 refers to the Holy Spirit who denotes Paul's authority and mediates an influence beyond Paul's physical presence.¹³⁹ This interpretation best fits the context, in which it is inferred that the writer's spiritual presence somehow conveys authority. His spiritual presence is directly linked to the warning in v. 4, and is indirectly linked to the direct admonition in v. 6. In the Pauline *homologoumena*, the Spirit often conveys power and authority in ministry, either for

¹³⁴ Lohse, *Colossians*, 83, n. 123; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 97.

¹³⁵ *Theology*, 208.

¹³⁶ Best, *One Body in Christ*, 59; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 98.

¹³⁷ O'Brien, *Colossians*, 98.

¹³⁸ Pneumatology is developed differently in Colossians than it is in 1 Corinthians and the rest of the Pauline *homologoumena*. On pneumatology and Pauline ethics, cf. F. W. Horn, "Wandel im Geist. Zur pneumatologischen Begründung der Ethik bei Paulus," *KD* 38 (1992) 149-70. Horn asserts that pneumatology is not foundational to all Pauline ethics, but is active exclusively in love for one's neighbour. On pneumatology in Colossians, cf. E. Schweizer, "Christus und Geist im Kolosserbrief," in *Christ and the Spirit in the New Testament*, ed. by B. Lindars and S. Smalley (Cambridge: CUP, 1973) 297-313. Schweizer does not assert a radical disjunction between the pneumatology of Colossians and the undisputed Pauline epistles, but believes that Colossians evidences a shift in emphasis from pneumatology to Christology in view of the Colossian opponents, for "orthodoxy is more easily maintained with regard to a clearly defined doctrine about Christ, than with regard to the Spirit" (313).

¹³⁹ "πνεῦμα," *TDNT* 6.436; also "πνεῦμα," *EDNT* 3.119. Lohse holds a similar position but believes there is a dual reference here to both the human and the divine spirit. He argues that τῷ πνεύματι refers primarily to the individual self, but at the same time the human Spirit is connected with the Holy Spirit who empowers the apostle (*Colossians*, 83).

Paul (Rom 9.1; 15.15, 19; 1 Cor 2.4-13; 2 Cor 3.3-8; 1 Thess 1.5; 4.8) or for Christian ministers in general (1 Cor 12.8). The identification of spiritual presence with the Holy Spirit also finds contextual support in the latter portion of v. 5, which describes the Colossians' spiritual stability ("your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ"), since in the undisputed Pauline literature and Ephesians, spiritual growth is explicitly a work of the Spirit (Rom 8.1-16; 1 Cor 2.4-16; Gal 5.5-25; Eph 1.13; 2.18, 22; 3.16; 4.30; 5.18; 6.17, 18). Thus the juxtaposition of the writer's spiritual presence with his rejoicing over the Colossians' spiritual growth is logical, for it is ultimately the Holy Spirit who enables believers to grow and it is the Holy Spirit who gives authority to his ministry.

The writer next describes the Colossians' spiritual growth in terms of good order (τάξις) and firmness¹⁴⁰ of faith in Christ (τὸ στερῆωμα τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν πίστεως ὑμῶν). Numerous exegetes argue that τάξις and στερῆωμα are military metaphors.¹⁴¹ Thus the NEB translation of this text reads "your orderly array and the firm front which your faith in Christ presents." While τάξις and στερῆωμα are often used in military contexts,¹⁴² they are more often used in other contexts.¹⁴³ The context of Col 2.5 is spiritual stability in the face of persuasive teachers who could deceive (v. 4) and spiritually enslave (v. 8). Thus τάξις and στερῆωμα are used to indicate social and spiritual strength, and probably not to connote specific military imagery. Τάξις ("order") describes the social stability of the Christian community in the face of opponents who would splinter the church if successful. Στερῆωμα ("firmness") describes the Colossians' faith, and indicates spiritual stability amidst claims that Christ is insufficient for fullness of spirituality and protection from the cosmic spirits. This is evidenced by the fact that the writer does not simply praise the Colossians for their faith, but for their faith in Christ (εἰς Χριστὸν). Though in v. 5 the writer praises the Colossians for their social and spiritual strength, he desires to see continued growth in the midst of opposition, so in v. 6 he issues a direct admonition.

¹⁴⁰ Chadwick sees a polemical allusion here to the gnostic doctrine of στερῆωμα—the barrier between the upper and lower realms ("All things to all Men," 272-73). The author's use of στερῆωμα could be polemical, but this is not likely since two other terms in this word group are used in the New Testament (στερεός—2 Tim 2.19; Heb 5.12, 14; 1 Pet 5.9; στερεώω—Acts 3.7; 16.5), and twice one of these terms is used to describe Christian faith (Acts 16.5; 1 Pet 5.9).

¹⁴¹ Caird, *Letters from Prison*, 188; Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 175-76; Lohmeyer, *Kolossier*, 95; Martin, *Colossians*, 76-77; Moule, *Colossians*, 89; contra Lohse, *Colossians*, 84 and O'Brien, *Colossians*, 99.

¹⁴² τάξις—"military camp or ranks," Xenophon, *An.* 1.2.18; Plutarch, *Pyrrh.* 16; cp. 1 QS 10.25; στερῆωμα—"castle or bulwark," 1 Macc 9.14; 1 Esdr 8.78.

¹⁴³ τάξις—"good order" Lucian *Alex.* 46; "fixed succession or order" Papias 2.15; Luke 1.8; 1 Cor 14.40; "post, position" 1 Esdr 1.15; Epictetus 1.29.39; Diogn. 6.10; "nature, quality, manner," Heb 5.6, 10; 7.17; Polybius, 3.20.5; στερῆωμα—"the solid part, firmament," Gen 1.6; Ezek 1.22; *I Enoch* 18.2; "skeleton," Aristotle *PA*, 655^a22.

In summary, in Col 2.1-5 the writer establishes rapport and credibility with the Colossians by indicating his concern for them and his distant, yet real, involvement in their lives. Throughout this section the writer emphasises the need for spiritual stability in the face of baneful opponents who, in his opinion, would deceive them and lead them away from Christ. With this background in view, the author's explicit moral exhortation in v. 6 will now be examined.

2. Significance of 2.6-7

Col 2.6-7 is a key text for our study of Christology and ethics, for it directly links Christology and moral behaviour.¹⁴⁴ After praising the Colossians for their social stability and firm faith in Christ in v. 5, in v. 6 the writer admonishes the Colossians to continued spiritual growth. More specifically, he calls on them to walk in a manner consonant with the inception of their faith (their reception of Christological tradition). The author does this by utilising the indicative/imperative construction, for they are called to walk in the present (imperative) based on their reception of Christ in the past (indicative). Hence paraenesis is drawn directly from Christology.

Col 2.6-7 is also significant in the overall rhetorical development in the epistle. O'Brien goes so far as to assert that 2.6 lies at "the heart of the letter."¹⁴⁵ Beasley-Murray similarly states that "the fundamental appeal of Colossians is stated in verses 6-7."¹⁴⁶ Given the nature of the Colossian opposition and the development of Christology in Colossians, 2.6-7 does appear to lie at the heart of the epistle.

The opponents were threatening the spiritual vitality of the Colossians by advocating the placation of cosmic powers, the pursuit of divine revelation through heavenly visions, and possibly the worship of angels. The opponents' tenets and attendant practices thus undermined the person and work of Christ. The solution to the Christological threat directly stated in 2.3-4, 8 is succinctly given in 2.6, with the injunction "as you have received Christ, so walk in him." Thus Nash in the context of affirming that 2.6 is the pivotal verse of Colossians, states,

The emphasis on the cosmic scope of Christ's lordship suggests that the author wished to dispel any compromising views regarding the authority of Christ. All rule and authority had been placed under Christ's sovereignty (1:6; 2:10, 15).

¹⁴⁴ Lohse notes that in Col 2.6 "Christology and ethics are immediately conjoined," *Colossians*, 93, n. 7.

¹⁴⁵ *Colossians*, 104-105.

¹⁴⁶ "The Second Chapter of Colossians," 470; cf. also Dibelius, *Kolosser*, 26; Nash, "The Role of the Haustafeln," 177-78, 207-209; Schweizer, *Colossians*, 125

The possibility of permitting human tradition and earthly structures (τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου) to control life was intolerable for the Christian life (2.8)...The emphatic placement of τὸν κύριον with τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν [in 2.6] stressed the nonnegotiable nature of Christ's lordship.¹⁴⁷

Additional evidence for the pivotal role played by 2.6¹ is seen in the fact that it contains numerous fundamental themes found elsewhere in the epistle. These include thanksgiving (1.12; 3.15; 4.2), union with Christ (2.12-13; 3.1-3), faith (1.4; 23; 2.5, 12), Christological teaching or tradition (1.7; 28; 2.8, 22), a walk worthy of the Lord (1.10; cf. 3.23), and Jesus being the Lord (1.3; 1.15-20; cf. 2.15). The final theme of Christ's lordship is one of the cardinal themes in the epistle, and is most fully developed in 1.15-20. Thus some scholars believe the Colossian hymn provides the basis for 2.6-7.¹⁴⁸

3. Meaning of 2.6-7

Though the writer's admonition in v. 6 is brief, and the command ("walk in him") is fairly straightforward, the basis for the command ("as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord") is not perspicuous. The opening verbal clause of v. 6 "as you received Christ Jesus the Lord" (ὡς παρελάβετε τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον) clarifies the command "so walk in him" by making the latter correlative to the former.¹⁴⁹ Thus the Colossians are enjoined to walk or act in a manner somehow consonant with their past reception of Christ Jesus the Lord. Though there is debate regarding the specific contextual meaning of "as you received Christ Jesus the Lord," there is a clear consensus that it refers to the Colossians' acceptance of Christological tradition.¹⁵⁰ The

¹⁴⁷ Nash, "The Role of the Haustafeln," 208.

¹⁴⁸ Fowl, *The Story of Christ*, 131-54; Lähnemann, *Kollosserbrief*, 151-52.

¹⁴⁹ The use of ὡς to denote comparison or correlation is common in the New Testament (Matt 6.10; Acts 7.51; 2 Cor 1.7; 13.12; Gal 1.9; Phil 1.20); cf. Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-Lexicon*, s.v. "ὡς." Normally in a correlative relationship such as this one, the primary clause begins with the conjunction οὕτως, and the other clause begins with ὡς (Isa 53.7; Acts 8.32; 23.11; Rom 5.15, 18; 2 Cor 1.7). In Col 2.6 the conjunction οὕτως is not used.

¹⁵⁰ Beasley-Murray, "The Second Chapter of Colossians," 470; F. F. Bruce, *Tradition Old and New* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1970) 36; O. Cullmann, "The Tradition," in *The Early Church*, ed. by A. J. B. Higgins (London: SCM, 1956) 68; N. A. Dahl, "Anamnesis," in *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976) 15-17; G. Dellings, "παραλαμβάνω," *TDNT* 4.14; Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 68, 145; L. Goppelt, "Tradition nach Paulus," *KD* 4 (1958) 215, 227-28; R. P. Hanson, *Tradition in the Early Church* (London: SCM, 1962) 11-12; J. McDonald, *Kerygma and Didache: The Articulation and Structure of the Earliest Christian Message* (Cambridge: CUP, 1980) 124-25; cf. also H. Koester, "The Structure and Criteria of Early Christian Belief," in *Trajectories Through Early Christianity*, ed. by J. Robinson and H. Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 205-31; Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament*, 3rd. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1982) 182-84. Wegenast is one of the few dissenters, and asserts that ὡς παρελάβετε τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον refers not to the acceptance of apostolic tradition concerning Christ but to baptised believers

verb παραλαμβάνω is used ten other times in the Pauline literature, and nine of the ten¹⁵¹ instances refer to the reception of authoritative Christian tradition, obtained either from the apostles (1 Cor 15.1-3;¹⁵² Gal 1.9; Phil 4.9; 1 Thess 2.13; 4.1; 2 Thess 3.6) or directly from the Lord (1 Cor 11.23;¹⁵³ Gal 1.12¹⁵⁴). In 2 Thess 3.6 παραλαμβάνω is expressly used of the reception of apostolic παράδοσις (tradition). In Mark 7.4 it is used of the acceptance of Rabbinic tradition.

Thus the Colossians are called to walk (live) based on their acceptance of tradition about Christ (tradition delivered through Epaphras, cf. 1.7). Since Paul was an apostle (Col 1.1), and in the early church apostles as witnesses of the resurrected Lord had an authoritative role in passing on Christian tradition (Acts 1.21; Rom 1.1, 14-15; Gal 1.1-12), the writer had a firm basis for admonishing the Colossians to live out in the present the traditions about Christ they had received in the past.¹⁵⁵

accepting the lordship of Christ, thus making a new way of life possible. He states "παραλαμβάνειν ist an unserer Stelle kein Traditionsbegriff im jüdischen Sinne, sondern bezeichnet meines Erachtens, wie Vers 6f. beweist, den Akt, in dem der Täufling in den Herrschaftsbereich Christi aufgenommen wird, und die in diesem Akt erfolgende Anerkennung Christi als des Herrn—die glaubende Annahme der Christusbotschaft—, die einen neuen Wandel ermöglicht" (*Das Verständnis der Tradition*, 128). Wegenast must strain the passage to find a primary reference to baptism here. He also fails to provide adequate support for his contention that with the use of the verb παραλαμβάνω, the writer merely takes over the vocabulary of his opponents who appealed to tradition. A. Kretzer ("παραλαμβάνω," *EDNT* 3.30) offers a milder departure from the traditional interpretation, and suggests that παραλαμβάνω in Col 2.6 is not a technical term for apostolic tradition, but refers to community building, as in John 1.11 ("his own did not receive the word") and 14.3 ("I will take you to myself"). While this interpretation of παραλαμβάνω may be possible in the Johannine usages, it is without precedent in the Pauline and deutero-Pauline literature.

¹⁵¹ The other usage is found in Col 4.17, which refers to the pastoral ministry Archippus received. Many exegeses believe that even this passage alludes to apostolic tradition received from Paul (O'Brien, *Colossians*, 259; Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 244-45; Pokorný, *Colossians*, 195).

¹⁵² Hunter (*Paul and His Predecessors*, 15) cites several arguments for affirming that 1 Cor 15.3-4 refers to pre-Pauline tradition: (1) the verbs used here are technical terms for the transmission and reception of tradition; (2) ὅτι is used here four times, and is the equivalent of quotation marks (ὅτι recitativum); (3) v. 11 indicates that the message just recounted was not a private *credo* but the message of all the apostles.

¹⁵³ This text ("I have received from the Lord what I also delivered to you") may also refer to the reception of apostolic tradition while at the same time affirming that Jesus is the ultimate source of Christian tradition (Bornkamm, "Lord's Supper and Church in Paul," in *Early Christian Experience* [New York: Harper and Row, 1969] 131; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 548).

¹⁵⁴ There is a discrepancy between 1 Cor 15.1-3, where Paul indicates he received the gospel (*kerygmatic* apostolic tradition) from others, and Gal 1.12, where he insists that he did not receive his gospel message from others but directly from God. Fee (*1 Corinthians*, 548) and Bornkamm ("The Lord's Supper," 123-60) attempt to resolve the discrepancy by arguing that Gal 1.11-12, 15-17 speak of the gospel, not Jesus tradition. Given the canonical description of Paul's gospel (Rom 1.1-4; 16.25; 2 Cor 4.3-6; 11.4; Gal 1.6) and the description of tradition recounted in 1 Cor 15.3-4, this appears to be a distinction without a difference. Furthermore, in 1 Cor 15.1, 3 the gospel and tradition are clearly identified with each other. Barrett (*1 Corinthians*, 265) offers a more plausible resolution to this apparent discrepancy between 1 Cor 15.1-3 and Gal 1.12. He suggests that while Paul did receive the factual tradition from humans, he received the interpretation (and hence the verification) directly from the Lord.

¹⁵⁵ Cullmann, "Tradition," 75-86; Dahl, "Anamnesis," 27-28; Lohse, *Colossians*, 92-93. Cullmann rightly stresses that as eyewitnesses of the resurrection, the apostles had a unique position and authority. He states "the apostolate consists in the witness given to Christ. Of course, the church also bears witness to Christ, but it cannot bear that direct witness which belongs to the apostles. Its witness is a *derived* witness, because it does not rest on the direct revelation which was the privilege of

In terms of content, apostolic tradition had three different elements:¹⁵⁶ a succinct recollection of the gospel message (1 Thess 2.13; 1 Cor 15.3-4), recollections of the words and deeds of Jesus (1 Cor 7.10-16; 11.23; cf. 1 Cor 9.14), and paraenesis (1 Cor 11.2; 1 Thess 4.1; 2 Thess 3.6).¹⁵⁷ In Col 2.6 the first and third elements are both involved, for the Colossians are enjoined to recall their original faith confession, and live a life appropriate to that confession. This blending of gospel kerygma¹⁵⁸ and paraenesis in early church tradition occurs in other texts, most notably Rom 6.17 ("you obeyed from the heart the form of teaching which you received") and 1 Cor 11.2 ("you hold fast to the traditions just as I delivered them to you").

The emphasis in Col 2.6, however, is not merely on the application of general Christian tradition, but the recollection and application of Christ Jesus as Lord¹⁵⁹

the apostle alone as an *eye-witness*" ("Tradition," 78); contra Schütz who believes the apostles had no unique authority to pass on tradition, rather, they had authority (as did all Christians) to proclaim the gospel (*Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* [Cambridge: CUP, 1975] 281).

Due to his conviction that the gospel message is trans-historical, Delling takes a different approach altogether to the question of authority in relation to early church tradition. He believes authority lies not externally in the apostolic messenger, or objectively in the specific content of the message, but existentially through the response of the recipients. It was generated when the recipients of Christian tradition "accepted [it] into the essential core of [their] personality." This is said to explain the claim to validity of Christian faith by congregations such as the Colossians which were not evangelised by Paul ("παραλαμβάνω," *TDNT* 4.14). On the contrary, in Gal 1.6-12 and 2 Thess 3.6 those whose personal spiritual experience led them away from the apostolic tradition are censured. Furthermore, 1 Cor 15.1-4 and Gal 1.11-12 place strong emphasis on the objective, historical content of the gospel as the object of παραλαμβάνω.

¹⁵⁶ See especially Bruce, *Tradition*, 29-38; Cullmann, "The Tradition," 64-65; Hanson, *Tradition*, 11.

¹⁵⁷ Dahl appears to minimise this element of tradition, for he implies that specific paraenesis was unnecessary. He says Christian converts "need only recall their initiation and permit this memory to shape their conduct" ("Anamnesis," 16). Elsewhere, however, he concedes that "at a very early time, baptismal instruction included the fundamentals of Christian conduct" ("Anamnesis," 24). In response one need only note that regardless of whether the recollection of the gospel and Christian initiation should have been sufficient for moral guidance apart from specific paraenetical instruction, the fact is that paraenesis was a part of early Christian tradition (1 Cor 11.2; 1 Thess 4.1; 2 Thess 3.6).

¹⁵⁸ Some scholars deny that the gospel was part of the apostolic *paradosis*. Schütz, for example, says the gospel is not *paradosis*, but the interpretation of it (*Apostolic Authority*, 110). In addition to failing to recognise that 1 Cor 15.1, 4 equate (or at least overlap) gospel and tradition, Schütz misconstrues the apostolic task. He states "Paul does not regard tradition as something which he shares with others and he does regard proclamation of the gospel as the quintessential apostolic task" (54). In fact Paul highly regarded the task of sharing tradition with the churches, as Phil 4.9; 1 Thess 2.13; 4.1 (cf. 2 Thess 3.6) indicate. Goppelt ("Tradition nach Paulus," 213-33) and H. Schlier ("Kerygma und Sophia: Zur neutestamentlichen Grundlegung des Dogmas," in *Die Zeit der Kirche: Exegetische Aufsätze und Vorträge* [Freiburg: Herder, 1962] 206-32) both believe early church tradition included the gospel or *kerygma*. Goppelt says "gospel" is Paul's formulation of the *Urkerygma* in the form of an early community confession (228-33). Schlier with a slightly different formulation says the *kerygma* is "normative apostolic *paradosis*" and includes both gospel and tradition.

¹⁵⁹ On the Christological title κύριος, see W. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus*, trans. by J. E. Stealy (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970); F. F. Bruce, "Jesus is Lord," in *Soli Deo Gloria*, FS W. Robinson, ed. by J. M. Richards (Richmond: Knox, 1946) 23-36; Bultmann, *Theology*, 121-33; Cullmann, *Christology in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1963) 195-237; Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 50-59; J. Fitzmyer, "κύριος," *EDNT* 2.328-31; W. Foerster, "κύριος," *TDNT* 3.1039-95; R. H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Charles Scribners, 1965) 50, 67-70, 87-93, 156-58, 184-86; F. Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology: Their History in Early Christianity* (London:

(παρελάβετε τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον). Κύριος is used of Jesus over 220 times in the Pauline epistles, and most scholars agree that "Jesus is Lord" was the principal confession of faith for Paul and his churches.¹⁶⁰ The use of the Aramaic expression *maranatha* ("our Lord come!" or "our Lord comes") in the early church also supports the early and central use of κύριος in confessions about Jesus. Some scholars have posited substantial differences between the two terms, suggesting that *mara* had a much narrower usage, and was used only of humans,¹⁶¹ whereas the belief in Jesus as the divine κύριος reflected a later Christological evolution owing to the influence of pagan mystery religions and Roman emperor worship.¹⁶² More recent scholarship has shown substantial overlap in the two words,¹⁶³ and reveals *mara* was also used as an honorific divine designation.¹⁶⁴ The belief of the early church that Jesus was Lord arose primarily as a response to their belief in his resurrection/exaltation (Luke 24.23; John 20.28; Acts 2.36; Phil 2.9-11). In time the application of κύριος to Jesus was understood as a title of deification (John 20.28).

With respect to the specific use of κύριος in Col 2.6, Harris notes six ways the phrase τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον could be translated.¹⁶⁵ The extant forms of early Christian confessions as well as the context of 2.6 point to "Jesus Christ the Lord" or "Jesus Christ as Lord" as the best translation for this phrase. It should be noted that the phrase found here (τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον) is very similar to the early Christian confession "Jesus is Lord" (Rom 10.9; 1 Cor 12.3; Phil 2.11) which was probably recited by new converts at baptism,¹⁶⁶ and by the assembly in public

Lutterworth, 1969); I. H. Marshall, *The Origins of Christology* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990) 97-110; Moule, *Origins of Christology* 35-46; G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973) 103-28.

¹⁶⁰ So Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 50.

¹⁶¹ H. Boers, "Where Christianity Is Real," *Interp* 26 (1972) 315-17; S. Schulz, "Maranatha und Kyrios Jesus," *ZNW* 53 (1962) 125-44.

¹⁶² W. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos—Geschichte des Christusglaubens von den Anfängen des Christentums bis Irenaeus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926) 91-101; Bultmann, *Theology*, 51-52.

¹⁶³ M. Black, "The Maranatha Invocation and Jude 14, 15 (1 Enoch 1.9)," in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament*, 189-96; Cullmann, *Christology*, 205-15; Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 393, n. 35; Marshall, *Christology*, 101-104; Moule, *Christology*, 36-41.

¹⁶⁴ (Aramaic) *1 Enoch* 9.6; 89.31, 33, 36; *1QapGen* 20.12-15; 22.16, 21.

¹⁶⁵ *Colossians*, 88-89. There are two ways the phrase could be translated as a proper name: "Christ Jesus as Lord" (GNB; NIV; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 105) and "Christ Jesus the Lord" (RV; RSV; NASV; NAB; Lohse, *Colossians*, 92-93). There are four ways it could be translated as a title: "Jesus...as Christ and Lord" (NEB; cf. Moule, *Colossians*, 89-90), "Jesus, the Christ, as your Lord" (TCNT), "the Christ, Jesus, as your Lord" (Goodspeed), "the Christ, even Jesus the Lord" (Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 173-74).

¹⁶⁶ George Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1962) 66; 100-102; Bultmann, *Theology*, 125-26; J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 2nd ed. (SCM: London, 1960) 40-49; Martin, *The Worship of God*, 90-93; Moule, *Birth of the New Testament*, 40; Schnackenburg, *Baptism in the Thought of St. Paul*, trans. by G. R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964) 82; Wright, *Colossians*, 98-99, cf. also Cullmann (*Christology*, 217) who says the phrase "Jesus is Lord" was an early liturgical confession, though he does not specifically identify it with baptism.

worship.¹⁶⁷ The addition of the name Χριστός in Col 2.6 (cf. 2 Cor 4.5; Phil 2.11) comes from another probable early Christian confession "Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 9.22; 17.3; 18.5, 28).¹⁶⁸

The context of Col 2.6 also clarifies the meaning of τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον. In the hymn and throughout ch. 2 (vv. 8-10, 15, 19-22), the lordship of Christ over the cosmic powers is explicitly heralded (cf. esp. vv. 8-10). In vv. 3-4 the writer emphasises the fulness of wisdom found in Christ, as opposed to the revelatory experiences advocated by the opponents. This is an implicit affirmation of Christ's lordship. The repeated message throughout Col 1-2 is that Christ is Lord over the cosmic powers. Everything needed for spirituality is found in him alone. Thus the immediate and remote polemical context points to τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον being a proclamation of Jesus' cosmic lordship.

In summary, the phrase "as you received Christ Jesus the Lord" calls the Colossians back to their initial conversion experience (probably at baptism) when they accepted apostolic tradition and confessed Jesus Christ as Lord. Since the opponents were attempting to persuade the Colossians to submit to cosmic or angelic spirits, this call to their initial confession of Christ's lordship is quite logical.¹⁶⁹

With the final phrase in v. 6 "so live in him" ([οὕτως] ἐν αὐτῷ περιπατεῖτε) the writer moves from indicative ("as you received Christ Jesus the Lord") to imperative, and unveils the ethical implications of Christ's lordship.¹⁷⁰ This ethical theme was introduced with the same verb in 1.10 in the form of a prayer ("to live a life worthy of the Lord"), and now is given as a direct command. As the Colossians had confessed Christ as Lord at conversion, so they were now to continue walking (living)

¹⁶⁷ Dunn does not believe the evidence is clear that this confession was used at baptism, though he concedes that Rom 10.9 links conversion and public confession, which strongly suggests baptism (*Unity and Diversity*, 55). He does, however, affirm that this confession was a part of early Christian public worship (John 20.28; 1 Cor 12.3; Phil 2.11; cf. 1 John 4.1-3).

¹⁶⁸ Harris, *Colossians*, 89. On the title Χριστός applied to Jesus, see Cullmann, *Christology*, 111-37; Dahl, "The Messiahship of Jesus in Paul," in *Jesus the Christ: The Historical Origins of Christological Doctrine*, ed. by Donal Juell (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991) 15-25; Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 41-45; Fuller, *New Testament Christology*, 23-31, 109-111, 158-62, 184-86, 230; W. Grundmann, F. Hesse, M. de Jonge, and A. S. van der Woude, "Χριστός," *TDNT* 9.493-580; Hahn, *Titles of Jesus*, 136-239; "Χριστός," *EDNT* 3.478-86; R. N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (London: SCM, 1970) 63-119; Moule, *Christology*, 31-35; Vermes, *Jesus*, 129-59.

¹⁶⁹ Lohse comments on 2.6 "Christ Jesus is the Lord: that means that he is not a lord alongside other lords, but is the Kyrios in an absolute sense (cf. 1 Cor 8:5f.)" (*Colossians*, 93). See also O'Brien, *Colossians*, 106; Martin, *Colossians*, 73; Wegenast, *Tradition*, 128.

¹⁷⁰ B. F. Westcott is one of the few commentators who seems to minimise the paraenetical force of "walk in him." He reduces this admonition to mean "live in the power of His faith, in union with His Person" (*Colossians: A Letter to Asia* [Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1914, reprinted 1981] 98). While union with Christ is the stated matrix for carrying out the admonition, the expressly ethical nature of this command should not be minimised.

in a manner consonant with that initial confession. Since Christ is the cosmic lord, his lordship should govern all their behaviour. The Colossians' lives were to reflect the lordship of Christ.

Instead of giving a detailed description of the desired behaviour consonant with their initial confession of Christ,¹⁷¹ the writer uses four participles in v. 7 to provide a general description. The first participle (ἐρριζωμένοι "rooted") restates the soteriological event; they had been and continued to be (the force of the perfect tense here)¹⁷² rooted in Christ as a result of their Christological confession. This verb (ρίζω) is also used in Eph 3.17 of believers being rooted in love. In both Col 2.7 and Eph 3.17 the metaphors of planting (ρίζω) and building are connected. In Col 2.7 the verb ἐποικοδομέω is used to mean "built up." "Build" is a common Pauline metaphor for spiritual growth (Rom 15.20; 1 Cor 10.23; 1 Thess 5.11) and ἐποικοδομέω is used several times in the NT for spiritual growth (Acts 20.32; 1 Cor 3.10-14; Jude 20).

The point here is that the Colossians by virtue of their union with Christ (cf. 2.6 "live in him") had a foundation for spiritual growth¹⁷³ which should be built on. Both participles (ἐρριζωμένοι and ἐποικοδομούμενοι) are connected with the prepositional phrase ἐν αὐτῷ. The rooting and the building up take place in connection with the believer's union with Christ, but the Colossians had a responsibility to be built up. The imperatival force of ἐποικοδομούμενοι and the next two participles is evidenced by the fact that they are in the present tense, a significant shift from the perfect tense of ἐρριζωμένοι. The fluid transition from indicative to imperative is evident here. They had been rooted in Christ, and yet this union created an ethical responsibility to nurture that relationship so as to be "built up in him."

The next phrase βεβαιούμενοι τῇ πίστει καθὼς ἐδιδάχθητε also links indicative and imperative, and connects present moral behaviour with the apostolic tradition the Colossians received in the past. βεβαιώω generally refers to firm grounding

¹⁷¹ Though detailed behavioural implications of Christ's lordship are not given in 2.6-7, they certainly are in the latter portion of the epistle, where vice/virtue lists (3.5-17) and a household code (3.18-4.1) delineate what the author considered to be appropriate Christian behaviour consonant with the lordship of Christ (cf. 3.13, 16, 17, 23-24).

¹⁷² Wright (*Colossians*, 99) incorrectly identifies ἐρριζωμένοι as an aorist participle, and concludes that it refers to "a once-for-all planting of the Christian 'in Christ.'" Even if this was an aorist tense, it would not necessarily refer to once-for-all (punctiliar) activity (cf. Charles Smith, "Errant Aorist Interpreters," *Grace Theological Journal* 2 [1981] 205-26; Frank Stagg, "The Abused Aorist," *JBL* 91 [1972] 222-31). Rather, the use of the perfect tense here indicates the Colossians were rooted in Christ in the past, and continued to experience the ongoing results of that soteriological experience.

¹⁷³ Maurer comments on the use of ρίζω in Col 2.6 "the point is the close rooting in Christ, the lifegiving soil and sustaining foundation" ("ρίζω," *TDNT* 6.990).

or establishment,¹⁷⁴ and is used of Christ keeping believers firm in the faith (1 Cor 1.8), the gospel being confirmed (Phil 1.7), God establishing believers in Christ (2 Cor 1.21), and of the confirmation of the promises given to the patriarchs (Rom 15.8). In secular literature it is often a legal term referring to the guaranteeing of a binding legal contract.¹⁷⁵ Its use in Col 2.7 with respect to the faith refers to the establishment of the Colossians' faith, faith which began as a result of their acceptance of teaching containing apostolic tradition. The Colossians were to continue to strengthen and establish the faith in Christ they had been taught about through Epaphras, and yet this was not an entirely human activity, for it occurs in the context of the believer's union with Christ.¹⁷⁶

The final phrase found in v. 7 "abounding in thanksgiving" (περὶσσεύοντες ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ) is a more specific ethical injunction. The subject of thanksgiving is an important one for Paul (or those who wrote in his name), evidenced by the fact that in the NT epistles, εὐχάριστος, εὐχαριστία, and εὐχαριστέω are only found in the Pauline letters. Thanksgiving is a particularly important theme in Colossians (1.21; 3.15, 17; 4.2). It is probable that due to the influence of the opponents, the author believed the Colossians did not adequately understand or appreciate the richness of their existence in Christ, and thus felt the need to emphasise the theme of thanksgiving throughout this epistle.¹⁷⁷ Lohse seems to speculate that this injunction in 2.7 is an invitation to join in the hymnic confession of 1.15-20.¹⁷⁸ This is quite possible, for the hymns allowed the expression of praise and thanksgiving to God, which is specifically mentioned in 3.16.

4. Summary of 2.6-7

Col 2.6-7 is a foundational text for our study of the ground and shape of paraenesis in Colossians, for it directly links Christology and moral behaviour. It is also a foundational text in the argumentation of the entire epistle. After indicating his involvement with the Colossians and concern for them in the face of opposition which

¹⁷⁴ Schlier says the noun βέβαιος essentially refers to "that which is solidly grounded" ("βέβαιος," *TDNT* 1.602). The verbal form βεβαιῶ is used in a very similar manner.

¹⁷⁵ A judicial use is found in Heb 2.3; 6.16. 9.17; Lev 25.23, 30; Wis 6.18. For secular legal references, see Deissmann, *Bible Studies*, 104-109.

¹⁷⁶ The conjunction καί which links βεβαιούμενοι τῇ πίστει with the previous phrases ἐρριζωμένοι καὶ ἐποικοδομούμενοι ἐν αὐτῷ is probably expegetical (so O'Brien, *Colossians*, 107), revealing the interconnection between indicative and imperative.

¹⁷⁷ Pokorný, *Colossians*, 112.

¹⁷⁸ *Colossians*, 94.

threatened to lead them astray, the writer goes on in v. 6 to challenge the Colossians to continued spiritual growth. More specifically, he calls on them to walk in a manner consonant with the inception of their faith (their reception of apostolic Christological tradition). The author does this by utilising the indicative/imperative construction, for they are called to walk in the present (imperative) based on their reception of Christ in the past (indicative). Hence paraenesis is grounded in Christology. The Christology emphasised here is the lordship of Christ. In view of competing cosmic powers vying for the Colossians' allegiance, the lordship of Christ is emphasised (as it is throughout chs. 1-2) and made the basis for their manner of living.

While the writer does not give a detailed description of moral behaviour appropriate to the reception of Christ as Lord, he does give a general description through the use of four participles. The first participle ("rooted") highlights their union with Christ. The next ("built up") is also in the context of union with Christ, but brings out the personal responsibility for growth which must be shouldered by the Colossians. The third phrase ("established in the faith as you were taught") also connects indicative and imperative, for they had been taught about Christ in the past, and yet they needed to continue to strengthen and establish that faith. Finally, a specific call to thanksgiving is given. This is a repeated theme in Colossians, probably owing to the fact that the author believed they did not adequately understand or appreciate their position in Christ. Their confession of the hymn in 1.15-20 would be one specific way they could carry out this injunction.

III. Conclusion

The paraenetical material in Col 1-2 is solidly grounded in Christology, though not in a simplistic fashion. Merk, for example, in his monumental work concludes that Christology is central to Pauline paraenesis, but reduces this to the justifying work of God based on the Christ event.¹⁷⁹ While the soteriological work of Christ, particularly reconciliation, is clearly one of the foundational planks in the Colossian paraenesis (1.20-23; cf. 3.13), it is not the only plank. The ontological plank of the lordship of Christ is also made a foundational plank (1.9-10; 2.6-7).¹⁸⁰ This is primarily due to the

¹⁷⁹ Merk has been justifiably criticised for being excessively reliant on modern Lutheran theologians by over-emphasising the righteousness of God as the ground for all Pauline paraenesis (cf. Karel Hanhart's review of *Handeln aus Glauben* in *CBQ* 31 [1969] 587-88).

¹⁸⁰ Thus Cruz employs a much better methodology than Merk, for he recognises the complexity of Christological motivation in Pauline paraenesis (he considers Colossians Pauline), and divides his study into some of the following sections based on different types of Christological motives: motives based on the earthly Jesus; motives based on the risen Lord (Rom 6.4-13; Col 2.8,

fact that the Colossians were facing opposition to the apostolic Christological teachings, opposition which sought to promote other rival cosmic powers. Thus the Colossians were admonished to live based on the lordship of Christ.

Col 1-2 gives several glimpses of the shape of Christian behaviour, indicating that a worthy walk involves fruit bearing, increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthening with power, and thanksgiving (1.10-12) as well as being rooted and built up in Christ, established in the faith and abounding in thanksgiving (2.7). At the same time, no elaborate lists of virtuous or appropriate behaviour are given in chs. 1-2. It seems rather, that the writer is laying the basis for spiritual and moral victory by highlighting Christ's soteriological victory and ontological supremacy in the context of the believer's moral life. In Col 3.5ff., however, the writer will move beyond this ethical sketch and give detailed instructions regarding the shape of Christian morality.

11ff.); motives based on the Christ to come (Col 3.1-4); motives based on the whole way of Christ (Col 3.13). The last category is vague and seems to overlap the first category, and the role of the lordship of Christ in paraenetical motivation is somewhat ignored (Phil 2.9-13; Col 2.6-7;), but Cruz has offered a helpful addition to the body of literature, and highlights the richness of Pauline Christological motivations.

Chapter Five

Dying and Rising with Christ: Colossians 3.1-4; 2.11-13

I. Introductory Comments

A. Can a Largely Realised Eschatology Provide a Basis for Ethics?

As noted in the introductory chapter, some scholars assert that the delay in the parousia had a baleful effect on Christian ethics, for with a delay in the coming of Christ, little basis remains for ethics. J. T. Sanders in particular makes this assertion. He says with respect to Jesus "his ethical teaching is interwoven with his imminent eschatology to such a degree that every attempt to separate the two and to draw out only the ethical thread invariably and inevitably draws out also strands of eschatology, so that both strands only lie in a heap."¹ With respect to Colossians with its largely realised eschatology, he says "the loss of the Pauline expectation of the parousia has solved the Pauline ethical problem only by dissolving it."² Hence the ethical result of the loss of imminent eschatology is that "there is in Colossians no inner coherence between theology and ethics."³

Beker offers a similar assessment of the effect of realised eschatology on ethics in Colossians. He notes that while Rom 6.1-11 limits the believers' union with Christ to his death, Colossians and Ephesians extend it to his resurrection, and thus "the apocalyptic future collapses into the Christ-event." This is said to have a deleterious effect on ethics, for "when participation in Christ is viewed as a completed state, Christian ethical life is distorted, because it leads to premature spiritual perfection and to a sectarian segregation from the rest of God's creation."⁴

Other NT theologians while acknowledging that apocalyptic eschatology is integral to the Pauline ethic, deny that a delay in the parousia necessarily undercuts the basis for NT or Pauline ethics. Nancy Duff, for example, expands Käsemann's definition of apocalyptic ("expectation of an imminent parousia"⁵) to include present and future elements, and describes it as the Pauline belief that "the turning of the ages had already begun" for the new age "has already been inaugurated in Jesus Christ.

¹ *Ethics*, 29.

² *Ethics*, 80.

³ *Ethics*, 79.

⁴ *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 163.

⁵ Käsemann, "Primitive Christian Apocalyptic," in *New Testament Questions of Today*, 109.

Hence we live at the *junction* of the ages."⁶ Duff asserts that in spite of the delay in the parousia, the second advent has great ethical significance for it provides the motivation (by giving hope, since believers' lives are bound up in the destiny of Christ) and the power (since Christ is the living Lord who draws believers into a new orbit of power) for Christian behaviour.⁷

Even if a delay in the parousia did not eliminate the basis for ethics in the Pauline literature, Colossians may be another matter. That Colossians reflects at least a largely realised eschatology is beyond dispute. Eschatological themes such as future judgment and resurrection, common in the undisputed Pauline literature, are not as obvious in this epistle. Believers are said to have not only died with Christ and been buried with him in baptism (cp. Rom 6.3-5), but also to have already been raised with him (Col 2.12-13; 3.1-2).

Thus Gerhard Sellin says that in Rom 6.1-14 a combination of apocalyptic and wisdom terminology is used to affirm the believer's death with Christ, but the author of Colossians transforms this eschatology and posits the believer's present spiritual resurrection in baptism.⁸ Sellin believes other epistles, particularly 2 Timothy (cf. 2.18) and 2 Thessalonians (cf. 2.2) reflect a later re-apocalypticising movement which returned to the inaugurated theology of Romans, in opposition to the realised eschatology reflected in Colossians.⁹

In this chapter we will not attempt to evaluate whether it is logical for a largely realised eschatology to provide a basis for moral exhortation, or whether the ethical picture which emerges is distorted. Rather, we will seek to determine whether moral exhortation is given a clear theological basis, and if so, what is the nature of that basis, particularly in terms of realised eschatology.

B. The Relationship between Theology and Paraenesis in Col 3.1-4

In spite of the claims by some scholars that the largely realised eschatology of Colossians leaves little basis for ethics, the text of Colossians does not bear this out. In fact there is a distinct relationship between theology and ethics in Col 3.1-4, with paraenesis being given a strong soteriological and eschatological basis. In our final

⁶ "The Significance of Pauline Apocalyptic for Theological Ethics," in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament*, FS J. L. Martyn, JSNTSup 24, ed. by Joel Marcus and Marion Soards (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990) 281.

⁷ "The Significance of Pauline Apocalyptic," 290-91.

⁸ "Die Auferstehung ist schon geschehen," 230-33.

⁹ "Die Auferstehung ist schon geschehen," 233-37.

section of this chapter entitled "Death and Resurrection: New Eschatological Life in Christ" we will demonstrate that the paraenesis of Col 3.1-4 is grounded on inaugurated eschatology which is largely (though not entirely) similar to that found in the Pauline *homologoumena*.

As is common in the undisputed Pauline literature, in the latter portion of Colossians (beginning with 3.1) the author begins the move from what has largely been a theological discussion (indicative) to concentrated moral instruction (imperative), with the latter grounded on the former.¹⁰ In fact, in Col 3.1-4 there is a clear and firm theological (*kerygmatic*) grounding for paraenesis. The predication of paraenesis on *kerygma* is first evidenced by the use of the conjunction οὖν in v. 1. While οὖν can be used in a transitional or continuative sense,¹¹ this is the less common use of οὖν, and is found primarily in historical narrative to indicate resumption (Luke 3.7; 19.12; Acts 8.25) or the introduction of a new subject (John 1.22; 2.18; 5.10; Acts 25.1). In the Pauline epistles, οὖν is most frequently used inferentially to denote the results of an inference from what precedes (Rom 5.1; 6.4; 11.5; 12.1; 13.10; 16.19; 1 Cor 4.16; 2 Cor 3.12; Phil 2.28).¹² For example, based on the fact that the Corinthians only had one human spiritual father (1 Cor 4.14-15), Paul urges them (οὖν—4.16) to imitate himself. Based on the nature of justification explained in Rom 1.18-4.25, the believer is said to have¹³ (οὖν—5.1) peace with God. In Rom 11.1-4 Paul says that based on the fact that historically God never rejected his people the Israelites, but always maintained a faithful remnant (οὖν—11.5), there is a remnant in the present.

In Col 3.1 we find that based on the believers' relationship with Christ, a relationship in which believers are united, made alive, and raised with Christ (2.11-13), believers are (οὖν) admonished to seek the things above, to set their minds on things above, and to consider their body parts dead to sin. It is important to note that οὖν is not only used in 3.1, the beginning of the paraenetic section, but again in 3.5, to introduce the vice lists. The use of the conjunction οὖν in Col 3.1 and 3.5 serves to link

¹⁰ Furnish and others refer to this as the relationship between *kerygma* and *didache* in the Pauline epistles (Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, 98-111).

¹¹ Jeal, for example, argues that the οὖν at the beginning of the ethical section in Ephesians (4.1) "does not act as a direct causal connector that introduces conclusions, argumentation or proof, but draws on the rhetorical effect of the 'sermonic' language of chapters 1-3. The particle serves to mark a continuation of the concern for Christian growth and maturity" ("Theology and Ethics in Ephesians," 239).

¹² BAG, s.v. "οὖν."

¹³ If one accepts the well attested variant reading ἐχωμεν, then the believer is being admonished to have peace with God, but the use of the conjunction οὖν remains the same.

solidly ethics and soteriology,¹⁴ and indicates that believers' behaviour is to be predicated on the nature of their relationship with Christ.

In addition to the use of the conjunction οὖν, the subject matter of the third class conditional sentence in 3.1 also strongly grounds paraenesis in theology. Based on the believers' participatory relationship with Christ, described as "having been raised," believers are to seek the things above. An additional evidence of *kerygmatic* grounding of paraenesis in Col 3.1-4 is seen in vv. 2-3, where the command to "set your mind on things above" is also based on the believers' union with Christ in his death ("for you have died"). The affirmation of the believers' death with Christ and resultant new life in 3.3 and 2.12-13 is in turn made the basis for the injunction against mendacity in 3.9-10 ("do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature").¹⁵ The fact that 3.1-4 contains both paraenesis as well as the theological basis for subsequent paraenesis in 3.5f. demonstrates the uniqueness of this section, for it stands between the largely theological section in 1.1-2.23, and the concentrated paraenesis contained in 3.5-4.1.

C. The Structural Role of 3.1-4

Some assert that Col 3.1-4 belongs to the *kerygma* portion of the epistle, and that the paraenetical section does not begin until 3.5.¹⁶ This view is untenable in light of the imperatives in 3.1-2 as well as the inferential use of οὖν in v. 1, which grounds imperatives on previous indicatives which affirm the believers' union with Christ. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that while 3.1-4 is part of the paraenetical section of Colossians, the character of these four verses is different from that found in 3.5-4.6. The latter is characterised by more specific, concentrated moral exhortations.

¹⁴ See also Wolfgang Nauck, "Das οὖν-paräneticum," *ZNT* 49 (1958) 134-35. Nauck concludes "Das οὖν-paräneticum läßt den Charakter urchristlicher Ethik deutlich erkennen: Sie ist weder eine autonome, noch eine finale, sondern eine konsekutive Ethik; eine Ethik, die aus dem gnädigen Handeln Gottes die Folgerung im Vollzug der Lebensführung zieht. Christliche Ethik ist Ethik der Dankbarkeit" (135). While the Christian ethic is an ethic of gratitude (Dankbarkeit), it is also an ethic of Christological enabling, for because of our relationship with Christ, we are enabled and admonished (οὖν) to live a certain way.

¹⁵ The participle ἀπεκδυσάμενοι in 3.9 is taken as causal ("because you have put off"), not imperatival (as in Eph 4.22-24, the parallel passage, although in Eph 4.22-24 infinitives are used). O'Brien rightly points out in his exegesis of 3.9 that in Colossians "the apostle grounds his exhortations in what has already occurred to the readers when they were incorporated in Christ...Paul often refers back to the readers' life-changing event; he does so by means of an aorist participle or an aorist indicative (1.6, 7, 13, 22; 2.6, 7, 11-15, 20; 3.1, 3). It is therefore natural to regard these participles of vv. 9, 10 in a similar light" (*Colossians* 189; cf. also Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 236; Martin, *Colossians*, 105-107).

¹⁶ See Bradley, "Topos," 240.

Furthermore, the conjunction οὐν is used inferentially again at the beginning of v. 5. The best explanation for these observations is that 3.1-4 serves as a thematic bridge, linking the polemic against the false teachers in ch. 2 and the detailed paraenesis in 3.5-4.6. In other words, 3.1-4 is a hinge passage, which links the indicative of the believers' existence in Christ who is the supreme Lord affirmed in chs. 1-2, with the detailed imperatives of the vice/virtue lists and household code in 3.5-4.1.¹⁷

An evaluation of 3.1-4 suggests that the language is occasionally shaped by the polemic of ch. 2. In dealing with opponents who were advocating heavenly ascent, the author reformulates the Pauline doctrine of death and resurrection with Christ,¹⁸ and informs the Colossians that they have already been raised with Christ, and thus need to set their minds on the things above. This message clearly undercuts the ascetic heavenly ascent theology of the opponents. According to the author, the Colossians did not need to seek mystical heavenly revelatory experiences, for through their union with Christ they were already raised with Christ.¹⁹

The extent to which 3.1-4 is polemically shaped is debated, however. E. Gräßer believes virtually all the wording of 3.1-4 relates directly to the false teaching in chs. 1-2.²⁰ Given the great degree of similarity between the wording of Col 3.1-4 and other passages directed to different audiences (particularly Rom 6), Gräßer's position is difficult to maintain. On the other extreme, one of the greatest weaknesses of Robert Tannehill's significant monograph, *Dying and Rising with Christ*, is his failure to consider the occasional setting of the various dying and rising with Christ passages. In discussing Col 2-3, Tannehill acknowledges no connection with the polemic of ch. 2.²¹

¹⁷ Lähnemann states "Kol 3, 1-4 vermittelt zwischen der Widerlegung der Irrlehre und der Paränese. Wie der Briefschreiber hier durch terminologische Verknüpfung die Anordnungen der Gegner und die heidnischen Laster nebeneinanderstellt und auf der anderen Seite die Aussagen über die Herrschaft Christi aus Kol 1-2 aufnimmt, wurde bereits gezeigt" (*Kolossierbrief*, 54).

¹⁸ Thus Wedderburn states "it is preferable to see this ["you have been raised with Christ"] as a logical development of Paul's thought to meet this specific pastoral need" ("Theology of Colossians," 50). He previously described the specific pastoral need as the need for the Colossians to understand that the cosmic powers are impotent to impede their progress to the world above (50).

¹⁹ W. House notes that for the author of Colossians "there was no reason for anyone to be 'seeking the things above' if he had not been raised with Christ. The road to the heavenly realm was through Christ, not through asceticism or mysticism" ("The Christian Life according to Colossians," *BSac* 151 [1994] 449).

²⁰ "Hier genügt die Feststellung, daß diese Variation der paulinischen Tauftradition eine apologetische Deduktion im geistigen Aspekt der kolossischen Gemeinde war und eben damit ein recipere secundum homines recipientes. Die apologetische Deduktion ist evident: Alle Formulierungen sind polemisch gezielte" ("Kol 3.1-4 als Beispiel einer Interpretation secundum homines recipientes," *ZTK* 64 [1967] 151).

²¹ *Dying and Rising*, 47-54. R. Gaffin's study of the resurrection suffers from the same methodological weakness (*The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978] 43-44, 127-34).

My approach will be to view the wording of 3.1-4 as shaped by the polemic of ch. 2, but not necessarily in every detail.

II. The Ground for Paraenesis: New Eschatological Life in Christ—2.11-13; 3.1-4

In Col 3.1-4 death (v. 3)²² and resurrection (v. 1) with Christ are given as the basis for Christian behaviour. More specifically, death and resurrection with Christ are the basis for the injunction to "set your mind on things that are above" in v. 2, and for the injunction "put to death therefore what is earthly in you" in v. 5. An examination of 3.1-4 will reveal that death and resurrection with Christ reflect the eschatological new life believers have by virtue of their union with Christ, a union which is described in 2.12-13.

There is very little debate that^{the} death and resurrection with Christ mentioned in 3.1, 3 refer back to^{the} union with Christ described in 2.12-13.²³ Thus we will begin our analysis of the ground for paraenesis in 3.1-4 by discussing baptism and union with Christ in 2.12-13.

The link between 3.1-4 and 2.12-13 is seen in the shared vocabulary and themes of the two passages. The fact that 3.1f. is linked with a previous section of Colossians is evidenced by the use of the inferential conjunction οὖν in 3.1. More importantly, the first class conditional statement at the beginning of 3.1 ("since you have been raised with Christ") is clearly linked to soteriological statements in 2.12, since the identical verbal form (συνηγήρθητε) is connected with a synonymous phrase²⁴ (ἐν ᾧ in 2.12, τῷ Χριστῷ in 3.1²⁵). Finally, there is a strong thematic link

²² While some scholars focus almost exclusively on resurrection with Christ as the basis for the paraenesis in 3.1-4.1 (Gaffin, *The Resurrection*, 44), death with Christ is also clearly given as a basis for moral behaviour. After admonishing the believers in v. 2 to set their mind on things above, in v. 3 the author gives an additional basis for the command with the use of an explanatory γάρ and the statement that they had died (ἀπεθάνετε γάρ).

²³ The reference to the believers' death with Christ in 3.3 might draw from both 2.12-13 which infers the believers' death with Christ, and 2.20 which states that with Christ believers have died to the elements of the world (so O'Brien, *Colossians*, 165). In this case, 2.20 is probably based on 2.12-13, for the believers' death to the cosmic spirits is ultimately predicated on their union with Christ.

²⁴ Harris suggests that οὖν in 3.1 might look back to 2.20 ("with Christ you died to the elemental spirits") since death with Christ implies resurrection with him (*Colossians*, 137). This is not a tenable suggestion, however, in the light of the terminology repeated in 2.12 and 3.1, and in light of the fact that 2.12 specifically refers to believers being raised with Christ. There is no need to infer resurrection from 2.20, as it is plainly stated in 2.12.

²⁵ Pace G. R. Beasley-Murray who interprets ἐν ᾧ in 2.12 as "in which," referring to baptism instead of to Christ. He thus translates the passage "buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith" (*Baptism*, 153-54). Thematically and structurally "in whom" is the preferred reading. Beginning in 2.6, the emphasis in this passage is on the believers' completeness in Christ. They are to walk "in him" (ἐν αὐτῷ) as they received him—v. 6; all the fulness of deity dwells "in him" (ἐν αὐτῷ)—v. 9; "in him" they were circumcised (ἐν ᾧ)—v. 11; they

between 2.12-13 and 3.1-4, since both passages patently describe the believers' union with Christ. This union is described in terms of death and resurrection, and 2.12 indicates that this union occurs in the context of baptism.²⁶ Hence the next section will analyse the role of baptism in 2.12-13.

A. Baptism—2.11-13

An analysis of Col 2.11-13 and two related baptismal passages (Rom 6.1-11; Gal 3.26-27) demonstrates that in the Pauline tradition baptism is linked to ethics,²⁷ a link which is primarily developed in terms of new life in Christ.²⁸ Beasley-Murray argues that in the apostolic church, baptism was a "moral-religious act" since NT baptism primarily signified believers' participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, a participation which carried tremendous ethical consequences since "the death of the baptized is a death *to sin*, and the life is a life *in God*, a life *after God*, a life *for God*" (emphasis his).²⁹ The link between baptism and ethics may also have been metaphorically demonstrated in the actual practice of early Christian baptism.³⁰ The following section will demonstrate that the link between baptism and moral exhortation is quite clear in Col 2.12-13, 3.1-4. I will begin by discussing the baptismal nature of Col 2.12-13.

Many exegetes consider 2.12-13 to be part of a pre-existing baptismal formula or at least pre-existing baptismal teaching.³¹ Patzia, for example, says this is evidenced

were buried "with him" in baptism (συνταφέντες αὐτῷ)—v. 12; "with him" (ἐν ᾧ) they were raised through faith—v. 12. See also O'Brien, *Colossians*, 118-19.

²⁶ In 3.3 the believers' death is stated, whereas in 2.12 it is implied in the statement "you were buried with him."

²⁷ Hence Lohse inaccurately concludes that in distinction from the Pauline *homologoumena*, in Colossians "moral instruction is rather unfolded throughout with reference to baptism" ("Pauline Theology," 217).

²⁸ Martin declares that the key to Paul's baptism teaching is "his describing baptism as a new creation" (*The Worship of God*, 129; cf. also Moule, *Worship in the New Testament* [London: Lutterworth, 1961] 57).

²⁹ *Baptism*, 284, 286. On the link between baptism and ethics based on the believers' death to sin and attainment of new life, cf. also Flemington, *The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism* (London: SPCK, 1948) 58-63. Due to his sacramental understanding of baptism, Bornkamm relates all Pauline paraenesis to baptism. He says "all the imperatives of Paul have their basis in what has happened to us through Christ in baptism" ("Baptism and New Life in Paul," in *Early Christian Experience* [London: SCM, 1969] 84). For a detailed study of baptism and Pauline ethics, cf. Halter, *Taufe und Ethos*.

³⁰ Meeks suggests based on early artistic renderings of Christian baptismal candidates, that the baptismal candidate was baptised naked and afterwards put on a new set of clothes (cf. Col 3.9-10). Thus early baptismal practice itself may have been intrinsically ethical, picturing the putting off of the old vices and the putting on of new moral behaviour based on new life obtained through union with Christ (*First Urban Christians*, 151).

³¹ Lohse, *Colossians*, 103; Patzia, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984) 56; Schweizer, *Colossians*, 143-44. Cannon argues that due to the structural differences between this pericope and the hymn in 1.15-20, the change in subject from "you" to "he" in

by the similarities between this text, Rom 6.1-11, and Gal 3.26-27, all of which teach that baptism is based on faith in Christ, involves participation in Christ's death and resurrection, and has ethical implications since the believer is given new life in Christ.³²

Differences in these three passages, indicate, however, that if this is part of pre-existing baptismal teaching, it has been edited by the author to suit his rhetorical purposes. For example, Schnackenburg, who believes Paul obtained some of his baptismal teaching from the early church,³³ notes that in contrast to Col 2.12 which clearly links the believers' faith and baptism,³⁴ Rom 6 does not explicitly mention faith. Furthermore, in Rom 6 rising with Christ is only presupposed, while in Col 2.12 and 3.1 it is expressly mentioned as already having occurred. After indicating that Rom 6 and Col 2.12 and 3.1-3 are quite complementary, he says "these differences are to be explained by the differing situations presupposed in the Letters and the practical tendency which the Apostle from time to time pursues."³⁵

While Gal 3.27-28 is a terse baptismal statement,³⁶ and evidences fewer similarities to the baptismal teachings in Col 2 and 3 than does Rom 6, significant similarities can be noted. In Gal 3 baptism is linked with faith (v. 26), and is explained as union with Christ (v. 27),³⁷ which results in new life. New life in Christ is

v. 13, and the change in the application of the baptismal statement from "you" (plural) to "we" in the last participial phrase at the end of v. 13, Col 2.12-13 is probably a Pauline adaptation of an earlier baptismal formula (*Traditional Materials*, 39-40).

³² Patzia, *Colossians*, 56. Patzia should have acknowledged that Rom 6.1-11 does not directly link faith and baptism, though the immediate context which deals with law versus grace (5.20-21) and with the abuse of grace (6.1-2) implicitly links faith and baptism. Furthermore, in other passages in Romans faith is inextricably linked to these same themes (law versus grace—3.21-30, 4.3-16; the abuse of grace—3.8-24).

³³ *Baptism*, 30.

³⁴ Contra R. Coughenour, who comments on Col 2.12 "no role is assigned to the faith of the individual in this passage. The passage is all of grace. God is the actor" ("Fullness of Life in Christ: Exegetical Study on Colossians 2:11-12," *RefRev* 31 [1977] 56). Coughenour reasons that since the dominant verbs and participles in this passage are passive, that διὰ τῆς πίστεως, τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ refers to God's faithfulness (55). He fails to recognise, however, that the Colossians' faith is a dominant theme in Colossians (1.4, 23; 2.5, 7). Repeatedly the author emphasises the Colossians' faith in light of the opponents whose teaching threatened their faith.

³⁵ *Baptism*, 71.

³⁶ Longenecker notes Heinrich Schlier (*Der Brief an der Galater*, KEK 7, 10th ed. [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959] 174-75) first suggested this text was part of a pre-existing baptismal liturgy (*Galatians*, WBC [Dallas: Word, 1990] 154). While it is difficult to prove that it is actually a confessional statement, there is evidence that it is at least part of pre-existing baptismal teaching. Longenecker notes that structurally: the logic and grammar of the passage fit together well if one omits vv. 27-28, the last clause of v. 28 parallels the last clause of v. 26 (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ), the pairings in v. 28 are found elsewhere and suggest a fixed pattern, and the content of v. 28 seems to be out of context with Paul's argument to the Galatians, for social status as it relates to slavery or gender seems to have little to do with his arguments against the Judaisers in Galatia (*Galatians*, 154-55). On the other hand, the inclusion of vv. 27-28 in this passage makes sense if these verses are seen as an appeal to baptismal teaching the Galatians were familiar with to support Paul's thesis statement in v. 26 regarding sonship through Christ.

³⁷ On the Pauline use of a clothing metaphor to explain union with Christ, cp. Col 3.10; 1 Cor 15.45-49. See also Bruce, *Colossians*, 147-48.

developed in this passage in terms of the believers' new identity and spiritual status (v. 28), which is further described in terms of the believers' new lineage as Abraham's offspring (v. 29). While the issue of ethics is not directly linked to baptism in this passage, it may well be in the background. John Barclay convincingly argues that Gal 5-6 was written as a response to the Galatian concern that without adhering to the law, there would be no basis for ethics, to which Paul responds by explaining the need to walk in the Spirit.³⁸ If this thesis is correct, then in appealing to baptismal teaching on union and newness in Christ in the context of the tutorial and temporal role of the law, the ethical significance of baptism and union with Christ is logically implied.³⁹ Even in this short passage, we can see similarities with the baptismal teaching found in Colossians in terms of faith, union with Christ, and ethics.

In Rom 6.1-11, the passage most similar to Col 2.11-13 and 3.1-3,⁴⁰ the setting of the baptismal passage is the ethical question of whether grace promotes sin (6.1). Paul uses baptismal teaching to answer this charge against grace, insisting that as the believer was united with Christ through baptism ("buried therefore with him by baptism into death"—v. 4a), new life was given which should lead to moral victory ("so that as Christ was raised from the dead...we too might walk in newness of life"—v. 4b).⁴¹ While resurrection with Christ is not stated as directly as death and burial with Christ, it is clearly implied, and is linked with newness of life (vv. 5, 8-9, 10-11), which is the basis for ethical victory (vv. 9-11). It is also significant that Paul begins the next section, which extends the ethical discussion, by appealing back to the baptismal passage as its basis ("Μὴ οὖν βασιλευέτω ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐν τῷ θνητῷ ὑμῶν σώματι").

³⁸ *Obeying the Truth: A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988).

³⁹ Betz also sees an implicit ethical link between baptism and new life in Christ in this passage, though based on the pre-existing baptismal text itself, not on the context in which it is used in the epistle. He asserts "in the liturgy the saying would communicate information to the newly initiated, telling them of their eschatological status before God in anticipation of the Last Judgment and also informing them how this status affects, and in fact changes their social, cultural, and religious self-understanding, as well as their responsibilities in the here-and-now" (*Galatians*, Hermenia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979] 184).

⁴⁰ In fact several scholars suggest that Col 2 is an elaboration on Romans 6 (A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection: Studies in Pauline Theology Against its Graeco-Roman Background*, WUNT 44 [Tübingen: Mohr, 1987] 72-73). Beasley-Murray calls Col 2.11-13 "Paul's authentic commentary on Rom 6.1ff" (*Baptism*, 155); contra Yates who says "Col 2.12 and 3.1 is more than a clarification of Rom 6 and represents a development of the Pauline theology for a later generation which no longer expected an immediate parousia" ("A Reappraisal of Colossians," 109). The textual evidence in Colossians, esp. 3.4, 6, 24-25 militates against Yates' assessment, for it indicates that the author still affirmed futuristic eschatology.

⁴¹ Bornkamm correctly notes that the new life described in Rom 6.4 is to be received and acted upon in the present, for the newness of life "does not mean the life of the Christian which has yet to be realized, but the life of Christ that already has become revealed and in which the believer is to walk" ("Baptism and New Life," 78).

In Col 2.12-13 and 3.1-4 baptism is also described in terms of new life which demands new moral behaviour (though obviously it is described in a much more terse fashion than in Rom 6). While the background of Col 2.12-13 is difficult to determine precisely (i.e., to what extent is the author utilising pre-existing baptismal hymns, baptismal liturgy, or other New Testament baptismal passages?)⁴² the contextual motivation for this passage is more obvious. To counter the Colossian opposition (v. 8), the author asserts the believers' completeness in Christ (vv. 9-10). The circumcision and baptismal text in vv. 11-13 serves to remind the Colossians regarding the means of appropriating the work of Christ.

The author uses the metaphor of circumcision to describe the spiritual cleansing they have already experienced. This unusual metaphor is probably polemical, being used in response to the opponents' advocacy of circumcision.⁴³ As opposed to the opponents' physical circumcision, the Colossians needed to remember that they had already been circumcised with a circumcision not of human hands. This adjective (ἀχειροποίητος) is only used two other times in the New Testament (Mark 14.58, 2 Cor 5.1), whereas the non-negated form χειροποίητος is used six times (Mark 14.58; Acts 7.48; 17.24; Eph 2.11; Heb 9.11, 24), and always indicates what is made by humans as opposed to what is made by God.⁴⁴ The point here is that God had already spiritually circumcised the Colossian believers, they did not need to resort to human circumcision.

The divine circumcision is further described as the "putting off the body of flesh." There are two main interpretations of this phrase. (1) This refers to the putting off of the old nature, making "body of flesh" synonymous with "body of death" (Rom 7.24) and "body of sin" (Rom 6.6). O'Brien says the imagery would then relate to baptism, where stripping off the old nature is said to occur.⁴⁵ In the last phrase of the

⁴² Cannon believes that of the entire Christological passage in Col 2.9-15, vv. 11-13 are the most difficult to deal with in terms of the author's reliance on pre-existing material. He does believe the author utilised pre-existing baptismal material, though he does not believe the writer relied on a single unified hymn (*Traditional Materials*, 39, 44).

⁴³ In general agreement with this view are Martin (*Colossians*, 82), Lightfoot (*Colossians*, 183), and Lohse (*Colossians*, 102), as opposed to Schweizer (*Colossians*, 142). Lohse, however, sees this not as literal Jewish circumcision but as some type of sacramental rite. Given the fact that the false teachers were advocating adherence to other aspects of Jewish law, such as Sabbath keeping, and given the unusual use of "circumcision" in 2.11 just a few verses after the caution to avoid being deceived by false teachers (2.8), "circumcision" in this context is probably a polemical reference.

⁴⁴ O'Brien, *Colossians*, 115-16.

⁴⁵ *Colossians*, 116-17. This is not a certain baptismal reference, though it might be implied. Martin suggests the removal of the body of flesh recalls the Christian initiation to new life in Christ, the stripping off being possibly a reference to the disrobing which occurred before baptism (cf. Gal 3.27) (*Colossians*, 81). Beasley-Murray on the other hand notes that baptismal language does not actually begin until v. 12, though he acknowledges that it may well be implied in v. 11 (*Baptism*, 153, 158-59). Vacher Burch objects to the linking of circumcision with baptism in Col 2.11, and says that this link is anachronistic, for it was made by church fathers such as Chrysostom and Justin Martyr, not

verse (ἐν τῇ περιτομῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ) "of Christ" is said to be a subjective genitive, and indicates the circumcision which Christ gave, i.e., baptism. Baptism is identified as the counterpart and replacement of Old Testament circumcision.⁴⁶ Thus Christians need not practice circumcision, for Christ replaced it with baptism, a ritual experienced by the Colossians.

(2) Body of flesh is the same as in 1.22, which refers to a physical body. In this case, it refers to the death of Christ, who had all of his flesh cut off, while in circumcision, only a little flesh was cut off. The last phrase of the verse is taken as appositional. The "putting off the body of flesh" is the same as "the circumcision of Christ." Beasley Murray advocates this view, and states,

In this context 'putting (or stripping) off the body of flesh' is most plausibly contrasted with the minor operation in circumcision: bluntly it appears to say that instead of stripping off a little piece of flesh, as in circumcision, the Christian has stripped off his whole body of flesh, and this happened because Christ was 'circumcised,' that is, killed on the cross; the Christian shares so completely in that event, it is as if he himself had suffered that appalling bloody death.⁴⁷

While Beasley-Murray has accurately explained the link between "putting off the body of flesh" in Col 2.11 and the believers' union with Christ, we would like to slightly modify this view as it relates to the meaning of "flesh." In the previous view⁴⁸ much weight is placed on "body of flesh" being the same physical body as in 1.22, but the two phrases are not parallel, for in 1.22 it is further defined by the pronoun αὐτοῦ.⁴⁹ The fluid usage of σὰρξ in the Pauline epistles to indicate physical as well as metaphorical flesh, is well known. While σῶμα and σὰρξ are not synonymous in the Pauline literature, σῶμα is used ethically, for the body is the instrument through which sin is expressed.⁵⁰ Thus we read of the "body of sin" (Rom 6.6), "body of death" (Rom 7.24), and the fleshly "deeds of the body" (Rom 8.13). It makes the most sense

by the NT ("Circumcision of the Heart," *ExpTim* 29 [1917-18] 330-33). Burch fails, however, to specifically discuss the text of Col 2.11-12, or to explain what circumcision means in the context of Col 2.

⁴⁶ *Colossians*, 116-17, cf. Lohse, *Colossians*, 102-103, Martin, *Colossians*, 81. For a lengthier defense of the view that circumcision has been replaced by baptism, see Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, trans. by J. K. S. Reid (London: SCM, 1950) 56-70. Similarly R. Uprichard argues for "a relationship of equivalence" between baptism and circumcision in Col 2.11-13 ("The Relationship of Circumcision to Baptism with Particular Reference to Colossians 2.11-13," *IBS* 2 [1980] 203-210). Hunt, on the other hand, concludes that the earlier church fathers along with Paul understood circumcision to be a figure of the believers' response to the gospel, a response expressed in baptism ("Colossians 2.11-12: The Circumcision/Baptism Analogy").

⁴⁷ "The Second Chapter of Colossians," 474; O'Brien also prefers this explanation of "putting off the body of flesh," *Colossians*, 116-17.

⁴⁸ Particularly as explained by O'Brien, *Colossians*, 117.

⁴⁹ So Caird (*Letters from Prison*, 193) and Lohse (*Colossians*, 103).

⁵⁰ Cf. Robinson, *The Body*, 29-31.

contextually to interpret "body of flesh" (σώματος τῆς σαρκός) ethically⁵¹ and "circumcision of Christ" (ἐν τῇ περιτομῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ) not as appositional to this, but instrumental. Thus it is by means of Christ's death and our union with him that we experience forgiveness and the stripping off of the old fleshly nature.⁵² This reading best harmonises with the following verses, especially v. 13, where we read "who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh" (flesh used ethically—"old nature"). "God made us alive" (stripped off flesh ethically speaking) "together with him" (Christ, the one who nailed the bond against us to the cross—v. 14, in the stripping off of his flesh). Not only are believers identified with the death of Christ (circumcision), but in v. 12 the writer goes on to assert the believers' association with his burial and resurrection.

In vv. 12-13 the author uses baptism to further develop his soteriology. The two main verbs συνταφέντες and συνηγέρθητε point to the union believers have with Christ in which they through baptism participate in Christ's death and resurrection. The work of Christ is thus applied to those who believe in such a way that they are united with Christ and given new life. In this verse, as well as in the other Pauline baptismal contexts (Rom 6.4-5, 9-10; Gal 3.27-29; Eph 5.14), baptism is described in terms of new life arising from death, not in terms of cleansing or washing from sin.⁵³ It is this union with Christ and consequent new life which forms the basis for ethics, for a new life demands and empowers a new lifestyle (cf. 3.9). Hence in 3.5 the author calls believers who have been given new life through baptism and union with Christ to live out the new life by dying to the old life ("put to death therefore what is earthly in you").

While dying with Christ expresses the negative side of union with Christ, rising with Christ expresses the positive. Dunn does not believe that "raised together with him" in v. 12 refers to baptism, asserting that the emphasis in this passage is on completed redemption being found in Christ.⁵⁴ Dunn argues "he sums up the event of becoming a Christian with one pregnant phrase—συνεζωποποίησεν ἡμᾶς σὺν

⁵¹ Robinson argues that "body of flesh" in 2.11 refers to "the whole personality organised for, and geared into, rebellion against God (*The Body*, 31).

⁵² So Uprichard, "The Relationship of Circumcision to Baptism," 204.

⁵³ See Martin, *The Worship of God*, 129; Moule, *Colossians*, 57. This point is particularly significant in the light of Rom 6, since the entire passage deals with victory over the power of sin, and would be a very logical context in which to develop baptism as washing from sin, if this is how Paul viewed baptism. Instead, in Rom 6 death to sin and new life through union with Christ is repeatedly asserted. For example, in vv. 1-11, forms of θάνατος occur four times, νεκρός three times, ζῶω or ζῶῃ five times, ἐγέλρω two times, and ἀναστάσις once. The author of Acts, however, does describe baptism as washing (22.16; cf. also 1 Pet 3.21).

⁵⁴ *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (London: SCM, 1970) 155.

αὐτῷ. It need hardly be said that baptism as a rite and symbol is not in his mind in this metaphor."⁵⁵

The absence of baptism from the author's mind is not as certain as Dunn maintains. From what we can glean about the early church's view of baptism as reflected in Acts, Dunn has bifurcated baptism and new life without warrant. In Acts we repeatedly find new life, faith, and baptism inextricably linked. Baptism is repeatedly described as immediately following initial faith (2.41; 8.35-36; 10.43-48; 16.33) and the two are pictured as if they are part of a united new life (salvation) experience. For example, in 2.38, repentance (which is probably synonymous with "received his word" in 2.41) and baptism are the stated prerequisites for receiving the gift of the Spirit, a new life blessing. In 16.31-34, salvation is said to be a result of believing (v. 31), but the ensuing description of the Philippian jailer's conversion notes his baptism and belief (vv. 33, 34).

Dunn's rejection of "rising with Christ" as baptismal language is also reflected in his incorrect assertion that both sacraments speak exclusively of Christ's death.⁵⁶ While the Eucharistic elements certainly focus on the sacrificial death of Christ, they are nevertheless placed in the context of Christ's return (1 Cor 11.26). Baptism does point to the death of Christ, but it is repeatedly placed in the context of resurrection and new life (Rom 6.4a, 8-9; Gal 3.28; Col 3.3-4). If one accepts immersion as the form of baptism practised in the NT period (cf. John 3.23; Acts 8.38; Rom 6.4), the very act of the baptismal participant going down under the water and rising up again is a poignant image of the believers' identification with the death and resurrection of Christ, and the believers' reception of new spiritual life.⁵⁷ Since the Pauline baptismal texts repeatedly describe baptism in terms of new life arising from death, we believe that baptism in Col 2.12-13 indicates participation in Christ's death and resurrection.

B. Baptism and Union with Christ

Union with Christ through baptism expressed in terms of burial and resurrection with Christ is admittedly a difficult concept. A. J. M. Wedderburn articulates the dilemma of grasping this language, and notes:

⁵⁵ *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 156.

⁵⁶ *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 144.

⁵⁷ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 133; Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 184; W. Sanday and A. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895) 162-63. Ridderbos, however, says the symbol of baptism as death and resurrection "appears to us to be a fiction. In Paul's statements themselves it has no support whatever" (*Paul: An Outline*, 402).

It would be possible to parallel the idea of one person's living with another at a future point of time or one being raised with another, when the resurrection of both takes place in the future. To find examples of a present sharing in the life of one already raised by those still not dead, or of a future resurrection being regarded as a sharing in the past resurrection of another, is harder.⁵⁸

This is, however, the language of Col 2.12. Believers are, in fact, said in the present to share in the life of Christ who has already died and been raised. The key to understanding this text is found in the believers' union with Christ. The believer is said to have been buried with him (αὐτῷ) in v. 12 and made alive with him (σὺν αὐτῷ) in v. 13. "With Christ" is a much rarer phrase in the Pauline literature than "in Christ," and in fact its use in a baptismal setting may be entirely unique to Paul.⁵⁹ Paul and the writer of Colossians use it in a variety of ways, such as to indicate the apocalyptic life after the parousia (2 Cor 13.4, "we shall live with him"; Col 3.4, "you also will appear with him in glory") apocalyptic life after death before the parousia (Phil 1.13, "to depart and be with Christ") and of present apocalyptic life (1 Thess 5.10, "so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with him").⁶⁰ In baptismal contexts, however, and in every instance in Colossians except for 3.4, it is used to indicate intimate spiritual union with Christ,⁶¹ being almost identical to the technical use of "in Christ."⁶² This is surely its meaning in 2.12-13.⁶³

Various suggestions have been made regarding the nature of the believers' baptismal union with Christ. Since the believer is said to participate in some manner in the death and resurrection of Christ so as to receive life, some suggest that the origin of Paul's concept of baptism is found in the Hellenistic mystery religions.⁶⁴ In the

⁵⁸ "Hellenistic Christian Traditions in Romans 6?," *NTS* 29 (1983) 343.

⁵⁹ In his detailed study of the Graeco-Roman background of baptism, Wedderburn asserts that the Pauline "with Christ" language used in the context of baptism has no parallel in Hellenistic mystery soteriology. He suggests, on the other hand, that it originated in the Old Testament concept of corporate solidarity (*Baptism and Resurrection*, 342-45).

⁶⁰ On the use of "with Christ" to indicate apocalyptic life, see E. Schweizer, "Dying and Rising with Christ," *NTS* 14 (1967-68) 1-3.

⁶¹ Note for example the following: "if we have died with Christ"—Rom 6.8; "I am crucified with Christ"—Gal 2.20; "he made us alive together with Christ"—Eph 2.5; "with Christ you died to the elemental spirits"—Col 2.20; "you have been raised with Christ"—Col 3.1; and "your life is hid with Christ in God"—Col 3.3.

⁶² A. J. M. Wedderburn, "Some Observations on Paul's Use of the Phrases 'In Christ' and 'With Christ,'" *JSNT* 25 (1985) 90-91. That "in Christ" and "with Christ" are not identical unless the former phrase is being used in a technical sense is seen in 2 Cor 13.4 which says "for we are weak in him [Christ], but in dealing with you we shall live with him [Christ] by the power of God." On the use of "in Christ" to indicate intimate spiritual union with Christ, cf. Parsons who concludes that the Pauline "in Christ" formula primarily designates "a close and indissoluble relationship with the Lord" ("In Christ" in Paul," 40).

⁶³ Lohse comments in a discussion of this verse "Paul employs the phrase, 'with Christ' in different contexts to describe the closest possible union with Christ" (*Colossians*, 104).

⁶⁴ Bultmann, *Theology*, 298-99, 311-13; Käsemann, *Romans*, 160-63; Lohse, *Colossians*, 102.

mystery religions the baptismal cultic act would magically unite one into the fate of the cultic god, assuring immortality for the participant. One of the elements of Pauline baptismal teaching which clearly distinguishes it from that found in the mystery religions is the necessity of individual faith.⁶⁵ For Paul, the rite of baptism is anything but magical, for apart from faith it would accomplish nothing.⁶⁶ Similarly, in Col 2.12 we note that the one baptised is raised to new life not by virtue of the magical power of the rite, but by faith (διὰ τῆς πίστεως).⁶⁷ Various other distinctions between Paul's baptismal teaching and that of the Hellenistic mystery religions have been noted,⁶⁸ though one of the most significant ones in terms of the ethics in Colossians is noted by Devon Wiens, who asserts that the primary difference between the Pauline concept of salvation and that put forth in the mysteries is that the former links moral imperatives to the redemption experience.⁶⁹ Wedderburn believes the very dying and rising with Christ language we find in Col 2 is unique to the New Testament. He asserts:

Dying and coming to life again may be a widespread idea, then, but not dying and rising with the past death and resurrection of a deity. Even if many (but not all) of the mysteries did worship a hero or deity who was thought to have died and to have come to life again in some form or other, we have found no evidence that the initiates in any of their rites believed that in their initiations they were experiencing in themselves the death and resurrection of their deity.⁷⁰

How then are we to understand dying and rising with Christ being connected with baptism if it is not mystical Hellenistic cult language? We can certainly say that being baptised with Christ relates to the believers' union with Christ (cf. Rom 6.5a), but it is much more difficult to determine how Paul and the writer of Colossians arrived at this concept, and in what sense believers participate in Christ's death and resurrection. Wagner's proposal merits consideration.⁷¹ He suggests that in Rom 6.3,

⁶⁵ See Martin, *Worship of God*, 131.

⁶⁶ Schnackenburg, *Baptism*, 187-90.

⁶⁷ Even Schnackenburg, a Roman Catholic, concedes "we may affirm that Paul considered the salvation event in baptism as 'sacramental,' but that this thought is not determined by a strongly marked 'sacramental-ritual' or 'liturgical' interest, i.e. by the external sign. To him the decisive thing is not rite and liturgy, not symbolic character and Mystery event, but the profound conceptions of its Christ related doctrine of salvation" (*Baptism*, 138).

⁶⁸ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975) 301-305; Schnackenburg, *Baptism*, 55-61; Günther Wagner, *Pauline Baptism and the Pagan Mysteries: The Problem of the Pauline Doctrine of Baptism in Romans 6.1-11, in the Light of its Religio-Historical "Parallels,"* trans. by J. P. Smith (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1967); Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection*; "The Soteriology of the Mysteries and Pauline Baptismal Theology," *NovT* 24 (1987) 53-72; D. H. Wiens, "Mystery Concepts in Primitive Christianity and in its Environment," *ANRW* 2.2.23. 1248-284.

⁶⁹ "Mystery Concepts," 1279, cf. also John Randall, *Hellenistic Ways of Deliverance and the Making of the Christian Synthesis* (New York: Columbia University, 1970) 154-55.

⁷⁰ *Baptism and Resurrection*, 394, cf. also Wiens, "Mystery Concepts," 1277-78.

⁷¹ *Pauline Baptism*, 286-94.

with Paul's use of the phrase ἀγνοεῖτε ὅτι, he is alluding to information the Roman believers should have known.⁷² They should have known that believers are baptised into Christ's death, because the death and resurrection of Christ was at the heart of the evangelistic message of the early church. He states "in the centre of the Christian message of salvation stands the κύριος Χριστός as the ἐσταυρωμένος. To this Christ as his Lord the man submits himself by faith, confession (Rom 10.9), and baptism."⁷³

Wagner's hypothesis is strengthened by the work of C. H. Dodd who has sought to identify and distinguish the *didache* (teaching, exhortation) and *kerygma* (the gospel proclamation) of the early church.⁷⁴ Dodd believes the Pauline epistles are essentially *didache*, for in them Paul addresses believers, and builds on the foundational already laid (1 Cor 3.10-11). Fortunately, there is enough evidence to recreate the essentials of the early church *kerygma*. Dodd convincingly argues that passages such as 1 Cor 1.23; 2.2-6; 15.1-4; Rom 8.31-34; 10.8-9; 14.9-10, and 1 Thess 1.9-10 all indicate that the Pauline *kerygma* was a message of "the facts of the death and resurrection of Christ in an eschatological setting which gives significance to the facts."⁷⁵

Wagner thus builds on Dodd's premise that the death and resurrection of Christ lay at the heart of the early church *kerygma*, a message which should have been well known to the Roman believers. He notes "the explanation of baptism into Christ as a baptism into his death therefore follows as a logical consequence from the preaching of salvation and the character of baptism as a conveyance to the Lord who died for us."⁷⁶ The pivotal point of Wagner's explanation is his assertion of a Pauline understanding of Christ's death as substitutionary. Wagner states that since Christ died a representative death for humanity "the man who believes in Him is justified and has attained life (Rom 4.25; 5.16f., 19-21); he is ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, i.e., his life is determined by the Christ-event, he is involved in the 'history' begun with Christ."⁷⁷ Thus because Christ's life

⁷² Cp. the expected possession of knowledge in Rom 6.16; 1 Cor 5.6; 6.16; 11.14.

⁷³ *Pauline Baptism*, 286-87.

⁷⁴ *Apostolic Preaching*.

⁷⁵ *Apostolic Preaching*, 13. Dodd outlines the specific content of the early church *kerygma* as follows: "The prophecies are fulfilled, and the new Age is inaugurated by the coming of Christ. He was born of the seed of David. He died according to the Scriptures, to deliver us out of the present evil age. He was buried. He rose on the third day according to the Scriptures. He is exalted at the right hand of God, as Son of God and Lord of quick and dead. He will come again as Judge and Saviour of men" (*Apostolic Preaching*, 17).

⁷⁶ *Pauline Baptism*, 287.

⁷⁷ *Pauline Baptism*, 291; cf. also Ridderbos, who calls this the redemptive-historical (as opposed to ethical, mystical, or metaphorical) participation of the church in the death of Christ (*Paul: An Outline*, 206-209). Bornkamm seems to hold a similar position, for he states "the death which the baptized and Christ die is only one death, i.e. the death of Christ himself, and through baptism this death becomes the death of the believer" ("Baptism and New Life in Paul," in *Early Christian Experience*, 76).

becomes the believers' life, and his history becomes the believers' history, in the Pauline tradition "in Christ" (or "with Christ" in the baptismal passages) is viewed as a participation in Christ's life in all aspects. This participation in Christ's life includes suffering (Rom 8.17; 2 Cor 1.5), crucifixion (Rom 6.6; Gal 2.19), burial (Rom 6.4; Col 2.12), resurrection (Col 2.12; Eph 2.5), glorification (Rom 8.17), inheritance (Rom 8.17), and reigning (2 Tim 2.12).⁷⁸

Wagner's explanation of death and resurrection with Christ as a logical development of Pauline substitutionary soteriology requires further explanation to clarify the change in tenses from the undisputed Pauline literature to that found in Colossians ("will be raised with Christ"/"has been raised with Christ"). It does, however, seem to do justice to Pauline soteriology and to Pauline statements regarding the believers' life "in Christ," which is repeatedly described as life in intimate participation with the life of Christ.

C. Death and Resurrection: New Eschatological Life in Christ—3.1-4

It is apparent that in 3.1, when the author appeals to believers being raised with Christ, he relates back to what was said in the baptismal teaching in 2.12-13, a passage which emphasises the believers' new life through participation in the death and resurrection of Christ.⁷⁹ In 3.1 we find an unexpected reversal of order, for being raised with Christ comes first, then death with Christ (v. 3). Earlier, burial was said to precede being raised with Christ (2.12, cp. Rom 6.4). The author probably begins this section by affirming that believers are raised with Christ as a contrast to the mystical soul ascent advocated by the false teachers (2.18). In 3.1 the writer argues that believers are complete in Christ, no heavenly ascension need be sought, for the Colossian believers had already been raised through their union with Christ. This eschatological raising with Christ is established as the basis for present morality.⁸⁰

The nature of the eschatology indicated by the believer being raised with Christ in Col 3.1-4 is the source of intense debate. As has been noted, many exegetes assert that the eschatology in this passage is almost entirely realised, for "eschatology in

⁷⁸ *Pauline Baptism*, 291-92.

⁷⁹ Martin accurately explains that "if then you have been raised" in 3.1 "looks back to the new life begun in a faith-response and certified in baptism (2.12)" (*Colossians*, 100).

⁸⁰ Hence Wessels argues that while Colossians does reflect a largely realised eschatology, the author does not deny futuristic eschatology (1.5; 3.6, 24-25), but in the light of the Colossian opponents, particularly their promotion of rival cosmic powers, the situation called for "a clear statement about the consequences of Christ's death and resurrection for the here and now—hence the realised eschatology" ("Eschatology of Colossians," 200).

Colossians recedes into the background."⁸¹ Furthermore, it is argued that in Colossians "Paul's temporal-horizontal (Jewish) eschatology is no longer deemed relevant within the categories of a worldview cast in spatial-vertical categories."⁸² While I will not argue for total continuity between the eschatology of Colossians and that found in the Pauline *homologoumena*, I will argue that the key to understanding the eschatology and ethics articulated in 3.1-4 lies in recognising that this passage affirms neither an entirely realised nor a highly futuristic but an inaugurated eschatology which is adapted from that found in the undisputed Pauline epistles.⁸³ Unfortunately, it seems that few scholars have recognised the influence of the inaugurated eschatology found in the Pauline *homologoumena* upon Col 3.1-4.⁸⁴

Instead of recognising the continuity between the inaugurated eschatology in the Pauline *homologoumena* and Col 3.1-4, some scholars appeal to other Jewish apocalyptic literature to explain the unusual language of this passage. J. Levison in particular argues that Col 3.1-4 is best explained by the apocalyptic perspective revealed in 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 48.42-52.7.⁸⁵ He maintains that various allusions in Col 3.1-4 do not make sense to the modern reader since we are "outsiders to the original communication."⁸⁶ He overstates the similarities between Col 3.1-4 and 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 48.42-52.7, and fails to give any attention to the NT passages upon which Col 3.1-4 is based (Col 2.11-13; Rom 6). As we will demonstrate, the unusual language of Col 3.1-4 can be satisfactorily explained by the language and eschatological constructs of Col 2.11-13 and Rom 6, and other Pauline passages which highlight the "already...not yet" paradox of inaugurated eschatology.

The initial evidence of inaugurated eschatology in 3.1-4 is seen in a series of apparent contradictions contained in the passage which emerge as the author appeals back to the baptismal teaching of 2.12-13 as a basis for moral behaviour. These inconsistencies or apparent contradictions are reflected in three indicative/imperative

⁸¹ Lohse, "Pauline Theology," 216.

⁸² Beker, *Heirs of Paul*, 91.

⁸³ Even Lohse who posits considerable disjunction between the theology contained in Colossians and that found in the Pauline *homologoumena* concludes that "the theology of the letter [Colossians] is clearly stamped by the presuppositions of Pauline theology" (Pauline Theology," 217). Lohse fails, however, to recognise the inaugurated eschatology in 3.1-4, and hence over-estimates the discontinuity between Col 3.1-4 and the undisputed Pauline epistles.

⁸⁴ Lincoln gives one of the best explanations of the inaugurated eschatology of Col 3.1-4 (*Paradise Now*, 122-34). He argues that "the Pauline 'already—not yet' tension is not broken by the emphasis on the former pole in Colossians. There is future eschatology in 3.4, 6, 24 and it is in precisely the section we have looked at in some detail, 3.1-4 that the tension is best seen—συνηγέρθητε (verse 1) with τότε...φανερωθήσεσθε (verse 4)" (133).

⁸⁵ Levison argues not for a literary relationship between Colossians and 2 *Apocalyptic Baruch*, but rather for a shared apocalyptic perspective between the recipients of the two books ("The Apocalyptic Dimension of Col 3.1-6," 93).

⁸⁶ Levison, "Apocalyptic Dimension," 95.

constructions present in this passage (3.1; 3.3, 5; 3.9-10, 12-17). Believers are said to have been raised with Christ, and yet they are admonished to seek the things above. Believers are said to have died with Christ (3.3), but are admonished to put to death the internal earthly things (3.5). Believers are said to have put off the old nature and put on the new (3.9-10), nevertheless they are urged to put on the attributes of the new (3.12-17). These contradictions are quite similar to the ones raised in Rom 6, where Paul says believers have died to sin, being baptised into Christ's death (vv. 2-3), and yet need to consider themselves dead to sin, and not yield to sin's power (vv. 11-13). The difficulty in understanding the Pauline ethical implications of baptism and union with Christ are reflected in Sanday and Headlam's parenthetical remark in a summary of Rom 6.1-14. They state:

The baptized Christian cannot sin. Sin is a direct contradiction of the state of things which baptism assumes...As Christ by His death on the Cross ceased from all contact with sin, so the Christian, united with Christ in his baptism, has done once for all with sin, and lives henceforth a reformed life dedicated to God. (This at least is the ideal, whatever may be the reality.)⁸⁷

The language in Rom 6 and Col 3 is not idealistic, nor does it reflect a break with reality. The key to understanding the ethical appeal of Col 2.12-13 and 3.1-4 is to recognise the complexity of the Pauline death and resurrection with Christ language, a complexity which is best explained in terms of the eschatological significance of the indicative/imperative construction.⁸⁸

One of the clearest descriptions of the complexity of Paul's death and resurrection with Christ language is found in C. E. B. Cranfield's commentary on Romans. He cites four distinct but closely related ways in which Paul speaks of the ethical aspect of the believers' death and resurrection, i.e., of the believers' death and resurrection with respect to sin.⁸⁹ (1) Believers die to sin and are raised up in God's sight based on Christ's salvific work on their behalf. This is labeled the juridical sense. (2) Believers die and are raised up in baptism, which is their ratification of God's decision on their behalf as well as God's bestowal of his seal, indicating that his

⁸⁷ *Romans*, 153.

⁸⁸ The majority of Pauline scholars since Bultmann view the eschatological tension reflected in the indicative/imperative construction as the key to understanding the Pauline ethic. Cf. Bultmann, "Das Problem der Ethik bei Paulus," *ZNW* 23 (1924) 123-40; W. Dennison, "Indicative and Imperative: The Basic Structure of Pauline Ethics," *CTJ* 14 (1979) 59; E. Dinkler, "Zum Problem der Ethik bei Paulus," *ZTK* 49 (1952) 170-73; Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, 224-27, 279; Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline*, 253; Tannehill, *Dying and Rising*, 77ff.; Dieter Zeller also notes the significant eschatological tension reflected in the Pauline indicative/imperative construction, though he gives it somewhat less emphasis than the scholars cited above ("Wie imperativ ist der Indikativ?," in *Ethik im Neuen Testament*, QD 102, ed. by K. Rahner and H. Schlier [Freiburg: Herder, 1984] esp. 192-93).

⁸⁹ *Romans*, 299-301.

decision concerned them personally. This is labelled the baptismal sense. (3) Believers are called and empowered to continually die to sin and rise to newness of life through obedience to God. This is labelled the moral sense. (4) Believers will one day die irreversibly to sin (following their physical death) and will be irreversibly raised to resurrection life (following the parousia of Christ). This is labelled the eschatological sense.

I believe descriptions (1) and (2) should be combined,⁹⁰ and that all four of the descriptions have an eschatological aspect. We will look at the eschatological implications of Cranfield's third category under the indicative/imperative construction. The eschatological aspect of the baptismal sense is noted by W. F. Flemington, who asserts "St. Paul's teaching about baptism cannot be understood save in an eschatological framework."⁹¹ For example, baptism in the early church is connected with the giving of the Spirit, an eschatological blessing (Joel 2.28; Acts 2.17; 1 Cor 6.11; 12.13; 2 Cor 1.22), is described by "put on," "put off" language (Gal 3.27; cp. Col 3.9), which in 2 Cor 5.1-8 is thoroughly eschatological, and baptism is connected with Christ's resurrection (Rom 6.4-5; Col 2.12), an eschatological event (Acts 17.31; Rom 1.4; 1 Cor 15.20-28).⁹² In spite of these corrections, Cranfield's descriptions are helpful in demonstrating the breadth and possible nuances of Paul's ethical dying and rising with Christ language.

We will now look at the eschatological significance of the indicative/imperative construction to help explain this diversity. Some earlier exegetes viewed it as a reflection of idealism. In this model, the indicative represents the Pauline ideal, and the imperative represents the realistic correction to the ideal. Others viewed the indicative/imperative construction as simply a contradiction, resulting from Pauline confusion or illogical thinking.⁹³ Bultmann, however, clarified the construction by demonstrating that it is an intentional antinomy in which the imperative is grounded on the indicative.⁹⁴ Col 3 clearly supports Bultmann's model, and indicates that the author

⁹⁰ The overlap in these two definitions is reflected in Cranfield's assertion that the question of whether ἀπεθάνομεν in 6.2 reflects the juridical or baptismal sense is unimportant (*Romans*, 300).

⁹¹ *Baptism*, 70. See also Schweizer, "Dying and Rising with Christ," 7-8; Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 49-53. Tannehill, in the conclusion of his monograph asserts that dying and rising with Christ, a concept closely connected with baptism, must be understood in the context of Pauline eschatology (*Dying and Rising with Christ*, 70).

⁹² *Baptism*, 70-75.

⁹³ For example, Paul Wernle, *Der Christ und die Sünde bei Paulus* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1897) 89, cited in Dennison, "Indicative and Imperative," 57.

⁹⁴ Bultmann says "Paul bases the imperative on the fact of justification deriving them from the indicatives" ("The Problem of Ethics in the Writings of Paul," in *The Old and New Man*, trans. by Keith Crim [Richmond: John Knox, 1967] 11). Bornkamm has a very similar view, but stresses the interdependence of indicative and imperative. He notes "the indicative establishes the imperative, and the imperative follows from the indicative with an absolute necessity—a necessity that is determined by

of Colossians was drawing on Pauline concepts in 3.1-4. As in the Pauline *homologoumena*, the imperatives found in Col 3.1, 2; 3.5-4.1. are not disjointed afterthoughts, but are grounded on the indicative of the believers' union with Christ described in 2.12-13; 3.1, 3. The best way to explain the paradox or antinomy of the indicative/imperative construction in Col 3 is to view it within the framework of Pauline eschatology, which reveals an "already, not yet" tension.⁹⁵

Numerous exegetes have noted the eschatological tension of the indicative/imperative construction. This tension results from the believers' presence in the period between the ages, a period in which the Christ event has already occurred, transforming the world order and giving life to believers (1.13-14, 2.12-15), and yet a period before the parousia (3.4). Kümmel explains this tension well saying:

The juxtaposition of the indicative and imperative is for Paul, in view of the existence of the believer in both eons, a necessary, an indispensable, antinomy. The indicative describes the eschatological salvation in which the Christian in faith has obtained a share; it says that the believer is newly created and shaped by God's saving actions in past and present and by the assured hope of the anticipated early consummation of salvation. But the imperative characterizes the Christian as threatened by the old eon which is coming to an end and by its powers, and hence as responsible for holding firm to the deliverance that he has received.⁹⁶

This eschatological old age/new age tension which is reflected in the believer possessing only part of the new age blessings, with the consummation of those blessings coming in the future, can be seen in the book of Colossians, though admittedly not as clearly as in the Pauline *homologoumena*.⁹⁷ Though the gospel brings hope in the present (1.23), hope is also laid up for the believer in heaven (1.5).⁹⁸

what has happened to us through God's activity" ("Baptism and New Life," 71; cf. also Dennison, "Indicative and Imperative," 71-74).

⁹⁵ Cf. esp. Moule, "New Life in Col 3.1-17," 481-85. Sampley gives particular attention to the role eschatological tension plays in the Pauline ethic. He states that for Paul "believers are citizens of two worlds, living at once in the old and the new. Sin's power is broken and believers look forward with confidence to God's ultimate and full victory at Christ's Parousia. This apocalyptic vision is the frame of reference from which Paul's reflection and [moral] counsel arise" (*Walking between the Times*, 11).

⁹⁶ *The Theology of the New Testament*, trans. by John Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973) 227; cf. also M. Parsons, "Being Precedes Act: Indicative and Imperative in Paul's Writings," *EQ* 60 (1988) 99-127.

⁹⁷ Vos incorrectly denies the softening of futuristic eschatology in Colossians. He comments on Col 3.1-2 "it has sometimes been asserted that this deflection from the straight prospective line of vision to the upward bent towards the heavenly world represents a toning down of the eschatological interest. Nothing could be farther from the truth" (*Pauline Eschatology*, 39).

⁹⁸ O'Brien comments on 1.5 "their hope is clearly oriented toward the future, but because it is at this moment being kept safe for them (*ἀποκειμένην* is a present participle) it has present and immediate ramifications" (*Colossians*, 12).

Believers are presently in the process of spiritual renewal in the image of God (3.10),⁹⁹ and yet the consummation of their spiritual renewal is in the future (1.22; cp. 1 Cor 13.9, 12; 1 Thess 5.23-24), a day the writer looked forward to (Col 1.28). Believers experience God's blessings in the present (1.12-14; cp. Eph 1.3), but their inheritance is yet to come (3.24; cp. Eph. 1.14). Through Christ, God has already disarmed the hostile principalities and powers (2.15), and yet his wrathful expression against evil humans lies in the future (3.6). Christ had been revealed (1.26-27), and yet there is more unveiling to come in the future (3.4).

W. Marxsen's comments on the Pauline use of the indicative/imperative construction are also helpful in explaining the unexpected assertion that the believer has already been raised with Christ. Marxsen correctly notes the paradoxical nature of the indicative/imperative, and the human tendency to overemphasise one side or the other, and thus become theologically imbalanced. When this happens, he says a corrective counter-emphasis must be made. Hence when the indicative is overemphasised, as in Corinth, the imperative must be stressed, and when the imperative is overemphasised, as in Galatia, the indicative must be stressed.¹⁰⁰ Since the Colossian opponents were apparently overemphasising the imperative (2.16-17, 20-23), this may naturally have led the author to emphasise the indicative of the believers' new life in Christ. Given the fact that the opponents were advocating mystical heavenly ascent, it is understandable that the author articulated the indicative in terms of believers being raised with Christ.

We will now survey Col 3.1-4, and in the process seek to demonstrate and elaborate on the eschatological nature of the indicative/imperative construction. Based on the indicative of the believers' union with Christ in 2.12-13, imperatives are now issued beginning in 3.1. Believers are first of all commanded to seek the things above (τὰ ἄνω ζητεῖτε). The relative pronoun οὗ, functioning as an adverb, identifies the heavenly things as those found where Christ is. The author's use of this phrase is probably polemical, using the language of his opponents, who were preoccupied with mystical heavenly ascent, to correct their misunderstandings about the new life in Christ.¹⁰¹ The prepositional phrase τὰ ἄνω could have spatial ("above" as opposed to "below"), cosmological ("heaven" as opposed to "earth")¹⁰² or religious ("spiritual" as

⁹⁹ The precise identity of the new man is debated, and could refer to pre-fall Adam or Christ. Moule correctly notes that in one sense, the image of Christ and the image of the original Adam are the same, for both reflect the image of God (Gen 1.27; 2 Cor 4.4; Col 1.15) ("Colossians 3.1-17," 490).

¹⁰⁰ *Christian Ethics*, 204-205.

¹⁰¹ See Chadwick, "All Things to all Men," 272; Lincoln, *Paradise Now*, 126-27; Martin, *Colossians*, 100.

¹⁰² Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 209.

opposed to "fleshly" or "worldly") connotations.¹⁰³ Of the nine uses of $\delta\nu\omega$ in the New Testament, three are clearly spatial (John 2.7; 11.41; Acts 2.19; Heb 12.15), one, a quote from Joel 2.30, is cosmological (Acts 2.19; cp. Prov 8.28; Eccl 3.21), and the rest appear to be religious. For example, according to John 8.23 Jesus distinguished himself from his religious opponents by saying "you are from below, I am from above."

Paul uses $\delta\nu\omega$ four times. In Gal 4.26, Jerusalem is described as "above," and is set in contrast to the present, worldly Jerusalem. Considering the context, this seems to be very similar to the spiritual as opposed to the fleshly realm. In Phil 3.14, Paul speaks of the "upward" call of God. The context here is future judgment, which seems to make this more than just heaven as opposed to earth, but a reference to the spiritual realm. Finally, the use of $\delta\nu\omega$ in Col 3.2 helps to clarify its use in 3.1, for here the heavenly things are compared to the earthly. Since the author has already cautioned against asceticism in 2.16, he surely intends a spiritual meaning here. Thus it seems that in the Pauline tradition (including its use in Col 3), $\delta\nu\omega$ indicates a sphere of existence which is spiritual, as opposed to the present world order which is considered fleshly.

It is difficult to determine what this means specifically for the believer. Büchsel asserts "naturally the NT has no doctrine of creation and consummation which establishes the relationship of the $\delta\nu\omega$ to the present world."¹⁰⁴ While this statement is true in the sense of a developed doctrine of creation and consummation not being found in the New Testament, Büchsel exaggerates the transcendent sense of $\delta\nu\omega$. The realm of the "things above" does, in fact, intersect the present world, for this is assumed in the imperative. It makes the most sense to understand $\delta\nu\omega$ in 3.1-2 as referring to the new eschatological order, as opposed to the old (the fleshly sphere of existence) on which the believer is to set his or her mind. This is very similar to other imperatival uses of $\phi\rho\nu\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ which contrast the fleshly versus the spiritual sphere of existence.¹⁰⁵ For example, in Rom 8.5 Paul says "those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on things of the Spirit," whereas the ungodly who will be destroyed set their minds "on earthly things" (Phil 3.19).

Eschatological tension is probably in view in the description of the heavenly realm as "where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." This is an allusion to Ps

¹⁰³ Pokorný essentially combines the latter two meanings in his interpretation of Col 3.2, for he says that "above" denotes not only spirituality, but particularly "fellowship with the exalted Jesus (Phil 3.19)" (*Colossians*, 160). Phil 3.19, however, speaks of the enemies of the cross who set their minds on earthly (i.e. fleshly) things.

¹⁰⁴ " $\delta\nu\omega$," *TDNT* 1.377.

¹⁰⁵ Schweizer, *Colossians*, 174-75.

110.1, one of the OT verses most quoted or alluded to in the NT.¹⁰⁶ In some of its uses by Paul (esp. 1 Cor 15.20-27; Phil 2.9-11), it refers to both the ascension and the parousia of Christ. Given the inaugurated eschatology reflected in the rest of 3.1-4, inaugurated eschatology is probably in view in v. 2 with the citation of Ps 110.1. Thus the eschatological victory of Christ began with his death and resurrection, when rulers and powers were disarmed (2.15), but the consummation of Christ's rule is yet in the future (cf. 3.4, 6). The use of Ps 110.1 in this ethical context of Col 3 is logical in light of the polemical setting, for it affirms the lordship of Christ¹⁰⁷ in the face of Christological opponents. The quotations or allusions of Ps 110 in the NT clearly demonstrates its use to affirm the lordship of Christ (cf. Acts 2.34-36; Eph 4.10; Phil 2.10-11; Heb 1.13). Bruce affirms this use of Ps 110 in Col 3.1, and articulates the ethical significance of the affirmation of Christ's lordship, noting that believers who have died with Christ the Lord are raised to new life and their conduct is to be different.¹⁰⁸

In light of the opponents' emphasis on heavenly revelations and angelic worship, the addition of the phrase οὗ ὁ Χριστός ἐστιν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ καθήμενος to further define τὰ ἄνω has an additional polemical significance. As Bockmuehl notes, the phrase "where Christ is" clearly "sets the agenda of any quest for the heavenly world: the 'things' above are of relevant interest in so far as they relate to the enthroned Christ; anyone lacking this perspective misses the point altogether."¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, as we have seen repeatedly in Colossians, Christology is made the canon for Christian praxis.

O'Brien articulates an eschatological reading of 3.1-2, saying that ἄνω describes "two spheres which correspond to the eschatological schema of the two ages."¹¹⁰ In calling believers to seek and set their minds on τὰ ἄνω, the writer indicates that the new order has come in the Christ event, an order upon which believers need to orient their thinking (φρονέω indicates motivation, not mere emotion). The eschatological tension in the indicative/imperative is obvious here. Christ had ascended, and the believer has been raised with him. These verities are to empower believers, and demand an ethical response.

¹⁰⁶ On the use and significance of Ps 110 in the early Christian church, cf. D. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity*, SBLMS 18 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973).

¹⁰⁷ Bruce, *Colossians*, 132-34; Caird, *Letters from Prison*, 202; Schweizer, *Colossians*, 174.

¹⁰⁸ *Colossians*, 134.

¹⁰⁹ "Revelation and Mystery," 277.

¹¹⁰ *Colossians*, 160.

In 3.3 the writer returns to the theme of the believers' death and resurrection with Christ. This is stated to strengthen the command of v. 2 ($\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$ is used causally). Believers are to be oriented to the heavenly sphere because they have died with Christ, and have been given new resurrection life. The author further clarifies the believers' death and resurrection with Christ by saying their life "is hid with Christ in God." The verbal form $\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\rho\upsilon\pi\tau\alpha\iota$ is in the perfect tense, in contrast to the previous verb, $\acute{\alpha}\pi\epsilon\theta\acute{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\tau\epsilon$, which is an aorist. This emphasises the ongoing results of believers' hiddenness with Christ.¹¹¹

Various interpretations have been given to "hid with Christ." Some suggest it indicates the Christian's life is concealed in a mystical way, so that new life is a secret to the world, and to some extent, even to believers themselves.¹¹² This, however, seems to go against 2.2-3, where we read that the believer can grow to have an "assured understanding and knowledge of God's mystery of Christ." It certainly contradicts the Pauline tradition reflected in other epistles, where conduct is said to be indicative of one's spiritual condition (Gal 5.19-23; Phil 2.15, 3.17; 1 Thess 2.10; 2 Thess 3.6). This reading is also hard to justify in the light of the close proximity of lists of vices and virtues which are to some degree externally verifiable (3.5, 8, 9, 12-16).

Others assert that this is an allusion to the pagan concept of death as hiddenness in the earth, and thus refers to the believers' death with Christ.¹¹³ This reading is possible, but seems to be unlikely, in that it makes the verse rather redundant. A slightly different interpretation is more likely. Given the context in which the believers' union with Christ and ethical responsibility are strongly affirmed, and given the coupling of the believers' hiddenness with his or her death with Christ, the "life hid with Christ in God" probably refers in a general manner to believers' union with Christ.¹¹⁴ This indicates the believers' old self has died, it is only in Christ that one has life. The believers' entire way of thinking is to be centred on the new spiritual realm Christ inaugurated. Consequently the believer no longer has a separate, self-oriented (thus fleshly) identity, for "your life is hid with Christ in God."

This is very similar to the anthropology found in Gal 2.20 "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." The ethical implications are clear. The believer has no right to live in a selfish, fleshly manner, for

¹¹¹ O'Brien, *Colossians*, 165.

¹¹² So Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 209, and Schweizer, *Colossians*, 175-76.

¹¹³ Martin, *Colossians*, 102, and Moule, *Colossians*, 112.

¹¹⁴ Hence Lincoln asserts "the Colossians' life is hidden in God because it is incorporated with or in Christ, who is himself hidden in God. As opposed to any ascent of the soul in order to become absorbed into the godhead, the basis of this hidden union is for Paul to be found in the historical events of Christ's death and resurrection" (*Paradise Now*, 128).

that no longer reflects his or her identity. The life the believer possess¹¹⁵ comes only from Christ, thus the life lived must be lived for Christ.

This passage ends with an additional note of eschatological tension, being reflected as the opposite of the hiddenness of v. 3. The author conveys eschatological tension by declaring that Christ and believers will be revealed. Again the use of the verb φανερώω may be polemical, set in contrast to the mystical, secret knowledge claimed by the false teachers.¹¹⁵ Though the mystery of Christ had been revealed, the fulness of revelation will occur at his parousia, which is in view in v. 4. The believers' revelation with Christ in glory refers to the consummation of salvation, and probably suggests the resurrection of the body (cf. 1 Cor 15.12-26, 42-43; 2 Cor 5.1-10; Phil 3.20-21).¹¹⁶ This reading is strengthened by τὰ μέλη τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς in 3.5, which (as we will demonstrate in the next thesis chapter) refers to physical body parts (Rom 6.12-13; 8.13). Thus the believer is beckoned to look forward to the day when salvation will be completed, and because of union with Christ which is a present reality, a new body will be given (v. 4). Yet in the present, believers must allow death with Christ to be reflected in the death of their physical bodies to sin (cp. Rom 6.12).

In summary, while the eschatological perspective indicated in Col 3.1-4 is largely realised, futuristic elements still remain. Thus this passage reflects an inaugurated eschatology, an eschatological perspective characteristic of the undisputed Pauline literature. Inaugurated eschatology is particularly evident through the indicative/imperative relationship seen throughout the section. The believers' eschatological new life has begun but will be consummated in the future. This eschatological new life is made the basis for new behaviour.

III. Conclusion

Col 3.1-4 is a unique passage in that it contains both paraenesis and the theological basis for subsequent paraenesis. This evidences the fact that it serves as a bridge, linking the detailed paraenesis contained in 3.5-4.1, with the refutations against the opponents in ch. 2. The latter concern helps explain the largely realised eschatology, for the author wanted the Colossians to understand that they did not need to seek a

¹¹⁵ Cf. Lincoln, *Paradise Now*, 129. Bultmann and Lührmann, however, see this as a revelation schema from pre-Pauline tradition which reflects a mixture of Gnostic and apocalyptic elements, "φανερώω," *TDNT* 9.4.

¹¹⁶ Martin, *Colossians*, 102. Schweizer notes "the fact that the community will at some point live in glory is what distinguishes their future consummation from the present" (*Colossians*, 177).

heavenly revelation, for by virtue of their union with Christ, they are said to have already been raised.

In spite of the fact that some scholars assert that the largely realised eschatology of Colossians can provide little basis for ethics, paraenesis is given a firm eschatological and soteriological grounding in this passage. In Col 3.1-4 the inferential use of the conjunction οὖν in v.1, the conditional clause in 3.1, and the dying/rising with Christ theme all serve to give a firm theological basis for paraenesis. Dying and rising with Christ described in 3.1-4 is based on 2.11-13. Col 2.11-13 affirms that fact that the believer is united with Christ in baptism based on Christ's representative death, so that believers participate in his historical death and resurrection. This union with Christ, and identification with his death and resurrection is made the basis for paraenesis, for the believer who has died and been raised with Christ is to set his or her mind on the heavenly things (as opposed to the ethically fleshly realm, v. 2). Furthermore, believers who have died with Christ are to consider their physical body parts dead to sinful vices (v. 5).

The paraenesis articulated in Col 3 is given in the context of the indicative/imperative construction, and reflects the eschatological tension of the believers' life between the ages. This tension shows that the eschatology in Colossians is not entirely realised. On the contrary, the author appeals to futuristic (apocalyptic) eschatology to establish the basis for ethics in the epistle.

Chapter Six

The Vice/Virtue Lists: Colossians 3.5-17

In this chapter the ground and shape of paraenesis in Col 3.5-17 will be examined, with particular attention given to the three vice/virtue lists found in vv. 5, 8, 12.

I Nature and Origin of Vice/Virtue Lists

A Nature of NT Vice/Virtue Lists

The promulgation of ethical vice/virtue lists was common in the ancient world among Jewish,¹ pagan,² and Christian³ writers. The lists were used polemically to castigate one's religious or philosophical opponents (Wis 14.23-28; 1 Tim 1.9-10; Jude 8, 16), rhetorically to explain one's religious system by citing its moral results or the need of them (Epictetus, *Discourse* 3.22.50-61; Seneca, *Epistle* 75), antithetically to promote moral behaviour by contrasting proper and improper conduct (Gal 5.19-23; Jas 3.13-18), mnemonically to remind readers of their former condition (1 Cor 6.9-11; Col 3.12-13), and even politically and ecclesiastically to establish requisite character qualities for leadership (Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 4.83-96; 1 Tim 3.2-6, 8-13; Titus 1.7-9).

In the NT, vice/virtue lists were widely employed, and appear in each of the Pauline and deutero-Pauline epistles but three (1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philemon), and in each of the general epistles except for Hebrews and 1, 2, 3 John. One of the most striking characteristics of these lists is their diversity in form as well as content.⁴ For example, Rom 1.29-31 lists twenty-one vices utilising the thrice repeated formula

¹ 3 *Apoc. Bar.* 8.5; 13.4; 1 *Enoch* 91.6-7; 2 *Enoch* 9-10; Ex 20.1-17; 4 *Macc* 1.26-27; 2.15; *Or. Sib.* 2.254-83; Philo, *Sac.* 27; 32; *Virt.* 180-82; 1 *QS* 4.9-14; *T. Levi.* 17.11; *T. Reu.* 3.3-7; Wis 14.23-2; cf. also S. Wibbing, *Die Tugend- und Lasterkataloge im Neuen Testament und ihre Traditionsgeschichte* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1959) 23-42.

² Cicero, *Tusc.* 4.11-27; Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 4.83-96; Epictetus, *Discourse* 4.1.1-5; Musonius Rufus, *Frag.* 16; Pseudo-Crates, *Epistle* 15; Seneca, *Epistle* 75; 95.65-67. For additional Greco-Roman lists, see J. T. Fitzgerald, "Vice/Virtue Lists," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6.857. For additional Stoic lists, see Wibbing, *Kataloge*, 14-23.

³ The canonical vice lists are found in Matt 15.19; Mark 7.21-22; Rom 1.24-26, 29-31; 13.13; 1 Cor 5.10-11; 6.9-10; 2 Cor 12.20; Gal 5.19-21; Eph 4.19; 5.3-5; Col 3.5-9; 1 Tim 1.9-10; 6.4-5; 2 Tim 3.2-5; Titus 3.3; 1 Pet 2.1; 4.3-4; Jude 8, 16; Rev 9.20-21; 21.8, 15; 22.15. Canonical virtue lists are found in Matt 5.3-11; 2 Cor 6.6-7; Gal 5.22-23; Eph 6.14-17; Phil 4.8; Col 3.12-14; 1 Tim 3.2-3; 6.11; Titus 1.7-8; James 3.17; 2 Pet 1.5-7. On the contents and structure of the NT lists, cf. Erhard Kamlah, *Die Form der katalogischen Paränese im Neuen Testament*, WMANT 7 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1964) 11-38; Wibbing, *Kataloge*, 78-108.

Non canonical Christian sources for vice/virtue lists include *Apoc. Pet.* 21-34; *Barn.* 18-20; *I Clem.* 35.5; *Did.* 5.1; *Herm. Mand.* 5.2.4; 6.2; 8.3-5; *Sim.* 6; 9.15; *Pol. Phil.* 2.2; 4.3; 5.2; 6.1.

⁴ For a comparison of the various lists, cf. Cannon, *Traditional Materials*, 54-60.

"God abandoned them," but only two of these vices are found in the Colossian lists (πλεονεξία and κακία). Gal 5.19-21 lists fifteen vices as the fruit of the flesh, four of which are found in the Colossian lists, and three of the nine virtues listed are in the Colossian list. In 2 Tim 3.2-5 nineteen vices are cited as characteristics of the last days, and only one (βλασφημία) appears in the Colossian lists. None of the eight virtues found in the Beatitudes (Matt 5.3-11) appear in the Colossians' list or in any other NT virtue list. Several other NT vice/virtue lists have no direct overlap with the Colossian lists (Eph 6.14-17; Phil 4.8; 1 Tim 1.9-10; 3.2-3; Titus 1.7-8; Jas 3.17; 2 Pet 1.5-7; Rev 21.8; 22.15), though in some instances different lists contain cognate terms or similar themes (1 Tim 1.9-10; 2 Pet 1.5-7; Rev 21.8; 22.15) as those found in Colossians. The differences in form and content between the various vice/virtue lists in the NT have led most exegetes to deny the existence of prototypical vice or virtue lists (*Urkataloge*).⁵

The Pauline and deutero-Pauline vice/virtue lists have several notable characteristics. Like the other NT lists, they vary widely in form and content. Several of the vice lists do, however, have a common framework, viz., the judgment of God (Rom 1.18-32; 1 Cor 5.10-13; Eph 5.3-6; Col 3.5-6, cp. 1 Pet 4.3-5; Jude 13-16; Rev 9.20-21; 21.8; 22.12-15). They also have a common soteriological foundation which sets them apart from most non-Christian lists, for in the Pauline and deutero-Pauline literature vices are not shunned and virtues gained through rigorous self effort.⁶ Vices are part of the pre-Christian life (Rom 1.18-32; 1 Cor 6.9-11; Eph 5.3-7; Col 3.5-7).

⁵ Cannon, *Traditional Materials*, 65; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 180; Wibbing, *Kataloge*, 81-83.

⁶ O'Brien notes "these catalogs are not to be understood in a moralistic sense or as some kind of new law so that the avoidance of the sins or the exercise of the virtues listed would lead to the achievement of righteousness or the acquiring of merit. Rather, they describe the walk of the Christian" (*Colossians*, 180). See also Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, 87; Moule, *Birth of the New Testament*, 193. This approach to morality is quite different from most of the Greek philosophers who taught that virtue was acquired by practise (Pseudo-Crates, *Epistle* 12; Plutarch, *Moralia* 439B). Thus Dodd notes that the Pauline ethical perspective is to be "sharply distinguished from that of contemporary Greek moralists, who from the time of Aristotle had set out to provide a self-contained and self-justifying system of ethics. For Christianity, ethics are not self-contained or self-justifying; they arise out of a response to the gospel" (*Gospel and Law. The Relation of Faith and Ethics in Early Christianity* [New York: Columbia University, 1951] 10). Wibbing believes the development of a performance scheme of Jewish works righteousness, as revealed in vice/virtue teachings, reveals one of the most stark contrasts between late Jewish theology, especially that found in the Qumran community, and the Apostle Paul (*Kataloge*, 120-22). The development of virtue was a particularly severe task for the Stoic, who believed that as long as one has any internal disharmony, one has forfeited the claim of virtue. Thus for the Stoic, there are no degrees of goodness, for "until a man is good he is bad" (A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy. Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* [New York: Charles Scribner's, 1974] 204; SVF 3.510; 3.657-70). It must be acknowledged, however, that the Stoics emphasised the doctrine of ὁμολογία or consistency with Nature. This Stoic cosmology is deterministic, and thus for the Stoic, morality is a necessary response to Right Reason. Virtuous behaviour is the ineluctable response of the individual who is wise and virtuous (Brad Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1985] 109-10; A. A. Long, "The Early Stoic Concept of Moral Choice," in *Images of Man in Ancient and Medieval Thought. Studia Gerardo Verbeke* [Louvain: Leuven University, 1976] 84; cf. Seneca *Ben.* 6.21.2-3).

Virtue results from putting on the new nature obtained through union with Christ (Col 3.1-4, 8-10), from putting on the armour supplied by God (Eph 6.14-17), through the grace of God (2 Cor 6.1-2, 6-8). It is the fruit of the Spirit, whereas vice is the fruit of the flesh (Gal 5.16-23).

B. Origin of Vice/Virtue Lists

There is little doubt that there are numerous parallels between the NT vice/virtue lists and household codes, and those found in Hellenistic Judaism and even first-century pagan moral philosophy. This raises pressing questions for a study of the Colossian vice/virtue lists: What is the source of the Colossian vice/virtue lists? In what sense have they been "Christianised"? What is the theological or "Christian" basis given for them? Thus we will now give a general overview of the proposed sources of the Colossian vice/virtue lists, with a view toward clarifying the shape of paraenesis in Colossians.

In terms of immediate Christian sources for the vice/virtue lists, Bultmann and Dahl⁷ believe one of the earliest Christian preaching forms was the soteriological contrast pattern which utilised an anthropological/soteriological contrast of the believers' pre- and post-Christian existence (Rom 6.17-22; Eph 2.11-22; Col 3.5-9). This pattern is said to be linked to the vice lists which describe the former life (Titus 3.3ff.; 1 Cor 6.9; Col 3.5-8) and the virtue lists which describe the new existence in Christ (Col 3.10-13; 2 Pet 1.5-7). These early Christian preaching forms were probably part of catechetical material which resulted from the author's development of common themes of missionary teaching.⁸ The question remains, however, where did the early Christian preachers get their material? What sources did they utilise to obtain the vice/virtue lists, and how did they shape or Christianise these sources? At the outset of this section we must acknowledge the difficulty of identifying the source of the NT vice/virtue lists. In a study of the NT vice/virtue lists, Schweizer aptly comments on the task of identifying the source of the Colossian lists "freilich sind die religionsgeschichtlichen Probleme hier besonders schwierig zu durchschauen."⁹

⁷ Bultmann, *Theology*, 105-106; Dahl, *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church*, 33-34.

⁸ Caird, *The Apostolic Age*, 106-15; Cannon, *Traditional Materials*, 65-82; Carrington, *Primitive Christian Catechism*, 31-65; Dodd, *Gospel and Law*, 10-24; E. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (London: Macmillan, 1946) 365-466.

⁹ "Gottesgerechtigkeit und Lasterkataloge bei Paulus (Inkl. Kol und Eph)" in *Rechtfertigung*, FS E. Käsemann, ed. by J. Friedrich, W. Pöhlmann, and P. Stuhlmacher (Tübingen: Mohr, 1976) 471.

1. Stoicism and Hellenistic Philosophy

Burton Scott Easton boldly begins his article on NT ethical lists by asserting "it is now generally recognised that the catalogs of virtues and vices in the New Testament are derived ultimately from the ethical teachings of the Stoa."¹⁰ Several other scholars share the conviction that the NT vice/virtue lists are ultimately of Hellenistic, particularly Stoic, origin.¹¹ The influence of the Stoa on Hellenistic Jewish ethics is obvious. For example, Stoic influence is evident in the introductory paragraph of 4 Maccabees, where the author states that his purpose for writing is to discuss the sovereignty of reason over the emotions that hinder self-control, justice, and courage (the four cardinal Stoic virtues being rational judgment, self-control, justice, and courage). Stoic ethical influence is also clearly evident in Philo's extensive vice list in which he relates over 150 vices to the pursuit of pleasure.¹²

Many of the vices and virtues in the NT lists have Stoic or other Hellenistic philosophical counterparts.¹³ Phil 4.8, for example, contains several terms commonly used in ethical discourse by Stoic and Hellenistic philosophers (ἀληθής; σεμνός; δίκαιος; εὐφημος; ἀρετή; ἔπαινος).¹⁴ At the same time, there are notable differences in content and emphasis between the NT and the Hellenistic lists.¹⁵ While some of the

¹⁰ "New Testament Ethical Lists," *JBL* 51 (1932) 1.

¹¹ H. D. Betz, *Galatians*, 281-83; H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 100-101; Vögtle, *Die Tugend- und Lasterkatologe: exegetische, religions- und formgeschichtlich Untersucht* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1936); cf. also Schrage, *Die Konkreten Einzelgebote in der Paulinischen Paränese* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1961) 202-203. On Stoicism and other Hellenistic philosophies and the New Testament, see D. Balch, "Neopythagorean Moralists and the New Testament Household Codes," *ANRW* 2.26.1. 380-411; H. Betz, *Der Apostel Paulus und die sokratische Tradition* (Mohr: Tübingen, 1972); R. Bultmann, "Das religiöse Moment in der ethischen Unterweisung des Epiktet und das Neue Testament," *ZNW* 13 (1912) 97-110; A. Malherbe, "Hellenistic Moralists and the New Testament," *ANRW* 2.26.1. 267-333.

¹² *Sac.* 32.

¹³ On similarities and differences between Pauline ethics (including Colossians), particularly the vice/virtue lists, and first-century philosophy, cf. Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, 81-89; Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Philadelphia: Minneapolis, 1989); M. Pohlenz, "Paulus und die Stoa," *ZNW* 48 (1949) 69-104; J. N. Sevenster, *Paul and Seneca*, *NovTSup* 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1961) 140-66. Sevenster, in particular, notes distinctions between Paul and Seneca. He says that for Seneca, perfection is attainable as one develops concord between nature and reason, whereas for Paul, perfection is only attainable through the believer's union with Christ (141-45). Similarly, he says Seneca's concept of virtue is anthropocentric, whereas for Paul virtue is a fruit of the Spirit (146-56). Furthermore, Sevenster notes differences between Paul and Seneca regarding the principal virtues of wisdom, bravery, equanimity, and justice (157-66). Seneca advocated heroic self attained bravery (*fortitudo*), whereas Paul espoused ὑπομονή (not ἀνδρεία), which is based on hope centred on the present and future acts of God. He says that for Seneca, wisdom was based on living in accordance with nature, and was said to result in an imperturbable, self-sufficient life, whereas for Paul, wisdom was revelatory, attainable only from God. Thus self-sufficient wisdom is fleshly and anything but virtuous.

¹⁴ Cf. Sevenster, *Seneca*, 152-56; Wibbing, *Kataloge*, 80-84, 101-103, 118-19.

¹⁵ This brings into question the assertion by Betz that the NT vice/virtue lists "are not in any way specifically 'Christian,' but represent the conventional morality of the time" (*Galatians*, 282).

four cardinal Stoic virtues are found in the NT virtue lists,¹⁶ none of them occupies a prominent position. One (courage) is never found in NT virtue lists or other paraenesis,¹⁷ and no Pauline or deutero-Pauline virtue list contains more than one of the four cardinal Stoic virtues.¹⁸ Other important Hellenistic virtues and vices are found in the NT lists, but again, they are neither prominent nor frequent.¹⁹ Conversely, one of the NT virtues cited in the Colossian list (ταπεινοφροσύνη—"humility") was regarded not as a virtue but as a weakness by Hellenistic moralists.²⁰ One scholar summarises the Graeco-Roman view of humility by noting "humility as a virtue is alien to the whole of ancient ethics."²¹ Thus while Stoicism and Hellenistic philosophy have influenced the NT vice/virtue lists, their direct influence cannot entirely account for the NT lists.

¹⁶ The noun ἐγκρατεία ("self-control") is found in the virtue list in Gal 5.22 and 2 Pet 1.5-6; σώφρωνων ("self-controlled," "temperate") is found in 1 Tim 3.2; Tit 1.8; 2.2, 5; δικαιοσύνη ("justice" or "righteousness") is found in 1 Tim 6.11 and 2 Tim 2.22; γνώσις ("knowledge") is found in 2 Pet 1.5-6.

¹⁷ The noun θάρσος ("courage") is used only once in the NT, in Acts 28.15 (cp. Euripides *Hec.* 371; Hesiod *Sc.* 96; Plato *Lg.* 647b). The verbal form θαρσέω is used eight times in the gospels and Acts as a greeting ("take heart" or "be of good cheer").

¹⁸ In the virtue list in 2 Pet 1.5-6, knowledge (γνώσις) and self-control (ἐγκρατεία), two of the cardinal virtues, are listed along moral excellence (ἀρετή), another important Hellenistic virtue.

¹⁹ The virtue ἀρετή ("excellence" "moral excellence") is an important Hellenistic virtue which generally denoted the positive results of human achievement (Hesiod *Op.* 313; Democritus 179, 263; Aristotle *EN* 1102a.6; *Pol.* 1295a.37; cf. Bauernfeind, "ἀρετή," *TDNT* 1.458-61), but in the Pauline and deutero-Pauline literature which emphasises human moral inability and divine enabling, it is used only once (Phil 4.8; cf. also 2 Pet 1.5). The vice ὕβρις ("pride" "arrogance") has a long and broad history in Greek thought (cf. Bertram, "ὕβρις," *TDNT* 8.295-99), being denounced by philosophers (Plato *Symp.* 188a; *Lg.* 6.783a; Aristotle *EN* 4.8.1124a; 7.7.1149a) tragedists (Aeschylus *Pers.* 808; Sophocles *Tr.* 280), and historians (Xenophon *HG* 2.2.10; Herodotus, 7.16a). It is rarely used in the NT (only in Acts 27.10, 21; 2 Cor 12.10 "insults"), and never in a vice list (though the cognate ὑβριστής is found in a vice list in Rom 1.30; cf. 1 Tim 1.13).

²⁰ In the NT, the noun ταπεινοφροσύνη (Acts 20.19; Eph 4.2; Phil 2.3; 1 Pet 5.5) and the verb ταπεινώω (Matt 18.4; 23.12; Luke 14.11; 18.14; 2 Cor 11.7; Phil 2.8; Jas 4.10; 1 Pet 5.6) signify humility as a virtue (though ταπεινοφροσύνη is used in Col 2.18, 23 to indicate inappropriate self-abasement). Among the Greeks, ταπεινοφροσύνη or the cognate ταπεινόφρων was widely understood to be undesirable, and denoted "weakness" (Epictetus *Diss.* 3.24.56; cp. 1.9.10), "fear" or "poorness of spirit" (Plutarch *Alex.* 4.2.336e; *Tranq. An.* 2.475e), and "mean-spiritedness" (Arrian *Epict.* 3.24.56; Josephus *BJ* 4.9.2). On humility as a Christian virtue but a Graeco-Roman vice, cf. Klaus Wengst, "Einander durch Demut für vorzüglicher halten." Zum Begriff 'Demut' bei Paulus und in paulinischer Tradition," in *Studien zum Text und zur Ethik des Neuen Testaments*, FS Heinrich Greeven, ed. by W. Schrage (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1986) 428-39. On Paul's radical departure from Greek culture based on his own self-humiliation, cf. Edwin Judge, "St. Paul and Classical Society," *JAC* 15 (1972) 26-36.

²¹ Stefan Rehr, "Demut 3, Neues Testament, 4. Alte Kirche," *TRE* 8 (1981) 464, cited by Klaus Wengst, *Humility: Solidarity of the Humiliated. The Transformation of an Attitude and Its Social Relevance in Graeco-Roman, Old Testament-Jewish and Early Christian Tradition*, trans. by John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 4.

2. Two Ways Tradition—Iranian Religion

The direction of Siegfried Wibbing's monograph *Die Tugend und Lasterkataloge im Neuen Testament* is suggested in its subtitle *und ihre Traditionsgeschichte unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Qumran-Texte*. Wibbing argues that the anthropological dualism found in the vice/virtue lists in ancient sect writings, particularly those found at Qumran, was ultimately influenced by Iranian religion. Since in his opinion the Qumran writings and other late Jewish period literature greatly influenced the NT vice/virtue lists,²² and Iranian religion was believed to have influenced Qumran and other late period Jewish literature, Qumran literature is said to have served as a middle link between Iranian religion and the NT. Thus ultimately the source of the NT vice/virtue lists is said to be Iranian religion. Wibbing gives particular attention to Jewish "two way" tradition literature, which he believes provides the link between Iranian religion and NT vice/virtue lists.²³

Unfortunately, Wibbing, like most others who make this assertion, offers very little primary source documentation of Iranian religious texts to support this claim. Another problem with Wibbing's model is his insistence on a Qumran light/darkness dualism behind all of the Pauline (which by his definition includes Colossians and Ephesians) vice/virtue lists.²⁴ While light/darkness or flesh/spirit dualism is in view in the vice/virtue lists found in Rom 13.13; Gal 5.19-23; and Eph 5.3-5; 6.14-17, it is absent in the lists found in Rom 1.24-26, 29-31; 1 Cor 5.10-11; 6.9-10; 2 Cor 12.20; 6.6-7; Phil 4.8; Col 3.5-9, 12-15. A model which posits the pervasive influence of a Jewish light/darkness dualism on all Pauline vice/virtue lists²⁵ must account for all the evidence, not just the evidence from four of thirteen lists.

Kamlah²⁶ follows in Wibbing's train, but develops the thesis in a somewhat different manner. Kamlah agrees that the NT vice/virtue lists owe their genesis to dualism which can ultimately be traced to Iranian dualism,²⁷ but he distinguishes two

²² "So zeigen die ntlichen Tugend- und Lasterkataloge ihrem Inhalt nach in den Hauptbegriffen und in ihrer Struktur klar, daß sie in der spätjüdischen Tradition, die in geschlossenem Zusammenhang in den Qumran-Texten vorliegt, fest verwurzelt sind" (*Kataloge*, 114).

²³ *Kataloge*, 33-42, 61-64.

²⁴ "die Tugend- und Lasterkataloge bei Pls in den Zusammenhang des dualistischen Schemas Licht—Finsternis, Fleisch—Geist hineingehören" (*Kataloge*, 124, also 108-14).

²⁵ Wibbing does note differences between late Jewish dualism and that found in the NT. The primary difference he notes is that the dualism of the Qumran texts is deterministic, whereas the NT message is that the domination of the darkness has been broken through the death and resurrection of Christ (*Kataloge*, 124). Wibbing, however, does not go far enough in recognising that the majority of the Pauline vice/virtue lists do not have a decidedly dualistic context.

²⁶ *Katalogischen Paränese*; cf. also Jack Suggs, "The Christian Two Ways Tradition," in *Studies in New Testament and Early Christian Literature*, FS Allen Wikgren, NovTSup 33 (Leiden: Brill, 1972) 66-67.

²⁷ "Ihr antithetisches Schema, in dem sie Gut und Böse gegeneinanderstellen und nichts Mittleres zulassen, stammt aus der iranischen Kosmologie" (*Katalogischen Paränese*, 214).

types of lists²⁸ which he believes have influenced the NT. First of all, he identifies a "descriptive" type of vice/virtue list ("beschreibende Katalog") which concludes with a promise and a threat (cf. Gal 5.21, 23-24). Secondly, he identifies a "paraenetical" type of vice/virtue list ("paränetische Katalog") which describes vices in terms of the old life which is to be put off, and virtues in terms of the new life which is to be put on (Col 3.5-14).²⁹ Kamlah believes the latter type of list was influenced by syncretistic mystery cults. The same criticisms given to Wibbing's model are applicable to Kamlah's. He provides little primary source documentation to verify the supposed Iranian influence,³⁰ a proposition he has made even more difficult to prove by his assertion that the "paraenetical" type of catalogue is ultimately influenced by Iranian dualism, but the proximate influence is syncretistic mystery religion.³¹

3. Canonical Judaism

A few scholars assert that the NT vice/virtue lists were primarily influenced by the Old Testament,³² particularly the decalogue,³³ or by the two ways tradition found in passages such as Deut 30.15-20, Jer 21.8, and Prov. 2.12-15. Most exegetes agree that NT morality is significantly influenced by canonical Judaism, but the form and composite content of the NT vice/virtue lists are unprecedented in the Hebrew Bible. With the exception of the decalogue (Exod 20.1-17; Deut 5.6-21), there are few vice lists in the OT (Prov 6.16-19). The NT lists explicitly or implicitly affirm several of the ten commandments. For example, the vice list portion of Colossians mentions immorality (cp. Exod 20.14 "adultery"), covetousness (Exod 20.17), idolatry (Exod 20.3-4), anger (cp. Exod 20.13 "murder"), and lying (Exod 20.16). At the same time, the NT lists contain quite a bit of material which does not seem to be drawn directly from the OT lists, and one of the ten commandments (Sabbath keeping) is not only absent from the NT lists, but is invalidated in the paraenesis of Colossians (2.16). The

²⁸ *Katalogischen Paränese*, 176-96, 214-15.

²⁹ *Katalogischen Paränese*, 202-207.

³⁰ Kamlah attempts to reconstruct the reputedly influential Iranian myth by appealing to IQS 3.13-4.26; Philo, *Quest. in Ex.* 1.23; and Plutarch, *De Is. et Osir.* 46-47 (*Katalogischen Paränese*, 50-53, 57-64).

³¹ Cf. *Katalogischen Paränese*, 85-102.

³² Contra Betz (*Galatians*, 282) and Conzelmann (*1 Corinthians*, 100) who assert that the vice/virtue lists have no Old Testament precedents.

³³ Hartman, "Code and Context"; Gnilka, *Kolossierbrief*, 185; R. M. Grant, "The Decalogue in the New Testament," *HTR* 40 (1947) 6. D. Schroeder argues that the NT lists have multiple roots, with the form and content being drawn primarily from the OT, whereas the station of life structure of the lists (wives, children, slaves) is Hellenistic, particularly Stoic in origin ("Lists, Ethical," *IDBSup*, 546-47).

NT virtue lists are even harder to identify strictly with the decalogue or other OT virtue lists.

While passages such as Deut 30 do provide a two paths metaphor, Jack Suggs³⁴ has demonstrated that differences in structure (the six element covenant formula pattern is nowhere represented in 1QS or the NT) and content (the lists in 1QS and the NT are sharply dualistic) counter the theory that vice/virtue lists found in the Qumran documents and in the NT were primarily influenced by the OT. Thus I agree with Fitzgerald that the OT vice/virtue lists "neither constitute a fixed literary form nor serve as the models for later Jewish and Christian catalogs."³⁵

4. Canonical Judaism via Primitive Christian Baptismal Catechism

Other scholars³⁶ propose that the NT vice lists reflect early Christian baptismal catechism, which is largely based on Jewish proselyte catechism found in the Holiness Code of Lev 17-19. The early church had to deal with the status of baptised Gentiles and the applicability of Jewish law to Christian morality, as the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.23-29³⁷ indicates. The Jerusalem Council decided that converted Gentiles need not be circumcised, but should abstain from fornication, items offered to idols, and meat from strangled animals. Since this threefold decree emphasises holiness and abstinence from certain practises, and holiness and abstinence from these three items are emphasised in some of the Pauline epistles, James and 1 Peter,³⁸ some scholars believe the church viewed itself as a neo-Levitical community which developed its own Holiness Code patterned after Lev 17-19.³⁹

³⁴ "The Christian Two Ways Tradition," 63-65.

³⁵ "Virtue/Vice Lists," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6.858.

³⁶ Carrington, *Primitive Christian Catechism*, 31-44, 92-93; Cannon, *Traditional Materials*, 68-93; D. Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (University of London: Athlone, 1956) 106-40; Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 120-36; G. Klein, *Der älteste christliche Katechismus* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1909); Selwyn, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 375-82; cp. Dodd, who accepts most of Carrington's conclusions regarding the form and content of early Christian catechism, but denies that the source was primarily canonical Judaism. He argues instead that NT ethical teaching was influenced largely by first-century popular Graeco-Roman moral philosophy (*Gospel and Law*, 14-24).

³⁷ In addition to the standard commentaries on Acts and Galatians, cf. C. K. Barrett, "Things Sacrificed to Idols," *NTS* 11 (1965) 142-50; P. Borgen, "Catalogues of Vices, The Apostolic Decree, and the Jerusalem Meeting," in *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism*, FS Howard Clark Kee, ed. by P. Borgen, E. Frerichs, R. Horsley, and J. Neusner (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 126-41; D. Catchpole, "Paul, James, and the Apostolic Decree," *NTS* 23 (1977) 428-44; M. Simon, "The Apostolic Decree and its Setting in the Ancient Church," *BJRL* 52 (1969-70) 437-60.

³⁸ For specific parallels, cf. Cannon, *Traditional Materials*, 69-70, 76.

³⁹ Carrington (*Christian Catechism*, 12) suggests the Christian Holiness Code had four main components: (1) don't walk as the unbelieving Gentiles (Lev 18.1-5); (2) avoid the three major sins (Lev 17-18); (3) the reception of the Spirit is a call to holiness (Lev 19.2); (4) love one another (Lev 19.18).

Carrington, the most influential proponent of this position, argues that a NT Holiness Code was developed as a baptismal catechism, which contained the following four components: (1) put off evil (*deponentes*); (2) submit yourselves (*subjecti*); (3) watch and pray (*vigilate*); (4) resist the devil (*resistite*).⁴⁰ The Colossian vice/virtue lists (and household code) are thus said to be part of this early Christian baptismal catechism.⁴¹

This stimulating proposal has been quite influential in NT exegesis, though it has had its share of critics.⁴² Carrington's fourfold component list does describe the content of much NT paraenesis. Furthermore, we noted in the previous chapter that apostolic tradition which was probably passed on through baptismal catechesis had three different elements, one of which was paraenesis (1 Cor 11.2; 1 Thess 4.1; 2 Thess 3.6). Finally, the Colossian vice/virtue lists are probably connected with baptism. Thus it is quite possible that at least portions of Col 3.5ff. were originally part of baptismal catechesis.

It is much less likely, however, that the entire content of the Colossian lists can be explained in terms of canonical Judaism *vis-à-vis* Lev 17-19, or that the baptismal catechism was as narrowly fixed as Carrington and others suggest. Few of the twelve vice lists in the Pauline *homologoumena*, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Peter or James have a clear baptismal context,⁴³ and of the five that probably do, none contain four or more of the terms supposedly linking them with the Jerusalem Council and Lev 17-19 (πορνεία, εἰδωλολατρία, ἀκαθαρσία, αἷμα, πνικτός),⁴⁴ only one list contains three of the terms (Col 3.5-7: πορνεία, εἰδωλολατρία, ἀκαθαρσία) and one of the five vice lists in a baptismal context contains none of the five terms (Rom 13.12-14). Lest it be argued that some of the remaining seven vice lists could contain baptismal catechism without the retention of an expressly baptismal context, it should be noted that two of the five terms connected with the Jerusalem Council are not found in any NT vice list (αἷμα, πνικτός). Since this represents two of the four terms specifically mentioned in the Jerusalem Council's list of prohibitions, this is a significant omission. Furthermore, none of the six virtue lists found in the Pauline

⁴⁰ *Christian Catechism*, 30-31.

⁴¹ *Christian Catechism*, 92-93.

⁴² Cf. Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, 38-44.

⁴³ Of these twelve vice lists, only in 1 Pet 2.1-2 is baptism explicitly mentioned in the immediate context, though the vice list in Col 3 is thematically linked to baptism in 2.11-13. Only three other vice lists of the twelve appear to have a baptismal context: Rom 13.12-14 ("put on...put off"); 1 Cor 6.9-11 ("you were washed"); Eph 4.19-24 ("put on...put off").

⁴⁴ Cf. Carrington, *Traditional Materials*, 68-70. Borgen, on the other hand, argues that the numbers and types of vices cited in the NT vice lists evidence the fact that the Jerusalem Council did not issue a specific apostolic decree ("Catalogues of Vices," 135).

homologoumena, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Peter or James cites ἄγιος as a virtue,⁴⁵ a very surprising omission if the lists are ultimately linked to Lev 17-19. *In fine*, the greatest obstacle to Carrington's theory is that the NT vice/virtue lists exhibit great variety in content—too much variety to be explained solely in terms of a narrowly fixed Christian baptismal catechesis derived from canonical Judaism.⁴⁶

5. Amalgam from Various Sources

Fee correctly notes that ultimately the search for the source of the vice/virtue lists is futile since the Pauline lists exhibit great diversity, and most of the vices and virtues cited in the lists were widely accepted in the ancient world,⁴⁷ even being listed in Latin on the counters of a popular game.⁴⁸ Thus some scholars assert that the NT vice/virtue lists are amalgams from various sources.⁴⁹ This view makes the most sense of the complex data on ancient vice/virtue lists and first-century ethical teaching. The parallelism in terminology in the Colossian lists and Acts 15 (πορνεία, εἰδωλολατρία; similarly ἀκαθαρσία) suggests that Christian baptismal catechesis may well have been one of the sources for the lists, though the other terms in both the vice and the virtue lists suggest that they generally reflect the Hellenistic moral climate in the first century.

II. Colossian Vice/Virtue Lists

A. Function of the Colossian Vice/Virtue Lists

Meeks astutely suggests that the question of the precise origin of the NT vice/virtue lists is probably unanswerable, an assertion supported by the hitherto interminable nature of the debate. Furthermore, what is more important than the origin of the lists, is their function (the manner in which the early church utilised them).⁵⁰ Thus we will now evaluate the function of the vice/virtue lists.

⁴⁵ It is used, however, to describe the believer in the virtue list found in Col 3.12, though it is not actually cited as a specific virtue.

⁴⁶ So Borgen, "Catalogues of Vices," 132. Even if one links the Pauline vice lists only with Lev 17-19, and not with Acts 15, there is still too much diversity to allow for a narrowly fixed Christian baptismal catechesis as the sole source of the lists.

⁴⁷ *1 Corinthians*, 225 n. 27; cf. also Meeks, *Origins of Christian Morality*, 67.

⁴⁸ A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (New York: Doran, 1927) 316.

⁴⁹ N. McEleney, "The Vice Lists of the Pastoral Epistles," *CBQ* 36 (1974) 217-19; Yates, "Col 3.1-4.6," 243; cf. also Gosnell, "Moral Teaching in Ephesians," 168-86.

⁵⁰ *Origins of Christian Morality*, 67.

Historically, exegetes have generally asserted that the vice/virtue lists are extrinsic to the occasional setting of the epistles in which they are found.⁵¹ A few, however, have sought to relate the vice/virtue lists to the epistolary context.⁵² As we develop the specific vices and virtues in the Colossian lists, we will note that they are quite general in nature, and could apply to most first-century congregations. With the exception of the virtue *ταπεινοφροσύνη*,⁵³ the other vices and virtues in the Colossian lists do not appear to be organically related to the occasional setting found in chs. 1-2. At the same time, this does not necessarily mean that they are so broadly traditional as to be irrelevant to the Colossian moral situation. It is reasonable to assume that the writer believed the vices and virtues he cites here are in some manner significant for the Colossians in their specific situation.⁵⁴ Thus we agree with Ernst who argues that the Colossian vice lists describe what the author felt to be constant moral threats to the Colossian community, though this does not presuppose that they are based on an absolutely concrete epistolary situation.⁵⁵ More importantly, we assume the author had a rhetorical purpose for utilising the traditional vice/virtue lists. We will now attempt to discern the function and purpose of the Colossian vice/virtue lists.

1. Secular Identification

If the vice/virtue lists in Colossians are not strictly occasional, then what is their purpose? Various suggestions have been given to answer this question, though much more discussion has been given to the lists' origin than to their purpose.⁵⁶ Betz

⁵¹ Wibbing asserts "Die Taten der Tugendkataloge wollen und geben auch nicht Anweisung für bestimmte Situationen, denn sie zählen in erster Linie allgemeine Begriffe (s. o. S. 99f.) wie Liebe, Langmut, Demut usw. auf" (*Kataloge*, 125). Others who believe the vice/virtue lists reflect general character qualities largely disconnected from the specific epistolary situations in which they are found include Betz (*Galatians*, 282), Cruz (*Christological Motives*, 349-50), Dibelius (*Kolosser*, 30-31), Lohse (*Colossians*, 137-38), and Moule ("The 'New Life,'" 487).

⁵² Houlden, *Letters from Prison*, 204-205 and Zaas, "Catalogues and Context: 1 Corinthians 5 and 6," *NTS* 34 (1988) 622-29. Zaas in fact, does demonstrate that the vice lists in 1 Cor 5.11 and 6.9-10 are directly relevant to the epistolary context (623).

⁵³ Yates ("Colossians 3.1-4.6," 245) cogently argues that since *ταπεινοφροσύνη* is not found in any other NT virtue list, and is used negatively in Col 2.18, 23 to describe the self-abasement necessary for heavenly revelations, its citation in the virtue list of 3.12 is corrective, and hence occasionally generated.

⁵⁴ So argue O'Brien (*Colossians*, 180), Houlden (*Letters from Prison*, 204), and Schweizer ("Gottesgerechtigkeit und Lasterkatologe," 476).

⁵⁵ *Kolosser*, 224.

⁵⁶ For example, the following writers offer at least some speculation on the origin of the Colossian lists, but have little or nothing to say about the specific purpose of the same lists: Cannon (*Traditional Materials*, 50-94), Houlden (*Letters from Prison*, 204), Moule (*Colossians*, 113-14), and Pokorný (*Colossians*, 162-65). This is unfortunate, since given the diversity of the NT lists, it is virtually impossible to assign a single source for them. Even if a single source could be proven, the more important issue for NT studies is the purpose and manner in which the lists are used. Cannon's failure to address the purpose of the Colossian vice/virtue list is particularly surprising, since he offers

does not specifically evaluate the purpose of the Colossian lists, but addresses the question of the overall purpose of the NT lists. He claims that the primary function of the NT lists is "to make clear that Christian ethical life should roughly conform to the moral conventions of the time."⁵⁷ This is based on the assertion that the catalogues sum up conventional morality at the time the epistles were written. While Betz's suggestion has merit, and the NT writers probably did believe the Christian life in most respects should conform to the customs of its day, there are several notable differences between the morality reflected in the NT lists and that found in Hellenistic moral philosophy.⁵⁸ Hence Betz's thesis cannot be accepted as stated.

2. Evidence of New Life

Wibbing argues that the vice and virtue lists in Colossians are given to provide general signs or evidences of the new life in Christ.⁵⁹ While Wibbing does acknowledge that the admonitions found in the vice/virtue lists are genuine and necessary calls to new behaviour (largely based on his repudiation of immediate perfectionism),⁶⁰ he sees the primary purpose of the Pauline vice/virtue lists (including the Colossian lists) to be evidential—virtues are signs of the new life, vices are antithetical foils to the virtues, and mark the old life.⁶¹

a detailed, salubrious discussion of the source of the Colossian lists. He implies that the inclusion of these lists (which he believes were part of an early Christian baptismal catechism) affirmed the believers' identity as a unique people of God. He does say "a baptismal catechism was as appropriate and necessary for converts to the new Israel as it was for the old" (*Traditional Materials*, 93), and indicates that the lists in general served to contrast the "true people of God with outsiders" (63), but he never draws out these implications with respect to the specific purpose for the Colossian lists. Since he denies that the Pauline churches would have understood themselves as a neo-Levitical community as Carrington argued (*Traditional Materials*, 80), one is not sure what purpose Cannon sees for the Colossian vice/virtue lists.

⁵⁷ *Galatians*, 282.

⁵⁸ Some of the most notable differences include: the primacy of love (for all humans) in the NT lists, the failure of the NT lists to highlight the four cardinal Hellenistic virtues, the complete omission of one of the four cardinal virtues in the NT lists (courage), the presence of some traits deemed virtues in the NT which were ignored (viz., idol worship) or labelled vices (viz., humility) by Hellenistic moralists.

⁵⁹ *Kataloge*, 124. Though Bornkamm does not specifically comment on the vice/virtue lists, his discussion of the passage which immediately precedes it (Col 3.1-4) suggests that he would agree with Wibbing that the vice/virtue lists are given to evidence new life. Bornkamm expounds on the relationship between baptism and paraenesis in Rom 6 and Col 3.1-4: "thus the hiddenness of the new life is the basis for the necessity of the doctrine of baptism itself and the basis for the impact of the imperative" ("Baptism and New Life" 81-82, cf. also 72).

⁶⁰ "Auch die Christen bedürfen also immer wieder der Ermahnung, diesen neuen Wandel zu vollbringen. Pls löst das von ihm übernommene dualistische Schema nicht im Sinne eines Perfektionismus auf, so daß es für den Christen nun automatisch nur noch den Wandel im Licht geben könnte, d.h. Sündlosigkeit" (*Kataloge*, 125).

⁶¹ *Kataloge*, 123-27.

While giving evidence of the new life is *in erster Linie* the purpose of some of the vice/virtue lists (esp. 1 Cor 6.9-11⁶²) this is not the case in Colossians. In fact, Wibbing has inverted the writer's argument, for the author begins with the fact that the Colossians have new life in Christ (3.1 "since you have been raised with Christ") and uses that as the foundation for an appeal to practise the virtues and shun the vices, whereas Wibbing suggests the writer begins with the vices and virtues, and then moves to new life (the former evidencing the latter).

To demonstrate that the author begins with the fact of their new life and uses this as the basis for his appeal to practise the virtues and shun the vices, we need only note the flow of thought in 3.1-17.⁶³ The author begins the paraenetical section in 3.1 by appealing to the fact that the Colossians had been raised to the heavenlies through their union with Christ which gave them new life (cf. 2.12-13). Their union with Christ and resultant new life is made the basis for an appeal to new thinking in v. 2 ("set your mind on things that are above") and lies behind the appeal to put to death the earthly members in v. 5. The inferential use of the conjunction οὖν after the command νεκρώσατε in v. 5 makes this link explicit. In vv. 4-5 the writer highlights the eschatological paradox of believers, i.e., they have been raised to the heavenlies through new life in Christ, and yet they currently live on the earth. Since Christ, the source of the believers' life will someday appear (the parousia) and enable believers to dwell with him in heavenly glory (v. 4), therefore (οὖν) believers should put to death their present earthly members (v. 5a) which are indicated by the vices (v. 5b). The new life/old life motif is again made the basis for the second vice list in vv. 7-10, where the writer admonishes the believers to avoid the old sphere of existence represented by vices which harm social relationships. Clearly, the flow of argument in Col 3.1-12 refutes Wibbing's proposal that the vice/virtue lists are given to provide general signs or evidences of the new life in Christ, for the writer begins with the assertion that they have new life in Christ.

⁶² Contra Schweizer, who does not see distinguishing between believers and unbelievers as the purpose of any of the NT vice lists ("Traditional Ethical Patterns," 196). Schweizer's stimulating proposal cannot account for 1 Cor 6.11, where Paul clearly consigns the vices to the Corinthians' former, pre-conversion days. In this passage, the vices identify the unrighteous, i.e., those outside the kingdom of God (v. 9).

⁶³ Moule argues that the doctrinal foundation for the morality found in 3.1-17 (including the vice/virtue lists) is the gospel, but more specifically, the believer's union with Christ: "it is this sharing in the death and life of Christ that, at one and the same time, frees Christians from the tyranny of mere ritual rules (2:20-23) and yet also enables them to be bound so firmly to Christ that they do not succumb to the moral evils of laxity and indiscipline against which those ritual rules were supposed to protect them" ("The New Life," 484; cf. also Hartman, "Code and Context," 238-39).

3. Warning against Secularisation

Schweizer argues that the Pauline and post-Pauline vice lists do not primarily serve to distinguish or clarify Christian behaviour, but rather to warn the Christian community of the dangers of secularisation. He says,

The function of the traditional list of vices has totally changed with Paul; no longer does it distinguish the perfect church from the imperfect world; on the contrary, it serves to remind the church of the fact that vices, which it thinks to have left behind for ever, easily creep back.⁶⁴

Schweizer is surely correct to say that the vice lists remind churches that vices can creep back into the lives of Christians (cf. esp. Rom 13.13; 1 Cor 5.10-11; 2 Cor 12.20; Gal 5.19-21; Eph 5.3-5). He has overstated his case, however, for at least some of the Pauline and deutero-Pauline vice lists are clearly used to distinguish Christians from non-Christians (cf. Rom 1.29-31;⁶⁵ 1 Cor 6.9-10; 1 Tim 1.9-10; 6.4-5; 2 Tim 3.2-5). We agree with Schweizer that the Colossian vice list does reflect the danger of the return to pre-Christian behaviour (3.7-8), though we will argue that the larger purpose is the clarification of Christian morality.

4. Description of the Christologically Governed Lifestyle

O'Brien offers a helpful (albeit prosaic) comment regarding the purpose of the Colossian vice/virtue lists. He says they are not intended to provide a new moral code or to stimulate self-attained righteousness, rather "they describe the walk of the Christian."⁶⁶ We can elaborate on this comment by saying the Colossian lists clarify—they flesh out and describe the Christologically governed lifestyle commanded, but not specifically described in 2.6.⁶⁷ We have seen that in chs. 1-2 the writer enjoins the Colossians to a new lifestyle which comes from Christ (1.20-23) and befits Christ (1.10; 2.6), but very few specifics are given to delineate this lifestyle.

⁶⁴ "Traditional Ethical Patterns," 196.

⁶⁵ While Rom 2.1 indicates all humans are guilty of vices, and thus 1.29-31 is not distinguishing Christians in Rome from their non-Christian neighbors, the point here is that all humans stand in need of divine righteousness (3.9, 10, 19-22) for the vice filled lifestyle which renders one guilty before God is implicitly contrasted with a truly righteous lifestyle (which applies to no mortal humans, 3.19) which would leave one free of divine condemnation.

⁶⁶ *Colossians*, 180. Though Lohse denies that the vices cited are situationally generated, and believes they reflect traditional Iranian anthropology (unlike O'Brien), he agrees that they are given "to spell out, in the exhortations, the type of life demanded of the Christian" (*Colossians*, 137).

⁶⁷ Cf. Hartman, "Code and Context," 239.

Because Christ has given them new life and they are risen with him, they are to set their minds on things above, not on things on the earth (3.1-2). This is highly abstract language, however. The shape of the new life obtained through union with Christ is not given much specific content in chs. 1-2. Thus the vice/virtue lists in ch. 3 serve to exemplify and make concrete the new existence they have received and been called to live out. The vice/virtue lists serve, in other words, to clarify the new Christological lifestyle of the believer.

The utilisation of the indicative/imperative construct in 3.1-5 also supports the view that the vice/virtue lists describe the Christologically governed lifestyle. In 3.1, 3-4 the writer emphasises the indicative of the believers' union with Christ. This is made the basis for the imperative in 3.5. In other words, beginning with the vices listed in 3.5, the writer is elaborating on the implications (the imperatives) of the believers' union with Christ. Thus he is describing the Christologically governed lifestyle.⁶⁸

B. Basis for Colossian Vice/Virtue Lists

Before we examine the content (the shape) of paraenesis in 3.5-17, we want to discuss its basis. Since the vice/virtue lists as well as the household codes are largely traditional material, and as such would presumably need only to be recited, not justified to its readers, whatever basis the writer gives for the vice/virtue lists is quite significant in our pursuit of the foundation for paraenesis in Colossians.

1. Eschatological/Soteriological Basis

Our first observation is that the Colossian vice/virtue lists describe the Christologically governed lifestyle in the context of the eschatological new life believers have by virtue of their death and union with Christ. This is particularly evident in vv. 5, 9-10. In spite of the repeated claims that Colossians presents an almost entirely realised eschatology, and that the apocalyptic gospel of the genuine Paul has been amended or even distorted, eschatology now being subsumed under

⁶⁸ We will see that 3.17 also supports the thesis that the purpose of the vice/virtue lists is to describe the Christologically governed lifestyle, for 3.17 summarises the entire section (3.5-16) which contains numerous specific behavioural guidelines, and introduces the household code in 3.18-4.1 by appealing to Christ as the basis for all behaviour.

ecclesiology,⁶⁹ futuristic eschatology precedes, and in fact provides the immediate impetus for the "put to death" injunction in 3.5.⁷⁰ Believers are said to have been given new eschatological life through union with Christ, but these eschatological blessings are not entirely realised. Thus when Christ, the one through whom believers receive life, appears at the parousia, believers will appear with him and experience the fulness of their eschatological blessings,⁷¹ indicated by their appearance with Christ "in glory" (v. 4b).⁷²

This concept of the believers' partially realised eschatological blessings obtained through union with Christ is in view in v. 5 as the writer transitions to the vice lists. While believers have been raised with Christ to heavenly new life (3.1), they do not yet permanently inhabit the heavenlies, and thus must learn to set their minds on the things above, not things on the earth (3.2). The well developed "already/not yet" construct utilised throughout 3.1-5 highlights the interplay of indicative/imperative common throughout the Pauline literature.⁷³ We can now make sense of the opening imperatival salvo in v. 5 "put to death therefore what is earthly in you." The writer understood the believer to possess new life through union with Christ, but the indicative of new life demands an imperatival response in view of the already/not yet eschatological condition.⁷⁴ The believer is raised and united with Christ, but still has earthly elements in residence.

The inferential conjunction οὖν also provides a strong link between the indicative of the believers' death and union with Christ in 2.12-13; 3.1-4 and the imperatival vice/virtue lists which follow.⁷⁵ As Nauck observes, οὖν is frequently used to connect a theological discussion (indicative) with paraenetical admonitions

⁶⁹ Beker, *Heirs of Paul*, 89-90; Sanders, *Ethics*, 69-70, 80. Beker believes the author of Colossians adapts and amends Pauline eschatology; Sanders argues that the writer of Colossians distorts it.

⁷⁰ While most scholars acknowledge at least traces of futuristic eschatology in 3.4, many insist that futuristic eschatology in Colossians is marginalised in the face of triumphalism. Wessels ("Eschatology of Colossians") demonstrates the fallacy of this argument, showing that while in the light of the opponents teachings the writer chose to de-emphasise futuristic eschatology and emphasise the believer's present heavenly blessings, the futuristic elements are real and must not be denied (cp. the mildly futuristic eschatology of Philipppians).

⁷¹ Schweizer correctly notes "the fact that the community will at some point live in glory is what distinguishes their future consummation from the present" (*Colossians*, 177).

⁷² Martin argues that based on other uses of δόξα (1 Cor 15.12ff.; Phil 3.20-21; 2 Cor 5.1ff.) the resurrection of the body is in view here.

⁷³ See especially Dennison, "Indicative and Imperative" 55-78; Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, 212-27; Parsons, "Indicative and Imperative in Paul's Writings," 99-127; Schnackenburg, *Moral Teaching*, 268-77.

⁷⁴ O'Brien correctly comments on the imperatival phrase νεκρώσατε οὖν τὰ μέλη τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς in v. 5 "Paul's imperative is based upon the previous indicatives which spell out what God has done in his Son the Lord Jesus Christ" (*Colossians*, 176).

⁷⁵ O'Brien, *Colossians*, 176; Lohmeyer, *Kolossier*, 135; Tachau, "Einst" und "Jetzt," 123.

which follow (imperative). It introduces admonitions which bring out the consequences of the theological principles previously discussed.⁷⁶

There is one other instance in which soteriology is made the basis for the Colossian vice/virtue lists. In vv. 9-10 we find the believers' death and union with Christ to be the basis for abstaining from sins, specifically, the sin of falsehood. We read "do not lie to one another, seeing that [based on the fact that] you have put off the old person with its practices." While the participial phrases ἀπεκδυσάμενοι τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον and ἐνδυσάμενοι τὸν νέον could be imperatival,⁷⁷ calling the believer to give up the old life and live out the new, this is not likely, in view of the fact that throughout 3.1-15, soteriology is made the basis for paraenesis (vv. 1, 2-3, 5, 7-8, 12, 13, 15) and in the light of the grammar and logic of the passage.⁷⁸ Rather, in vv. 9-10 believers are called to avoid falsehood based on the fact that they have put off the old nature and put on the new.

2. Christological Basis

In addition to an eschatological/soteriological basis (the believers' union with Christ) for the Colossian vice/virtue paraenesis, there is also a strong Christological basis. This observation is contested by Meeks, who states that normally when vices or virtues are cited in the NT "there is no explicit reference in our texts to a Christological connection. Rather, the abominations or the desired traits stand on their own, as self-evident marks of the wrong or right way to live."⁷⁹ While Meeks is correct that in the vice texts themselves there is generally no explicit Christological reference, this ignores the critical fact that repeatedly vice lists are given in a clearly Christological context and given a decidedly Christological basis.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ "Das οὖν verbindet häufig eine systematisch-theologische Erörterung mit einer sich daran anschließenden parännetischen Ermahnung, in der die Konsequenzen aus den theologischen Erwägungen aufgezeigt werden" ("Das οὖν paränneticum," 134). Nauck draws from E. Burton (*Galatians*, 269). For examples of οὖν being used inferentially to transition from indicative to imperative, cf. Rom 12.1; Gal 5.1; Eph 4.1; 1 Pet 4.1; cp. Rom 8.12; 13.12; 1 Cor 6.15.

⁷⁷ Lohse, *Colossians*, 136; 141; Schnackenburg, *Moral Teaching*, 271 n. 7.

⁷⁸ Harris (*Colossians*, 150-51) gives four reasons for taking these two participles to be causal rather than imperatival: (1) An indicative meaning of ἐνδυσάμενοι in v. 10 provides the most natural basis for the imperatival clause ἐνδύσασθε οὖν ("put on therefore") in v. 12; (2) if the two aorist participles in vv. 9-10 derive their imperatival force from the verb ψεύδεσθε, we would expect ψεύδεσθε to also be in the aorist, instead of the present tense; (3) if they were imperatival, we would expect some kind of adversative between the prohibition "do not lie" and the command "put off"; (4) the use of an imperative ("put on") is incongruous in a section dealing with vices to be put off.

⁷⁹ *Origins of Christian Morality*, 67.

⁸⁰ For example, the paschal sacrifice of Christ in 1 Cor 5.7 is made the basis for a list of vices meriting excommunication (vv. 10-11). The vices in 1 Cor 6.9-10 are set in opposition to the believers' present condition in which they have been sanctified and justified in the name of Christ (v. 11). After

In the vice/virtue list portion of the Colossian epistle, there are three instances in which vices and virtues are grounded in Christology. (1) In 3.11, at the end of the vice section and immediately preceding the virtue list, the writer states that Christ "is all and in all" (ἀλλὰ [τὰ] πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν Χριστός). The use of καὶ here suggests that two different predications are being made here⁸¹ (as opposed to the singular predication "Christ is all in all", cf. 1 Cor 15.28; Eph 1.23). The first assertion "Christ is all"⁸² is a teleological summary statement in the context of moral behaviour. It probably draws from the hymn which affirms that Christ is supreme over all creation and is the goal of all creation (1.16-17).⁸³ Hence the writer reminds the readers in a discussion of vices and virtues that Christ is of supreme importance, all creation (including his spiritual creation the church) was created by him and exists for him. Believers should avoid vices and cultivate virtue because "Christ is all."

(2) A second text in the vice/virtue section which grounds paraenesis in Christology is 3.17, where the readers are urged to do everything (in word or deed) in the name of the Lord Jesus (πάν ὃ τι ἐὰν ποιῆτε ἐν λόγῳ ἢ ἐν ἔργῳ, πάντα ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου Ἰησοῦ). As with 3.11, this verse stands in a pivotal paraenetical position, for it lies at the end of the vice/virtue section, immediately preceding the household codes.⁸⁴ Its position in the epistle as well as the global nature of the exhortation ("whatever you do...do everything") also suggests that this verse serves to summarise the preceding paraenetical concepts,⁸⁵ and is thus quite significant in the examination of the ground of paraenesis in the vice/virtue section. The author did not attempt to construct a casuistic ethic or develop an exhaustive list of vices and virtues in the preceding verses. Instead, he gives a comprehensive, universal moral principle in 3.17⁸⁶ which is Christologically grounded.

The opening verbal clause "and whatever you do" (καὶ πάν ὃ τι ἐὰν ποιῆτε) is syntactically independent, and probably serves to give rhetorical

citing lists of vices and virtues in Gal 5.19-23, Paul immediately (v. 24) appeals to the fact that those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh (and thus need not carry out the vices, the fruits of the flesh). In Eph 4 the author sets the vice lists (vv. 19, 31) in opposition to the manner in which the readers had learned Christ (v. 20) and the forgiveness of God in Christ (v. 32). In Eph 5.2-5 those who practise vices are identified as those who have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ (v. 5).

⁸¹ Harris, *Colossians*, 154-55; Moule, *Colossians*, 121-22.

⁸² The second assertion "Christ is in all" relates to the preceding statements regarding unity and equality for all believers regardless of ethnic or social differences. There is unity and equality for all believers because he is in all believers (i.e., they have been united with him).

⁸³ So Wright (*Colossians*, 140); cf. also Lightfoot (*Colossians*, 219).

⁸⁴ Schweizer, *Colossians*, 211.

⁸⁵ So Bujard, *Kolossier*, 98; Ernst, *Kolossier*, 230; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 210.

⁸⁶ Patzia comments on v. 17 "rather than a directory of rules, Paul leaves an important principle with his readers" (*Colossians*, 82); cf. also Bruce, *Colossians*, 160; Gnllka, *Kolossier*, 202.

emphasis.⁸⁷ The emphasis here is on the universal scope of the command, and highlights the fact that "the whole of life is placed under the lordship of Christ."⁸⁸ The next phrase "in word or deed" (ἐν λόγῳ ἢ ἐν ἔργῳ) clarifies the preceding adjective πᾶν, and indicates that the command here is not restricted to worship (v. 16) or liturgical practice,⁸⁹ but applies to all a believer says and does. The next clause (πάντα ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου Ἰησοῦ) is the main clause of the verse, and has an implied imperative verb (ποιεῖτε). This clause summarises Christian moral behaviour in five succinct words (cp. 1 Cor 10.31), and reminds the Colossians that "immer steht der Christ in der Ganzheit seiner Existenz vor seinem Herrn."⁹⁰

The phrase "the name of the Lord Jesus" is a common and pregnant NT phrase.⁹¹ It is primarily found in Acts and in the Johannine literature where "one senses that the name represents the proclaimed ([Acts] 8.12) Lord, who is active in the church—through his name alone there is salvation and healing (4.12; cf. 19.13) through it forgiveness of sins is possible."⁹² Christians were baptised "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2.28; 10.48) or "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19.5; cp. 1 Cor 1.13, 15; 6.11). Thus the early Christians were willing to suffer for the sake of "the name" (Acts 5.41; cp. John 15.21). That "the name of the Lord Jesus" is not restricted to the earthly Jesus⁹³ is evidenced by Phil 2.9-11 and Heb 1.4, which speak of the honorific name being bestowed upon the exalted Christ.

While "the name" can denote the authority of⁹⁴ the risen Christ for healing (Acts 3.6; 4.7, 10) exorcism (Acts 16.18), or exhortation (2 Thess 3.6; Jas 5.10), it also indicates the authority of the risen Christ over the entire life of the believer. Hence Paul declares that every knee will bow at the name of Jesus and confess that he

⁸⁷ O'Brien, *Colossians*, 211; cf. also Harris, *Colossians*, 170. Lohse suggests the phrase πᾶν ὁ τι ἐάν is a Semitism (*Colossians*, 152).

⁸⁸ Ernst comments on v. 17 "Alles was ihr tut, d. h. euer gesamtes Leben, steht nun unter der Herrschaft Christi" (*Kolossier*, 230).

⁸⁹ Lohse, *Colossians*, 153; contra Bousset, who restricts word and deed to worship (*Kyrios Christos*, 132), and Schlier, who argues that ἐν λόγῳ refers to cultic or liturgical worship, and ἐν ἔργῳ refers to the Lord's Supper (*Epheser*, 249).

⁹⁰ Gnlika, *Kolossebrief*, 202.

⁹¹ Cf. H. Bietenhard, "ὄνομα," *TDNT* 5.270-81; R. G. Bratcher, "'The Name' in Prepositional Phrases in the NT," *BT* 14 (1963) 72-80; H. von Campenhausen, "Taufen auf den Namen Jesu?" *VC* 25 (1971) 1-16; L. Hartman, "Into the Name of Jesus: A Suggestion Concerning the Earliest Meaning of the Phrase," *NTS* 20 (1973-74) 432-40; L. Hartman, "ὄνομα," *EDNT* 2.519-22; W. Heitmüller, *In Namen Jesu* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1903).

⁹² Hartman, *EDNT* 2.520.

⁹³ Gnlika concludes that the name of Jesus "bezieht sich nicht auf das Vorbild des irdischen Jesus, sondern den erhöhten Kyrios" (*Kolossebrief*, 202); Merk suggests that it may refer to both the historical Jesus, as well as the exalted Jesus who is Lord over the church (*Handeln aus Glauben*, 213-14).

⁹⁴ Hence Wright (*Colossians*, 145) and Harris (*Colossians*, 171) suggest that "in the name of the Lord Jesus" in Col 3.17 could mean "as representatives of." Other uses of this phrase and the context suggest, however, that "under the lordship of" is a better interpretation of this phrase.

is Lord (Phil 2.10-11; cp. 1 Cor 1.2). This sense of being entirely under the lordship of Christ is the meaning of "do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus" in Col 3.17. Everything the believer says and does should reflect the fact that Jesus is Lord.⁹⁵ The believer lives for Christ, under his authority. Bietenhard comments on v. 17 "the whole life of the Christian stands under the name of Jesus."⁹⁶

As with 3.11, 3.17 may be drawn from the Colossian hymn. While it is obviously not a direct citation of the hymn, it is very closely linked thematically, and appears to be a paraenetical application of the hymn to the Colossian believers. In 1.16b we discovered the hymn contains a teleological statement regarding creation: all of creation was created for Christ (εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται). This is given in the context of Christ's absolute supremacy over all of creation (1.16—he created everything, visible and invisible; 1.17b—he sustains creation; 1.17a he is superior, for he existed before all creation). In 3.17 we find strikingly similar Christological affirmations. As with the hymn, the supremacy (lordship) of Christ is affirmed ("do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus") in the context of teleology. In 1.16 all of creation is said to be created for Christ, whereas in 3.17 this is applied only to human believers who are called to do everything in the name of Christ. In both passages, Christ's lordship is ultimately the basis for human existence and behaviour.

(3) A final instance in which Christology grounds moral vices/virtues is found in 3.13, immediately after the virtue list. We must acknowledge, however, that this verse grounds vice/virtue teaching on both Christology and soteriology, for the two are inextricably linked in this text which affirms Christ's forgiveness of believers.

After citing a list of virtues which foster healthy interpersonal relationships, the writer admonishes the Colossians to be forbearing and forgiving of one another (ἀνεχόμενοι ἀλλήλων καὶ χαριζόμενοι ἑαυτοῖς). The ethical basis for forbearing and forgiving is then given:⁹⁷ "as the Lord (κύριος) has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." While some take κύριος here to refer to God,⁹⁸ the overwhelming majority of commentators understand it as a reference to Christ.⁹⁹ There are good

⁹⁵ Merk, *Handeln aus Glauben*, 214.

⁹⁶ TDNT 5.274. Lohse notes that the post apostolic church continued to cultivate this attitude, for he quotes from Chrysostom who said "If you eat, if you drink, if you marry, if you travel, do all in the name of God, that is, calling Him to aid you" (*Colossians*, 153 n. 166).

⁹⁷ The adverb καθὼς is used as a correlative to introduce the final words of the sentence "as the Lord has forgiven you, so also you must forgive" and clearly indicates that the writer is giving the reason or basis for forbearing and forgiving one another. Blass and Debrunner note "ὡς and especially καθὼς used to introduce a sentence may have something of the meaning 'because'" (*Grammar*, §453) (Matt 6.12; John 17.2; 19.23). Cf. also Robertson, *Grammar*, 963-64.

⁹⁸ Ernst, *Kolösser*, 228; Merk, *Handeln aus Glauben*, 211.

⁹⁹ So Conzelmann, *Kolösser*, 198; Cruz, *Christological Motives*, 415-20; Gnlika, *Kolösser*, 196; Martin, *Colossians*, 112; Moule, *Colossians*, 123; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 202-203; Lightfoot,

arguments for the Christological interpretation of 3.13. First of all, as we saw in 1.10, the articular use of κύριος in the NT generally refers to Christ.¹⁰⁰ Secondly, the type of construction found here in which καθώς introduces a correlative clause which gives the basis for an exhortation to engage in unrestricted loving behaviour, normally has a Christological connotation.¹⁰¹ While the reference to Christ's forgiveness of believers is unusual in the NT epistles, it is not without logical precedent since the NT writers repeatedly affirm that God works through Christ. Cruz notes, for example, that while the NT writers declare that God forgives sin (Matt 6.15; 1 John 1.9), they also affirm that God forgives through Christ (Acts 5.31; 13.38; Eph 1.7; cp. Mark 2.5-10) in his name (Luke 24.47; Acts 10.43) for his sake (1 John 2.12) and on his commission (John 20.23).¹⁰² The author of Colossians also affirms the fact that God forgives sins (2.13), and that he forgives through Christ (1.14).

This concept of Christ forgiving sins is particularly understandable in the context of Col 3 if we do not restrict forgiveness to Christ's death on the cross, but to forgiveness which takes place when believers are united with the risen Christ through baptism (Acts 2.38; 22.16; cf. 1 Cor 6.11; Col 2.12-13).¹⁰³ Based then, on Christ's model of forgiveness, believers are to forgive each other. Dahl calls this type of exhortation conformity teaching, in which the total life of Christ, not just his earthly example, provides a paradigm for believers to follow (Rom 15.7; Eph 5.2, 25, 29).¹⁰⁴

As we noted earlier, while the Colossians were called to live a life worthy of Christ in chs. 1-2, the Christologically governed lifestyle is not fleshed out until ch. 3. The entire vice/virtue section, including this admonition to forgive others based on the forgiveness of Christ, gives further clarification to the shape of Christian morality. While he unfortunately restricts imitation of Christ to the earthly life of Christ, John Webster's comments on the believers' imitation of the example of Christ is helpful in this discussion. He notes that the story of Christ "provides not simply the initial impetus of Christian morality but also a perceptible form or contour for its

Colossians, 221; Lohse, *Colossians*, 148; Pokorný, *Colossians*, 171; Wright, *Colossians*, 142. There is a variant reading here, with some manuscripts reading Κύριος, and some Χριστός, but the former reading has the weight of p⁴⁶ and some of the better Alexandrian and Western manuscripts (cf. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 625). The latter reading (Χριστός) may have arisen due to the influence of Eph 4.32.

¹⁰⁰ So Harris (*Colossians*, 31) and Cruz (*Christological Motives*, 416-17).

¹⁰¹ So Rom 15.7; Eph 5.2, 25, 29. Gnllka labels this construction "καθώς-Wendung-allerdings" (*Kollosser*, 196).

¹⁰² *Christological Motives*, 417-18.

¹⁰³ *Christological Motives*, 418.

¹⁰⁴ Dahl, *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church*, 34-35; Martin, *Colossians*, 112.

growth."¹⁰⁵ In Col 3.13 we have a Christological contour for Christian morality, for the soteriological activity of the risen Christ who forgave the Colossians is to provide a model for their own social relationships.

C. Examination of 3.5-6: The First Vice List

The writer begins this section by calling the Colossians to put to death their earthly members (*νεκρώσατε οὖν τὰ μέλη τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς*). While they had died with Christ (the indicative, 2.12; 3.3), they were to live this out (the imperative, 3.2, 5). The language here is very similar to that found in Rom 6, where believers are said to have been made dead to sin through death and union with Christ (the indicative, vv. 3-11), and yet the believers are called to prohibit sin from reigning in their mortal bodies (the imperative, vv. 12-13). The object of death in Col 3.5 is earthly members.¹⁰⁶ This unusual command to put to death the members on the earth (*τὰ μέλη τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς*) has generated various interpretations. Lohse takes this to be a traditional expression originally (though probably not consciously) drawn from Iranian religion, in which "man's members are his good or bad deeds, out of which his heavenly self is constituted and thus his other-worldly fate is decided." Since personal identity and personal behaviour are inextricably connected, only through death of the old self can a new life be opened.¹⁰⁷ Instead of resorting to a remote Iranian influence to explain the linking of sin and earthly members, we will see that the Pauline writings themselves provide a more natural explanation.

Other commentators suggest that "earthly members" refers metaphorically to the old way of life,¹⁰⁸ earthly nature,¹⁰⁹ or "old man."¹¹⁰ The greatest problem with these metaphorical interpretations of *τὰ μέλη τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς* is that *μέλος* is

¹⁰⁵ "Christology, Imitability, and Ethics," *SJT* 39 (1986) 311. On a closely related theme, that of conformity to Christ versus imitation of Christ (*imitatio* versus *conformitas*, to use Luther's terminology), cf. E. J. Tinsley, "Some Principles for Reconstructing a Doctrine of the Imitation of Christ," *SJT* 25 (1972) 45-57.

¹⁰⁶ Harris notes that grammatically, *τὰ μέλη* could have a vocative use here, which would then be translated "members, put to death the earthly things" (*Colossians*, 145). Masson interprets this phrase in this manner (*Colossiens*, 142). The metaphorical use of *μέλος* to indicate "body of Christ," however, is always indicated directly by an accompanying clarifying phrase (Rom 12.5 "members one of another"; Eph 5.30 "members of his body"; 1 Cor 6.15 "members of Christ") or by the immediate context (1 Cor 12.26-27 "if one member suffers, all suffer together...you are the body of Christ and individually members of it").

¹⁰⁷ *Colossians*, 137.

¹⁰⁸ Caird, *Letters from Prison*, 205;

¹⁰⁹ NIV, "whatever belongs to your earthly nature"; RSV, "what is earthly in you"; Arndt and Gingrich, s.v. "μέλος," "whatever in your nature belongs to the earth."

¹¹⁰ Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 211.

never used this way in the NT. When it is used metaphorically, it refers to members of the spiritual community, the body of Christ, not to human nature. Caird, however, suggests that Col 3.5 refers to the extermination of the old way of life. He argues that Rom 6.11 shows that "put to death" in Col 3.5 is essentially a change of mind ("consider yourselves dead to sin") involving not mortification of the physical flesh, but "the ignoble habits to which it has been inured." Caird is surely correct to appeal to Rom 6 to explain this passage, and putting to death is best explained as a change in attitude, but he fails to note that the context of Rom 6.11 is the physical body (σῶμα, v. 12) and physical body parts (μέλος, v.13). Thus he begs the question of the relationship between the physical body and moral vices.¹¹¹

If instead of interpreting τὰ μέλη τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς metaphorically, we give it the literal interpretation "body parts," then the author's argument in this passage would seem to be contradictory, for he is writing to combat opponents who advocated bodily asceticism, based at least in part on the widespread ancient deprecation of the body and the tangible world in favour of the immaterial world. The most natural interpretation of τὰ μέλη τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς is, however, earthly (as opposed to heavenly, v. 2) body parts. In Classical Greek, "limbs" or "body parts" are the most common meanings of μέλος.¹¹² This anatomical usage is well attested in secular Koine writings as well as in the NT.¹¹³

The most important interpretive factor, however, is Paul's argumentation in Rom 6, a passage which exhibits numerous marked parallels with Col 3.1-5.¹¹⁴ The most significant parallel is found in Rom 6.12-13, where in a very similar

¹¹¹ Pokorný makes a similar mistake, for he says that "putting to death what is earthly" in 3.5, is identical to "putting off the body of flesh" in 2.11 (*Colossians*, 162). In 2.11, however, metaphorical language is clearly being used to describe the forgiveness of sins, as Pokorný elsewhere recognises (*Colossians*, 125).

¹¹² *Il.* 7.131; Pindar *Nem.* 1.47; Aeschylus *Pers.* 991; *Eu.* 265; Herodotus 1.119; Plato *Lg.* 795e.

¹¹³ *P. Tebt.* 2.331.11; *P. Lips.* 1.37.21; Rom 6.13, 19; 7.5; 12.4; 1 Cor 12.12, 14, 18-20; Jas 3.5, 6. Contra Käsemann, who in a discussion of Rom 6.13 contends "μέλη does not refer primarily to the parts of the body," but as in 1 Cor 12.12ff. refers to human capabilities (*Romans*, 169). On the contrary, one's capabilities (1 Cor 12.15-20: smelling, hearing, sight, tactile sensation, walking) are made possible by the μέλη (vv. 12, 14, 18-20) i.e., the literal body parts (nose, ears, eyes, hands, feet).

¹¹⁴ Note the following parallels between Rom 6.4-19 and Col 2.11-3.5: both intricately weave the indicative/imperative construction throughout the passage; in both the stated indicative is the believer's dying (Rom 6.4, 8, 9; Col 2.12) and rising or living (Rom 6.4, 11, 13; Col 2.12, 13) with Christ; both base ethical injunctions on the fact that through Christ the power of sin has been broken (Rom 6.7, 11, 18; Col 2.13-14, 16-17); both state or imply that based on the death and resurrection of Christ, the believer has been freed from the law (Rom 6.14; Col 2.16-17); in both union with Christ is linked to baptism (Rom 6.3-4; Col 2.12); in both the believer is called to new theocentric or heavenly behaviour based on the fact that he or she has died to sin (Rom 6.7, 10, 11; Col 3.2-3, 5); in both, the believer is warned not to use the body or physical body members (μέλη) to sin (Rom 6.12-13; Col 3.5). Cf. also Bornkamm, who argues that Col 3 accurately reflects and even interprets Rom 6 ("Baptism and New Life," 71, 77, 80-81, 84).

indicative/imperative discussion of the ethical implications of the believers' death and resurrection with Christ, the readers are cautioned not to use their bodies or their members (body parts) as instruments of sin. This is precisely the meaning of τὰ μέλη in 3.5, namely, physical body parts which are used for earthly (i.e. "fleshly," "sinful") purposes.¹¹⁵ Harris correctly summarises νεκρώσατε οὖν τὰ μέλη τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς in Col 3.5 "Paul is not advocating ascetic suppression nor rejection of bodily desires and functions; he is rather calling for termination of the immoral and self-centered use of physical limbs or organs."¹¹⁶ The metaphorical picture of the physical (fleshly) body parts being used for fleshly (the realm of active rebellion against God) purposes is prefigured in 2.11, where the phrase "body of flesh" links the physical body with ethical flesh ("a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ").¹¹⁷

The fleshly use of the believers' bodily members is elucidated with the two vice lists which follow. Schweizer believes the first list (v. 5) cites basic heathen vices the Colossians had already put behind them (v. 7), whereas the second list cites vices they were encountering in the present, and needed to "now set aside."¹¹⁸ Tachau, on the other hand, argues that the double use of the phrase "καὶ ὑμεῖς" with reference to both lists, as well as use of the imperative verb νεκρώσατε at the beginning of both lists make it absolutely clear (verdeutlichen unmißverständlich) that both sets of vices are (presently) ascribed to the Colossians.¹¹⁹ Tachau's second argument (the use of the strong verb νεκρώσατε) is more compelling than the first argument (the double use of "and you"), for the manner in which Schweizer loosens the tension of the imperative force of the first vice list contradicts the pattern of indicative/imperative constructions in the Pauline literature, where the indicative is made the basis for real imperatives.

The first set of five vices (πορνεία, ἀκαθαρσία, πάθος, ἐπιθυμία κακή, and πλεονεξία) are traditional vices, most of which have sexual connotations.¹²⁰ The first

¹¹⁵ Bruce comments on Col 3.5 "what he really has in mind is the practices and attitudes to which his readers' bodily activity and strength has been devoted" (*Colossians*, 141); also Harris, *Colossians*, 146; Martin, *Colossians*, 103; Moule, *Colossians*, 115; Yates, "The Christian Way of Life," 244; cf. also Schnackenburg, *Moral Teaching*, 272.

¹¹⁶ *Colossians*, 146.

¹¹⁷ So Robinson, *The Body*, 30-31. This is not to say, however, that the use of σώμα and μέλος in Rom 6 and Col 2-3 are synonymous (as is implied by Westcott [*Colossians*, 143] who translates Col 3.5 "kill then your earthly bodies!"). For an excellent discussion of the relationship between the physical body, body parts and ethical "flesh," cf. Horst, "μέλος," *TDNT* 4.561-64.

¹¹⁸ *Colossians*, 181.

¹¹⁹ "Einst" und "Jetzt," 124.

¹²⁰ For example, the Stoics had similar conservative views of sexuality, and taught that sexual relations should be limited to marriage. Musonius Rufus, for example, states "Men who are not wantons or immoral are bound to consider sexual intercourse justified only when it occurs in marriage and is indulged in for the purpose of begetting children...But of all sexual relations those involving adultery are most unlawful, and no more tolerable are those of men with men, because it is a monstrous

vice cited, πορνεία, along with the verbal form πορνεύω, are broad terms for sexual sin, including prostitution (1 Cor 6.13, 18), marriage within forbidden degrees of kinship (Acts 15.20, 29; 21.25; 1 Cor 5.1; and possibly Matt 5.32; 19.9¹²¹), and wanton sexual behaviour or fornication (Matt 15.19; 1 Cor 7.2; Gal 5.19; Eph 5.3; 1 Thess 4.3-5).¹²²

The next term, ἀκαθαρσία, refers to impurity or uncleanness, both ritual impurity¹²³ and general moral impurity,¹²⁴ though most often in the NT it refers to sexual impurity.¹²⁵ The next vice, πάθος is used only three times in the NT (Rom 1.26; Col 3.5; 1 Thess 4.5), and in each instance refers to inappropriate affections in a sexual context (passion). The next term ἐπιθυμία refers to strong desire, which is not intrinsically sinful¹²⁶ unless the object of desire is deemed inappropriate (a desire for that which is forbidden).¹²⁷ This observation helps to explain the prevalence of modifiers in the NT used to describe ἐπιθυμία, giving it a morally negative sense.¹²⁸

thing and contrary to nature. But furthermore, leaving out of consideration adultery, all intercourse with women which is without lawful character is shameful and is practiced from lack of self-restraint. So no one with any self-control would think of having relations with a courtesan or a free woman apart from marriage, no, nor even with his own maid-servant" (*Fragment 12*; also Seneca *Epistle* 94.25-26; cp. Aristotle, *Oec.* 3.2, where husbands are charged to be sexually faithful to their wives; cp. Cicero, *De Off.* 1.128, where the propriety of sexual relations in marriage is affirmed, but the discussion of the act along with the terms for the sexual organs is deemed indecent). In *Moralia*, "Advice to Bride and Groom," Plutarch admonishes husbands (47) and wives (46) to sexual fidelity, though his commendation of Persian kings who sent their wives out of the room before the music-girls and concubines are sent in, engaging in "licentiousness and debauchery" (16) reflects a stark double standard.

¹²¹ J. A. Fitzmyer, "The Matthean Divorce Texts and Some New Palestinian Evidence," *TS* 37 (1976) 197-226.

¹²² Bruce Malina ("Does Porneia Mean Fornication?," *NovT* 14 [1972] 10-17) argues that "porneia means unlawful sexual conduct or unlawful conduct in general. What makes a particular line of conduct unlawful is that it is prohibited by the Torah, written and/or oral. Pre-betrothal, pre-marital, non-commercial sexual intercourse between man and woman is nowhere considered a moral crime in the Torah" (17). Joseph Jensen however, counters Malina's arguments, and gives abundant evidence that "fornication" is one of the NT meanings of πορνεία, that the OT and Rabbinic Judaism did prohibit non-coercive, non-commercial sexual relations before marriage, and that NT sanctions against πορνεία are not reliant on Levitical law ("Does *Porneia* Mean Fornication? A Critique of Bruce Malina." (*NovT* 20 [1978] 161-84).

¹²³ Matt 23.27; cf. Num 19.13.

¹²⁴ Epictetus 4, 11; Prov 6.16; 1 Esdr 1.40; Rom 6.19.

¹²⁵ 2 Cor 12.21; Gal 5.19; Eph 4.19; 5.3; Rev 17.4. It is significant that several times ἀκαθαρσία is linked with or cited alongside πορνεία (Rom 1.24, 29; 2 Cor 12.21; Gal 5.19; Eph 5.3; Col 3.5; 1 Thess 4.5, 7; Rev 17.4).

¹²⁶ We find ἐπιθυμία used in an amoral or positive sense in the following texts: Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1.111; Luke 22.15; Phil 1.23; 1 Thess 2.17; cf. Rev 18.14. The verb ἐπιθυμέω is used in an amoral or positive sense in Matt 13.17; Luke 15.16; 16.21; 17.22. Hence Büchsel is inexact in stating that "ἐπιθυμία is always a danger against which man must be warned and must fight" ("ἐπιθυμία," *TDNT* 3.171).

¹²⁷ Plato, *Phaed.* 83b; Wis 4.12; Sir 23.5; 4 Macc 1.22; Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 4.93; Rom 7.7; Jas 1.14; 2 Pet 1.4; Jude 18.

¹²⁸ Thus in the NT ἐπιθυμία is used to describe fleshly lust (σάρξ—Gal 5.16; Eph 2.3; 1 Pet 2.11; σάρκιος—1 John 2.16); lusts of their own [evil] hearts (καρδιῶν αὐτῶν—Rom 1.24); their own [fleshly] lusts (ἴδιος—2 Tim 4.3); evil lust (κακῆ—Col 3.5); their own ungodly lusts (ἐαυτῶν ἀσεβειῶν—Jude 18); senseless and hurtful lusts (ἀνοήτους καὶ βλαβεράς—1 Tim 6.9); worldly lusts (κοσμικός—Tit 2.12); former ignorant lusts (πρότερον ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ—1 Pet 1.14); lusts of men

It is frequently used in the NT to refer to "inappropriate (lustful) sexual desire,"¹²⁹ which is its meaning in Col 3.5. Greed or covetousness,¹³⁰ which is idolatry (πλεονεξίαν, ἥτις ἐστὶν εἰδωλολατρία), is the final vice in this first list. Πλεονεξία is a vice castigated by several NT authors,¹³¹ and normally refers to greed or covetousness. Its semantical propinquity to the four previous sexual sins is evident. Both sexual sin and greed involve a dissatisfaction with what God has given, and often a lusting for what he has given to others. The Testament of Judah (19.1) also links greed and idolatry, asserting that the former leads to the latter.

After citing these five traditional vices, the writer reminds the Colossians that these sins will incur the wrath of God.¹³² God's judgment is often connected with the NT vice lists,¹³³ and in this instance is probably invoked to motivate the Colossians to lay aside or avoid these particular sins.

D. Examination of 3.7-11: The Second Vice List

The hortatory nature of this passage is given further development in v. 7, where again the writer utilises the "then...now" motif (cf. 1.21-22) to transition from the Colossians' pre-Christian past to the Christocentric present (cf. v. 11). The "then...now" motif is often used to help believers better understand God's saving work in their lives, and the present paraenetical implications of that divine work.¹³⁴ Tachau notes that the structure of the "then...now" motif in Col 3.7-8 is rather unusual, in that after giving the "then," the author conflates paraenesis and the soteriological "now," so that the indicative of the present has been replaced with an imperative of the present.¹³⁵

(ἀθροῦπος—1 Pet 4.2); lust of corruption (μασμός—2 Pet 2.10); and deceitful lusts (ἀπάτη—Eph 4.22).

¹²⁹ Rom 1.24; 1 Thess 4.5; Titus 3.3; 1 Pet 4.2, 3; 2 Pet 2.10, 18.

¹³⁰ Among the Stoics, covetousness was one of the chief social vices (cf. Dio Chrysostom *Oration* 4.83-93).

¹³¹ Mark 7.22; Luke 12.15; Rom 1.29; 2 Cor 9.5; Eph 4.19; 5.3; 1 Thess 2.5; 2 Pet 2.3, 14.

¹³² On the wrath of God, cf. G. Bornkamm, "The Revelation of God's Wrath: Romans 1-3," in *Early Christian Experience*, 47-70; C. H. Dodd, *Romans*, 18-30; Anthony T. Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb* (London: SPCK, 1957) 68-111, esp. 102-103; G. H. C. Macgregor "The Concept of the Wrath of God in the New Testament," *NTS* 7 (1960-61) 101-109; Calvin R. Schoonhoven, *The Wrath of Heaven* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966) 17-39.

¹³³ Rom 1.18ff.; 1 Thess 4.36; 1 Cor 5.13; Gal 5.21; cf. Eph 5.5-6.

¹³⁴ Cf. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 88; Tachau, "*Einst*" und "*Jetzt*," 128-29. Repeatedly in the NT, paraenesis is drawn directly (1 Cor 6.6-11, 15-18; Gal 4.8-9; Eph 5.8; Tit 3.3-8) or implied (Rom 7.5-6; Phlm 11-12) from the use of the "then...now" motif.

¹³⁵ Tachau suggests that this change was necessitated by the enthusiastic misunderstandings of the Colossian opponents, an assertion he does not attempt to prove ("*Einst*" und "*Jetzt*," 125). Tachau fails to note, however, that the "now" is clearly implied in v. 10, viz., that the Colossians "now" have a new nature.

Thus in vv. 7-8 the writer reminds the Colossians that they¹³⁶ used to walk or live in these sins, but are now to put away¹³⁷ five vices, all of which disrupt the social order and harm interpersonal relationships.¹³⁸ The first two vices cited, anger (ὀργή) and wrath (θυμός) are closely related in meaning,¹³⁹ and both refer to a hostile disposition toward another individual which can result in uncontrolled malevolent behaviour. The next vice, malice (κακία), is a broad term which ranges in meaning from morally neutral "trouble" or "misfortune" (Eccl 7.14; Sir 19.6; Matt 6.34) to general "moral vice" or "wickedness" (Wis 7.30; Acts 8.22; 1 Cor 5.8; 14.20) to "malice" or "ill-will," a specific kind of moral vice frequently described in NT vice lists (Rom 1.29; Eph 4.31; Titus 3.3; 1 Pet 2.1). The context suggests that the latter meaning of "malice" or "ill-will" is the meaning of κακία in Col 3.8.

The next vice, βλασφημία in the NT and LXX generally refers to "speech against God" directly, or indirectly (through verbal abuse of God's representatives).¹⁴⁰ It can also be used, as it is here in Col 3, of speech against other people, i.e., "slander" (cf. also Tit 3.2). The final vice, "foul talk" (αἰσχρολογία) is modified by the pleonastic phrase "from your mouth" probably to give emphasis to the verbal nature of this sin. Some argue that the final phrase ἐκ τοῦ στόματος ὑμῶν modifies the verb ἀποτίθημι and hence relates to all five vices.¹⁴¹ This is a difficult view to maintain in the light of the placement of ἐκ τοῦ στόματος ὑμῶν so far from the verb, and more significantly, because this reading limits all five vices to verbal sins, which is much more restrictive than the use of ὀργή, θυμός, and κακία elsewhere in

¹³⁶ Jervell argues that the phrase καὶ ὑμεῖς evinces the author's application of independent, non-Christian material (the vice lists) to the Colossians (*Imago Dei*, 235); also Lohse, *Colossians*, 140; Martin, *Colossians*, 104; Vögtle, *Kataloge*, 19.

¹³⁷ The verb ἀποτίθημι is used here of putting off or putting away the old pre-Christian vices. For other sartorial uses of ἀποτίθημι, cf. Acts 7.58; 2 Macc 8.35; Josephus, *Ant.* 8.266. For other metaphorical or ethical uses of ἀποτίθημι, cf. Rom 13.12; Eph 4.22, 25; Heb 12.1; Jas 1.21; 1 Pet 2.1. O'Brien comments on the injunction in Col 3.8 "they are to discard their old repulsive habits like a set of worn-out clothes" (*Colossians*, 186).

¹³⁸ The Stoics also placed great value on unity in the community, cf. Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 48.14-16.

¹³⁹ The Stoics did distinguish between these two vices, ὀργή referring to a settled disposition of hatred, and θυμός to the passion which results when ὀργή rules an individual (Diogenes Laertius, 7.114; Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 214). In citing these vices as sins to be put off, the writer categorically condemns anger and wrath (contra Eph 4.26). While Hellenistic moralists also condemned anger, they did not always posit categorical condemnations, for Plutarch claims that moderate anger is good (*Moralia*, 451e) and that reason should be one's guide, so that one avoids excessive anger (*Fragments* 148).

¹⁴⁰ Βλασφημία is used of speech: against God (Rev 13.6; 16.11, 21), against the name of God (Rom 2.24; 1 Tim 6.1; Rev 16.90) and against God's representatives (2 Kgs 6.22; 19.4; Isa 52.5; Ezek 35.12-13; 2 Macc 8.4).

¹⁴¹ Caird, *Letters from Prison*, 205.

the NT.¹⁴² Abbott offers another view¹⁴³ which is grammatically and lexically viable, viz., that ἐκ τοῦ στόματος ὑμῶν modifies both αἰσχρολογία as well as βλασφημία. Since these two vices are intrinsically verbal, and are the closest terms to the modifying phrase "from your mouth," this interpretation makes good sense.

The next command "do not lie to one another"¹⁴⁴ may also be traditional material, and is linked to the preceding two vices (slander and foul speech) in that all three of these activities are verbal. Lying is linked to the entire vice list by the words "to one another," which indicates that this sin, like the previous five vices, is one which disrupts relationships in the Christian community. The basis for this prohibition against mendacity is twofold: they have put off the old nature and have put on the new. Most modern exegetes believe this is a baptismal reference. Martin asserts "all commentators agree that there is a baptismal motif in these verbs, taken from the activity of disrobing and re-robing for the act of baptism when the new Christian entered the water."¹⁴⁵

Recently, however, some scholars have questioned the certainty of "put on...put off" language being a baptismal motif.¹⁴⁶ It is noted that the "put on...put off" metaphor was commonly used apart from baptism in secular moral discourse for putting on virtues and putting off vices.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, there is no unambiguous Christian baptismal reference using "put on...put off" language before the second century C.E. Thus Lincoln says "it is probably safer to say that this imagery is entirely appropriate to what we know of later baptismal rites." He goes on to suggest that the "put on...put off" statements in Col 3.9-10 and Eph 4.22-24 indicate a change of identity, and a new/old order of existence.¹⁴⁸

In response it can be said that while no first-century text patently links baptism with putting on and putting off, there are texts which come close. Rom 6.6, in a

¹⁴² O'Brien, *Colossians*, 187.

¹⁴³ *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1897) 283.

¹⁴⁴ On the grammatical possibility of the variant subjunctive reading μή ψεύδησθε, cf. S. Porter, "P.Oxy. 744.4 and Colossians 3.9," *Bib* 73 (1992) 565-667.

¹⁴⁵ *Colossians*, 106. Cf. also Halter, *Taufe und Ethos*, 215-17; Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 154-57.

¹⁴⁶ Gosnell, "Moral Teaching in Ephesians," 107-109; Hickling, "Baptism in the First-Century Churches," in *The Bible in Three Dimensions*, ed. by David Clines, Stephen Fowl, and Stanley Porter (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990) 249-67; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 284-85.

¹⁴⁷ Lincoln (*Ephesians*, 284) notes several sources: Lucian, *Dial. Mort.* 10.8, 9; *Ep. Arist.* 122; Philo *De Conf. Ling.* 31; Plutarch *Cor.* 19.4; cp. Job 29.14; Ps 132.9. The fact that this metaphor was widely used in ancient moral discourse weakens Lohse's suggestion (*Colossians*, 141) that the metaphor might have been drawn from the mystery religions and militates against Van Der Horst's argument ("Observations on a Pauline Expression," *NTS* 19 [1973] 181-87) that "put off the old man" was borrowed from a statement by the philosopher Pyrrho.

¹⁴⁸ *Ephesians*, 285.

baptismal context, speaks of the old self being crucified with Christ. Crucifixion and the putting off of life are not far apart in meaning. In Gal 3.27-28, those who have been baptised into Christ are said to have "put on Christ." The terms "put on Christ" may well have had its genesis in the practice of baptismal candidates taking off their garments before baptism, and being reclathed afterwards.¹⁴⁹ Until we have more concrete knowledge of first-century baptismal practice, however, we can only say that Col 3.9-10 may ground paraenesis in the baptismal confession, though we will now attempt to demonstrate that paraenesis in Col 3.5-17 is certainly grounded in the believers' union with Christ.

The "old person" "new person" is the object of putting on and off in Col 3.9-10. We have already argued that the participles used here (ἀπεκδυσάμενοι...ἐνδυσάμενοι) are best translated as causal and not imperatival, indicating that the reason for refraining from lying was that they had already put off the old person and put on the new. The "old person" "new person" metaphor denotes both individual and corporate existence.¹⁵⁰ Individually, the believer has a new existence which is progressively being renewed or transformed after the image of its creator. This existence is moral and spiritual, and is evidenced by its deeds (v. 9b). The writer seems to have Gen 1.27 in view here, where the first Adam was said to be created in God's image. All subsequent humans are said in the Pauline literature to be "in Adam," i.e., in the sphere of existence of sin and spiritual death as Adam's descendants (Rom 5.12-19; 1 Cor 15.22a). Conversely, the Pauline literature identifies Christ as the "new Adam," the one who has overturned death which resulted from the sin of the first Adam (Rom 5.14-17; 1 Cor 15.22b, 45-47).¹⁵¹ Paul asserts that believers are being transformed into the image of Christ¹⁵² which is similar to the concept in Col 3.9 of believers being renewed after the knowledge of the one creating Adam (Christ). The description here of Christ as the creator of believers is unusual, though not entirely surprising in view of the hymn's affirmation of Christ's role as creator of all things, visible and invisible (1.16). The statement that the believers' renewal occurs through knowledge (τὸν ἀνακαινούμενον εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν) is probably polemical, in view of the opponents' emphasis on knowledge obtained through heavenly revelations. In short, the language used in 3.9-10 as well as the

¹⁴⁹ Betz, *Galatians*, 188-89; Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 186; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 156; Moule, *Worship in the NT*, 52-53.

¹⁵⁰ Jervell also notes the breadth of this metaphor, arguing that the "new person" in Col 3.10 and Eph 4.24 signifies the entire life of the Christian (*Imago Dei*, 249).

¹⁵¹ Cf. M. Black, *From First Adam to Last* (London: A and C. Black, 1962) 92-119; "The Pauline Doctrine of the Second Adam," *SJT* 7 (1954) 170-79.

¹⁵² Rom 8.29; 1 Cor 15.49; 2 Cor 3.18; 4.4-7, 16; Phil 3.21.

statements in Gal 3.27-28 that all those baptised have put on Christ lead to the conclusion that "putting on the new person" refers to union with Christ the new Adam,¹⁵³ and putting off the old person refers to the cessation of the fleshly, preconversion mode of existence.¹⁵⁴

In addition to the believers' new individual existence expressed in "putting on the new person," a new corporate existence is also discussed in v. 11.¹⁵⁵ This is a new corporate entity in which all who have been united with Christ share a common life, which transcends ethnic, political, and social differences. Hence believers no longer find their identity in being Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free.¹⁵⁶ All believers have a common life and unity in Christ who "is all and in all." This strong affirmation of the believers' equality and unity in Christ along with a clear emphasis on interpersonal health and unity in the body of Christ through the condemnation of vices which enhance (v. 8), and virtues which vitiate (v. 12) Christian relationships is quite significant in terms of the shape of Christian paraenesis. It also lends support to Meeks' thesis that community building and community life were central to moral development in the early church.¹⁵⁷

E. Examination of 3.12-17: The Virtue List

After affirming the believers' new corporate existence, the writer returns to a sartorial metaphor, and urges the readers to put on five virtues. Though in v. 12 the writer shifts from vices to virtues, the concept of the believers' corporate entity and the importance of maintaining unity and harmony among believers which was affirmed in vv. 8-11 is maintained and developed. The five virtues given in v. 12, along with the corollary exhortations in vv. 13-16 address relational health and unity

¹⁵³ Bruce, *Colossians*, 147; R. Schnackenburg, "Der neue Mensch-mitte christlichen Weltverständnisses: Kol 3.9-11," In *Schriften zum Neuen Testament* (Munich: Kösel, 1971) 392-413.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Best, "Ephesians: Two Types of Existence," *Interp* 47 (1993) 41.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Robinson, *The Body*, 63-67.

¹⁵⁶ Several social gradations can be seen in this list, with Scythians at the bottom, being barbarians who were considered little better than wild animals (Josephus, *Ap.* 2.269). The iconoclastic Cynics spoke approvingly of the Scythians (Pseudo Anacharsis 1; 5; 9.18), but this was quite anomalous to the widespread derision of the Scythians in the ancient world (Michel, "σκύθης," *TDNT* 7.448-49). Plutarch attests to the ethical and anthropological significance of this social hierarchy in the Greek world, for he says that in choosing a nurse for one's child, it is best to choose a Greek slave and not a barbarian (non-Greek), for barbarians can contaminate children with their speech and base character (*Moralia*, "On the Education of Children" 4.A). Thus one's ethnic and social identity largely determines one's moral character and worth.

¹⁵⁷ *Origins of Christian Morality*, esp. 5-11; also PHEME PERKINS, "Paul and Ethics," *Interp* 38 (1984) 268-80. On the contrast between an Aristotelian (corporate virtuosity) versus a Nietzschean (autonomous individualism) approach to morality, cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theology*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984) esp. 109-120, 256-63.

among believers by advocating relational harmony (v.12, 15), love (vv. 13-14), and mutual edification (v. 16) among believers.

Compassion (σπλάγχνοα οίκτιρμοῦ), the first virtue cited, is composed of two terms. The first term, σπλάγχνοα when used literally referred to the inner anatomical organs, and was used figuratively of the heart, the seat of human emotions (Prov 12.10; Sir 30.7). It came to be used of the feeling itself, indicating "love" or "affection" (Wis 10.5; Phil 1.8). The second term οίκτιρμός refers to "mercy" or "compassion" (Rom 12.1; 2 Cor 1.3; Phil 2.1; Heb 10.28). These two terms used together in the phrase σπλάγχνοα οίκτιρμοῦ, mean "compassionate heart" or "affectionate compassion."

The next noun (χρηστότης) is sometimes used in a general moral sense of "goodness" or "rightness" (Ps 36.3; Rom 3.12), but more commonly in the NT it has a more specific meaning of "kindness" or "generosity" (Rom 11.22; 2 Cor 6.6; Gal 5.22). The latter definition of "kindness" best fits the context of Col 3.12. The next virtue, ταπεινοφροσύνη, can indicate "self-denial" or "self-abasement" (2.18, 23), but most frequently refers to the Christian virtue "humility" (Acts 20.19; Eph 4.2; Phil 2.3; 1 Pet 5.5), which is its meaning here.¹⁵⁸ Its use in this passage fits the context of harmonious relationships in the Christian community.¹⁵⁹ The next term, πραΰτης,¹⁶⁰ is similar in meaning (cf. Matt 11.29), and denotes "gentleness" or "humility" (1 Cor 4.21; 2 Tim 2.25; Jas 1.21; 1 Pet 3.15). Μακροθυμία, the final virtue cited, denotes "patience" or "forbearance" (Rom 2.4; 2 Cor 6.6; Gal 5.22).¹⁶¹ In addition to the fact that all five virtues deal with qualities which enhance interpersonal relationships and

¹⁵⁸ In view of the negative manner in which ταπεινοφροσύνη is used in Col 2.18, 23 of self-abasement, probably as a means of attaining heavenly visions, Yates suggests that in citing it as a virtue in 3.12, the author wanted "to draw attention to the only humility which has any value. It describes the reality of the new man as he has appeared in Jesus Christ, and is not to be used as a means to another end" ("Colossians 3.1-4.6," 245).

¹⁵⁹ Wengst notes that in the Graeco-Roman world "humility" was typically used in a political or social context. Often those in a superior social position used the term "humility" in a patronising manner to describe those in a lower social position (*Humility*, 4-14). Wengst also argues that in the early Christian community "humility" continued to be used in a social context, but came to indicate not superiority, but solidarity with others in the community who are also humiliated (36-57). This understanding of "humility" seems to fit the context of Col 3.12 where virtues are given which emphasise harmonious relationships in the Christian community.

¹⁶⁰ The Christian virtue of gentleness or humility is seen in stark contrast to the Cynic sense of superiority (Pseudo-Crates, *Epistles*, 6; 13; 15; 16; Pseudo Diogenes, *Epistles*, 30; 37) and to the Cynic sense of harshness (particularly the misanthropic school) (Pseudo-Diogenes, *Epistle*, 29.4-5).

¹⁶¹ The Christian virtue of patience is seen in contrast to the Cynics' withdrawal from those who refused to live based on truth and reason (Pseudo-Heraclitus, *Epistles*, 2.4; 7.9; Pseudo-Socrates, *Epistles*, 24; Pseudo-Diogenes, *Epistles*, 28.8).

promote harmony, several commentators have noted that the five virtues cited here are all qualities ascribed elsewhere to Christ or God.¹⁶²

Lohse summarises the virtue list in v. 12, and says that all five virtues deal with how a Christian "should deal with his fellow man. He should stop making himself and his interests the center of his life, and should completely put himself at the service of his neighbor who needs his sympathetic readiness and helping hand."¹⁶³

In v. 14 the writer espouses love as the crowning virtue to be put on ("above all these put on love"). Though du Plessis argues that Paul (and the writer of Colossians) never advocated a hierarchy of virtues with love at the pinnacle,¹⁶⁴ this text and several others demonstrate otherwise. In v. 14, love is described as being above the other virtues (ἐπὶ πᾶσιν δὲ τούτοις), and the virtue which is the bond of perfection or the bond which leads to perfection (ὃ ἐστὶν σύνδεσμος τῆς τελειότητος). While Paul certainly does not offer a graduated list of vices and virtues, love is repeatedly enjoined as the quintessential Christian virtue. Paul affirms that the most sacrificial act of religiosity is futile apart from love (1 Cor 13.1-7); love will endure and is greater than hope or faith (1 Cor 13.8-13); the whole law is fulfilled in love (Rom 13.8-10; Gal 5.13-14). Hence in the context of Christian virtues which contribute to corporate health and unity, the author in keeping with the Pauline tradition exhorts the Colossians to put on love, the greatest Christian virtue.¹⁶⁵

It is debated whether the concept of love, particularly love for others who are not part of one's own physical community, originated with Christianity. Philo's lengthy virtue list suggests that this concept was not accepted in his Hellenistic Jewish

¹⁶² Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 251-52; E. Larsson, *Christus als Vorbild. Eine Untersuchung zu den paulinischen Tauf- und Eikontexten* (Uppsala: Gleerup, 1962) 210-20; Lohse, *Colossians*, 147. Σπλάγγνον is used of God's compassion (Luke 1.78) as well as Christ's (Phil 1.8). The modifying noun οὐκτριμὸς is used repeatedly of God (Ps 24.6; 39.12; Rom 12.1; 2 Cor 1.3). Χρηστότης and the cognate χρηστός are used of God's goodness (LXX-Ps 24.7; 30.19; 84.12; Jer 40.11; Matt 11.30; Luke 5.39; Rom 2.4; 11.22). Ταπεινοφροσύνη is not actually used of God or Christ, but cognates are used of Christ who reportedly claimed to be meek and lowly (Matt 11.29; also Phil 2.3, 8). Πραΐτης and cognates are used to describe Christ (Matt 11.29; 21.5; 2 Cor 10.1). Μακροθυμία is ascribed to both God (Rom 2.4; 9.22; 1 Pet 3.20) and Christ (1 Tim 1.16; 2 Pet 3.15).

¹⁶³ *Colossians*, 147.

¹⁶⁴ *Perfection*, 201.

¹⁶⁵ Furnish, *The Love Command in the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972) 91-131; Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, rev., trans. by Philip Watson (London: SPCK, 1953) 127-45; Georg Strecker, "Gottes- und Menschenliebe in Neuen Testament," in *Tradition and Interpretation in the NT*, ed. by Gerald Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 53-67; Viktor Warnack, *Agape, die Liebe als Grundmotiv der neutestamentlichen Theologie* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1951). Furnish affirms the centrality of love in the Pauline ethic, as well as in Ephesians/Colossians, and goes so far as to say that the best title for Paul's theology is "faith active in love" (*The Love Command*, 94). He emphasises the soteriological connection of Christian love, and states that love in Col 3.14 is not just a crowning virtue but "the fundamental reality of life in the body of Christ" (121). Warnack, as the title of his monograph suggests, affirms love as the basic and foundational principle of theology (and morality) in the NT (641-51).

circles, for he declares virtuous "love of one's kind" (*Sac.* 27). Cicero comes close to affirming universal brotherhood and love for all humans. This pivotal text warrants lengthy citation:

[In the entire moral sphere] there is nothing more glorious nor of wider range than the solidarity of mankind, that species of alliance and partnership of interests and that actual affection which exists between man and man, which, coming into existence immediately upon our birth, owing to the fact that children are loved by their parents and the family as a whole is bound together by the ties of marriage and parenthood, gradually spreads its influence beyond the home, first by blood relationships, then by connections through marriage, later by friendships, afterwards by bonds of neighborhood; then to fellow-citizens and political allies and friends and lastly by embracing the whole of the human race.¹⁶⁶

W. Den Boer points out, however, that Cicero's statements on brotherly love are not as magnanimous as they appear *prima facie*, for there is no indication that Cicero broke with established societal attitudes toward slavery,¹⁶⁷ advocating brotherly acceptance of and love for slaves.¹⁶⁸ While first-century non-Christian moralists did advocate love for one's fellow human being, the love ethic articulated in the NT, particularly in Colossians, is distinct in foundation and scope. The love the writer enjoins in Col 3.12 is entirely rooted in Christology. They were to love, not based on self-effort or with prudential motives, but in response to the love they had experienced through Christ. Furthermore, the scope of this love is implied to be universal, extending to all believers regardless of ethnic, political, or social distinctions (v.11).¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ *De Fin.* 5.23, 65; cf. also *De Fin.* 3.19, 63.

¹⁶⁷ *Private Morality in Greece and Rome. Some Historical Aspects* (Leiden: Brill, 1979) 80-82, 89-91. Den Boer suggests that Cicero's original contribution was the hypothesis that the affection individuals feel toward members of the human race is an extension of the affection they feel toward members of their own family (80).

¹⁶⁸ While Cicero did call for justice and fair treatment to be given to slaves, even treating them as employees (*De Off.* 1.41) he also advocated harsh treatment when necessary for control. He states "those who exercise a command over men constrained only by force may need to employ severity, just as a master must towards his servants if he cannot otherwise control them" (*De Off.* 2.24).

¹⁶⁹ We can note distinct differences between this and the Stoic social ethic. For example, though Seneca argued that no philosophical school was more loving, kind, or concerned for other humans than Stoicism (*On Mercy*, 2.5.2-3), there are qualitative differences between the love and forgiveness espoused in Col 3 and that advocated by Seneca. In addition to the anthropocentric focus of Seneca versus the Christocentric focus of Col 3, Seneca advocated mercy in moderation. He states "neither should we have indiscriminate and general mercy, not yet preclude it; for it is as much a cruelty to pardon all as to pardon none. We should maintain the mean" (*On Mercy*, 1.2.2). Col 3, on the other hand, advocates not moderation but magnanimous love and mercy based on the magnanimous forgiveness of Christ. Furthermore, Col 3 enjoins the believer to love and forgive all believers, regardless of racial or social distinctions. While Seneca did advocate the practice of kindness to slaves, this was muted by the fact that he still regarded them as intrinsically inferior and termed them "human chattel" (*mancipio cogitandum*) (*On Mercy*, 1.18.1).

After commanding the Colossians in v. 14 to love, in v. 15 the writer takes the love theme in a slightly different direction and urges them to "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." The context of this phrase "peace of Christ" (εἰρήνη τοῦ Χριστοῦ) probably has both a horizontal and a vertical referent, indicating peace which comes from Christ (cp. 1.21-22) which in turn makes interpersonal peace (horizontal peace) possible.¹⁷⁰ In v. 16, the last verse of the passage before the grand ethical summary in v. 17, the writer urges the readers to engage in relational harmony in a different way—by teaching and worshipping, and thus mutually edifying one another.

III. Summary and Conclusions

A. Summary

Vice/virtue lists were commonly employed in the ancient world by Jewish, pagan, and Christian moralists. The NT lists are diverse in form and theocentric in focus (virtue is gained through new life, i.e., union with Christ, not through rigorous self-effort; vices are part of the pre-Christian, old life). In terms of the origin of the vice/virtue lists, all single source proposals regarding the origin of the NT lists have proven unsatisfactory as a complete explanation for the lists, which are probably an amalgam from various sources.

More important than the origin of the lists is their function and rhetorical purpose. Secular identification, warning against secularisation, and evidence of new life are purposes for some of the NT lists, but the primary purpose for the Colossian lists is the clarification of the Christologically governed lifestyle, commanded, but not specifically described in 2.6.

The basis for the Colossian vice/virtue lists is soteriological and Christological. The eschatological new life believers have by virtue of their death and union with Christ is the first basis given (vv. 5, 9-10). Secondly, the use of the indicative/imperative construct in 3.1-5 highlights the concept that believers have been united and raised with Christ (indicative), and this forms the basis for the put on...put off admonitions in 3.5f (the imperative). The Christological basis for the vice/virtue admonitions is found in v. 11, a theological summary statement ("Christ is all and in all"). This statement indicates that all creation (including Christ's spiritual creation the church) was created by him and exists for him. A second instance in

¹⁷⁰ Cf. O'Brien, *Colossians*, 204.

which Christology forms the basis for paraenesis involving moral vices/virtues is in 3.13, where believers are admonished to forgive others based on Christ's forgiveness. The final, and strongest Christological foundation for paraenesis is in 3.17, where in a global statement the writer states that everything the believer says and does should reflect the fact that Jesus is Lord.

Both vice lists which contain five vices each, and the virtue list which contains five virtues, are essentially traditional material with the exception of "humility" (which is a Christian virtue). The first vice list in v. 5 primarily emphasises sexual sin. The second list in v. 8 emphasises vices which disrupt the social order and harm interpersonal relationships, relationships which are extremely important in the light of the new corporate entity in which all who have been united with Christ share a common life which transcends ethnic, political, and social differences. The five virtues given in v. 12, along with the corollary exhortations in vv. 13-16 continue to address relational health and unity among believers by advocating relational harmony (vv. 12, 15), love (vv. 13-14), and mutual edification (v. 16) among believers.

B. Conclusions

1. The shape or content of paraenesis in the vice/virtue section of Colossians (3.5-17) is largely traditional.
2. The shape of paraenesis in the vice/virtue section of Colossians is not traditional material *simpliciter*, for the role of humility, the nature of love, and the foundation for paraenesis make it distinctly Christian.
3. The shape of paraenesis in the vice/virtue section of Colossians is highly relational, and centres upon behaviour which enhances relational health and unity among believers.
4. A basis for the Colossian vice/virtue lists is soteriological, for paraenesis is based on the believers' new life through death and union with Christ.
5. A basis for the Colossian vice/virtue lists is Christological, for paraenesis is based on the lordship of Christ.
6. A basis for the Colossian vice/virtue lists is Christological, for paraenesis is based on the forgiveness of the risen Christ.

7. The primary purpose for the Colossian vice/virtue lists is to describe the Christologically governed lifestyle which is commanded, but not specifically described in 2.6.

Chapter Seven

The Household Code: Colossians 3.18-4.1

I. Introduction

The Colossian household code is a particularly interesting section to evaluate in our investigation of the ground and shape of paraenesis in Colossians, since the majority of scholars believe it is essentially traditional ethical material which has received little Christian alteration. This raises various questions regarding the shape of the household code, the extent to which it reflects a "Christian ethic," and the possible theological basis upon which such a traditional (non-Christian) domestic ethic rests. Due to the fact there is a large amount of ancient and modern material on the household codes, the following discussion will be limited to three areas: the *origin* of the NT and Colossian household codes, the *function* of the Colossian code within the epistle, and the *basis* of the Colossian code. The origin of the Colossian household code has been vigorously debated, and¹ sheds light on the shape of the Colossian paraenesis. The function of the Colossian code has been largely ignored by many scholars, and helps to relate the code to the rest of the epistle. This is particularly important for establishing the basis of the code. The basis of the code relates to our overall thesis direction, and the theological basis for the code is given clear development in this section of paraenesis.

II. Origin of NT Household Codes

Numerous household codes which cited the duties of various household members were written by ancient Greeks and Romans,¹ Jews,² and Christians.³ While there is considerable variation in the ancient household codes, there is also quite a similarity between the canonical codes and those written by Hellenistic and Jewish moralists, making the question of the origin of the NT codes quite complex. Cannon aptly summarises the difficulty of attempting to identify a source for the NT household codes. He says,

¹ Arist. *Oec.* 3.1-7; *Pol.* 1.1253b.1-14; Arius Didymus 147-52; Hierocles 4, 50, 51; Plutarch, *Moralia*, "Advice to Bride and Groom"; "The Education of Children"; Seneca *Ep.* 47; 94.1-3.

² Philo *Hypoth.* 7.1-8, 14; *Spec. Leg.* 2.67-69, 225-232; 3.137-38; *Jos. Cont. Ap.* 2.24-28.

³ Eph 5.21-6.9; Col 3.18-4.1; 1 Pet 2.11-3.12; 1 Tim 2.8-15; 5.1-2; 6.1-2; Titus 2.1-10; 3.1; *Barn.* 19.5-7; *Did.* 4.9-11; *1 Clem.* 1.3; 21.6-9; Ignatius *Pol.* 4-6; Polycarp *Phil.* 4.1-6.3.

It is clear that the New Testament *Haustafeln* were not the first lists of ethical instructions for everyday life that were ever written. There were plenty of prototypes already present in New Testament times. Furthermore there are striking similarities between the New Testament *Haustafeln* and non-Christian codes. However, there are just as many striking differences between them. At the present stage of investigation, it is just as impossible to reconstruct an original *Haustafel* as it is to reproduce an *Urkatalog* of vices and virtues.⁴

A. Stoicism

Martin Dibelius was the first modern scholar to suggest that the NT household codes are Christianised versions of popular Hellenistic philosophical teachings, particularly Stoic teachings.⁵ He argues that the terms ἀνῆκεν (Col 3.18) and εὐάρεστον (Col 3.20) were motivational terms commonly used by popular Hellenistic philosophers. He furthermore views the phrase ἐν κυρίῳ as a Christianised replacement for the expected Hellenistic phrase τῷ κυρίῳ after these two terms.⁶ His student Karl Weidinger developed his thesis,⁷ and argued that there was organic continuity between the household codes of the Greeks, Stoics, Hellenistic Jews, and Christians. He saw little difference between the various household codes of the Hellenistic period, since he believed they all reflected essentially the same scheme,⁸ and all evidenced the law of God written in human hearts.⁹

Thus he did not believe it made a difference whether the NT codes had been drawn from Hellenistic or Hellenistic Jewish sources.¹⁰ The only significant distinction he made between the various ancient household codes was to indicate the Christianisation of the NT codes ("die verchristlichung der Haustafeln") through the addition of phrases such as "ἐν κυρίῳ."¹¹ Following in this train, some later exegetes assert the moral exhortations contained in the NT *Haustafeln* are "indistinguishable from non-Christian ones."¹² There certainly are many strong similarities between the

⁴ *Traditional Materials*, 111.

⁵ *Kolossers*, 91-92.

⁶ Also Lohse, *Colossians*, 158; Schlier, "καθῆκον," *TDNT* 3.437-40.

⁷ *Die Haustafeln. Ein Stück urchristlicher Paränese* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1928).

⁸ *Haustafeln*, 49.

⁹ "So stellt dieses Stück Paränese ein Zeugnis dar für das gemeinsame ethische Empfinden in Heidentum, Judentum und Christentum. Es ist, wie Paulus sagen würde, ein Stück des Gottesgesetzes, das die Heiden von Natur tun (Rom 2.14), das in jedem Menschenherzen von Geburt an eingegraben ist" (*Haustafeln*, 79).

¹⁰ *Haustafeln*, 50.

¹¹ *Haustafeln*, 74-79.

¹² R. Bultmann, "Man Between the Times," in *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann*, ed. by Schubert Ogden (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961) 261-62. Bultmann asserts that the injunctions found in the NT household codes and other NT paraenesis are uniquely Christian only when they are characterised by the admonition to suffer patiently and when they evidence a sharply negative demeanour toward the world (262).

injunctions given to family members by Hellenistic philosophers and those found in the NT. In particular, *Haustafeln* written by the second-century Stoic philosopher Hierocles are remarkably similar to those found in the NT.¹³ Furthermore, the issue of duties to the state or civil authorities was a common theme in Hellenistic, particularly Stoic household codes, and is the most likely explanation for its inclusion in the Petrine code (1 Pet 2.13-17).¹⁴

Several arguments have been advanced against the proposition that the NT household codes are essentially Christianised versions of Stoic codes. First of all, the Stoic codes do not contain the type of reciprocity that is found in the NT codes, particularly the ones in Colossians and Ephesians.¹⁵ Secondly,¹⁶ the distinction between subordinate and superior individuals is not typical of Stoic household codes.¹⁷ The final and strongest argument is that the order of the codes in Colossians and Ephesians (wives, children, slaves) finds no precise duplication in the Stoic codes.¹⁸

¹³ For a recent translation of Hierocles' household codes, cf. A. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation: A Greco-Roman Sourcebook* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 85-104. While Hierocles' lists echo much NT teaching, they are broader in scope and more detailed in development than those in the NT. For example, he addresses the following issues which are given little or no treatment in the NT lists: duties towards one's fatherland, duties of adult children to their aged parents, duties to one's siblings, duties towards relatives outside one's immediate family, and the division of domestic duties between husbands and wives. One notable discrepancy between Hierocles' lists and those in the NT is seen in Hierocles' insistence on the necessity of marriage ("a household is imperfect without marriage") (Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation*, 101).

¹⁴ Cf. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive*, 94-95.

¹⁵ Hierocles comes close to articulating reciprocity in his household codes ("On Duties," 4.22-28; cf. also the non-Stoic Plutarch, *Moralia*, "Advice to Bride and Groom"), but this is not the type of reciprocity found in the NT codes. The chief difference between the apparent reciprocity found in Hierocles and Plutarch and that found in the household code of Colossians is that the former simply describes what husband and wives should do, whereas the author of Colossians directly addresses the various members of the household (the nominative forms αἱ γυναῖκες; οἱ ἄνδρες; τὰ τέκνα; οἱ πατέρες; οἱ δούλοι; οἱ κύριοι are clearly used for direct address, and are vocative nominatives, as Harris calls them (*Colossians*, 178-81; cf. also Blass and Debrunner, *Grammar*, § 147).

¹⁶ These first two arguments are cited by Crouch (*The Colossian Haustafel*, 83).

¹⁷ In theory, the Stoics were typically egalitarian. Musonius Rufus, for example, argued that women should study philosophy since they, just as men, have the gift of reason and have a natural inclination toward virtue (*Frag.* 3). Balch demonstrates that the Stoics, including Musonius as well as the non-Stoic Plutarch, were not as egalitarian as they appear, and in fact still assume in practice the subordination of wives (*Let Wives Be Submissive*, 143-49). The Cynics, however, went far beyond the Stoics in declaring equality of the sexes. Pseudo Crates asserts "women are not by nature worse than men [αἱ γυναῖκες ἀνδρῶν οὐκ ἔφουσιν χεῖρους]. The Amazons, at any rate, who have accomplished such great feats, have not fallen short of men in anything" (28, trans. Malherbe).

¹⁸ This is most thoroughly demonstrated by David Schroeder, who analysed 49 Stoic duty lists and concluded that the order of the Stoic lists and the nature of the addressees (the Stoic lists address individuals, the NT lists address classes of people) evidence an original Christian genesis, with some Jewish influence ("Die Haustafeln . . . des neuen Testaments. Ihre Herkunft und theologischer Sinn," unpublished doctoral Thesis, Hamburg, 1959).

B. Hellenistic Judaism

Other scholars recognise differences between household codes found in popular Hellenistic philosophical teachings and those found in the NT, and argue that the NT codes are primarily influenced by Hellenistic Judaism. Lohmeyer, for example, like Dibelius and Weidinger says the Colossian household code comes from pre-existing, traditional material, but argues that the motivation of fearing the Lord found in the Colossian household code shows the pre-existing code was Jewish.¹⁹ He postulates that the writer of Colossians drew from a Jewish code which addressed the duties of women, slaves, and children, in spite of the fact that no such Jewish code has ever been found (whereas scores of Stoic and other Hellenistic codes addressing various household members in a similar fashion do exist).

D. Daube also asserts a Jewish influence on the NT household codes.²⁰ He argues that in post-biblical Judaism, particularly as reflected in the earlier portions of the Talmud, participles came to be used to express an injunction, permission, or prohibition.²¹ He then notes that there are numerous instances in the NT of "unattached participles" used imperatively, particularly in the *Haustafeln*. He concludes that the most probable explanation for these participles is that the material in the NT household codes was drawn from "Rabbinic Hebrew" material.²² Again, one major problem with this hypothesis is that there is no extant "Rabbinic" material from this period which is similar in content to the NT codes. Furthermore, the Colossian household code is not full of "unattached participles used for admonition" and thus gives no obvious verbal evidence of dependence upon Hebrew sources.²³

The most thorough and influential exposition of a "Jewish influence model" comes from James Crouch.²⁴ In a major study of the Colossian household code, Crouch concludes that the Hellenistic influences on the NT codes are not nearly as significant as the Jewish influences. In particular, he argues that the reciprocal nature of the duties cited in Colossians²⁵ as well as the distinction between superior and

¹⁹ *Kolosser*, 157-58.

²⁰ *New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, 90-105.

²¹ Daube reasons "the [participial] form reflects the Rabbinic view of the secondary, derivative, less absolute nature of post-biblical rules" (*New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, 91).

²² *New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, 102-103.

²³ The imperative mood is repeatedly used in the Colossian household code. Note the following: ὑποτάσσεσθε (v. 18); ἀγαπάτε (v. 19); μὴ πικραίνεσθε (v. 19); ὑπακούετε (vv. 20, 22); μὴ ἐρεθίζετε (v. 21); ἐργάζεσθε (v. 23); δουλεύετε (v. 24); παρέχεσθε (4.1). The participial form εἰδότες in 3.24 and 4.1 is probably causal, not imperatival. The other participle in this passage is φοβούμενοι (v. 22), which is possibly imperatival, though the context suggests that it also is a causal participle which explains the preceding command to submit.

²⁴ *The Colossian Haustafel*.

²⁵ *The Colossian Haustafel*, 83.

subordinate members²⁶ evidences a Jewish, not a Stoic or other Hellenistic influence. Crouch's discussion of the history of research is invaluable. His research is broad in scope, and his analysis is keen. At the same time, his reconstruction cannot be accepted as a whole. While he builds a convincing case for the dissimilarities between the Stoic codes and those found in the NT, the texts by Josephus and Philo which he believes are much closer to the NT household code (and which undergird his reconstruction) contain significant dissimilarities. None of these texts is an actual household code, and none contains the three pair structure, making them less similar to the NT codes than the Stoic codes. Crouch notes the distinction between higher and lower positions, the "principle of reciprocity," which he correctly emphasises is characteristic of the Colossian code, but fails to recognise that it is actually absent from Philo (though it is found in terse form in Josephus—*Cont. Ap.* 2.25).

C. Early Christianity

Other scholars also argue that the NT household codes were not primarily adaptations from Hellenistic Jewish or pagan moral writings, but rather are distinctly Christian lists created by the early church. Karl Rengstorf, for example,²⁷ was one of the first scholars to challenge Dibelius and Weidinger's hypothesis that the NT household codes were essentially Christianised adaptations of Stoic codes. After acknowledging that there are parallels between the NT codes and Hellenistic, particularly Hellenistic Jewish codes, he asserts "die Haustafeln des Neuen Testaments gegenüber ähnlichen Erscheinungen in seiner Umwelt doch etwas Neues und Besonderes darstellen."²⁸ He does not offer a detailed critique of the specific differences between the NT codes and Hellenistic codes, though his comments have caused scholars to question the assumption that the NT codes are merely Hellenistic codes to which κύριος phrases have been added. He specifically argues that the use of the verb ὑποτάσσω in the NT codes is unique, and finds no identical use in non-Christian codes²⁹ (ὑποτάσσω is only used two times outside the NT of a wife's relationship to her husband³⁰).

²⁶ *The Colossian Haustafel*, 83.

²⁷ "Die neutestamentlichen Mahnungen an die Frau, sich dem Manne unterzuordnen," in *Verbum Dei Manet in Aeternum*, FS Otto Schmitz, ed. by Werner Foerster (Witten: Luther, 1953) 131-45.

²⁸ "Die neutestamentlichen Mahnungen," 134.

²⁹ "Die neutestamentlichen Mahnungen," 131-33.

³⁰ Plutarch, "Advice to Bride and Groom," 33; Pseudo Callisthenes, *Hist. Alex. Magni* 1.22.4.

David Schroeder carefully evaluates Dibelius and Weidinger's Stoic source model, and demonstrates numerous differences between Stoic household codes and those found in the NT, particularly differences in structure. He concludes that Paul himself created the NT household code due to confusion created by the egalitarian language of passages such as Gal 3.28. For support of this model, he argues that the use of ἀγαπάω to describe how husbands are to treat their wives evidences a Christian source for the household codes.³¹ The problem with this argument is that it is predicated on the assumption that ἀγάπη/ἀγαπάω are always uniquely Christian terms, which ignores the fact that these terms were quite frequently used in the LXX and occasionally in other Jewish writings of the love of a man for a woman.³²

Carrington also believes the NT household codes were essentially Christian creations. He appeals to various common terms or themes in the paraenesis (including the household codes) of James, Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Peter as evidence of a common paraenetic source which he identifies as an early Christian baptismal catechism, which is largely based on Jewish proselyte catechism found in the Holiness Code of Lev 17-19.³³ In the previous thesis chapter on the vice lists several problems with this proposal were cited, but a few additional concerns will be noted here.³⁴ First of all, the late appearance of the household codes in the NT canon argues against this hypothesis. If the household codes were part of early Christian baptismal catechesis, then why are they not found in the earlier epistles, particularly Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Galatians, all of which contain specific discussions of baptism (Rom 6.1-13; 1 Cor 1.13-17; 10.2; 12.13; 15.29; Gal 3.27) and contain extensive paraenesis, including traditional material (Rom 1.24-26, 29-31; 13.13; 1 Cor 5.10-11; 6.9-10; Gal 5.19-23)? If one accepts the conclusion that Paul did not write Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastoral Epistles, then this difficulty becomes even more acute, for it would appear that Paul himself was either unaware of the household code portion of the baptismal catechism, or considered it relatively unimportant.

Secondly, the restricted presence of household tables, which appear only in epistles belonging to the Pauline school and 1 Peter, raises questions regarding the

³¹ "Die Haustafeln," 127.

³² Crouch, *The Colossian Haustafel*, 111-13; Gen 24.27; 29.18, 20, 30, 32; 34.3; Judg 16.4; 2 Chr 11.21; Eccl 9.9; 1 Esdr 4.25; Tob. 6.19; Josephus *Ant.* 1.323; 5.342.

³³ *Primitive Christian Catechism*, 31-58; cf. also Alfred Seeberg, *Der Katechismus der Urchristenheit* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1905). Seeberg was the first scholar to propose that the NT household codes were traditional material. He argued that they originated from a Jewish catechism for proselytes which was reformulated for use by the early Christians.

³⁴ Crouch, *The Colossian Haustafel*, 15-18.

existence of an early Christian baptismal catechism. Why is it absent from the Synoptic and Johannine traditions?

While Schroeder and others have successfully argued that the NT codes do not appear to be lightly Christianised, verbatim Stoic or other Hellenistic household codes, at the same time, those who maintain the NT household codes were creations of the early church fail to recognise the similarities between the NT and the Hellenistic codes, including Hellenistic Jewish codes. The next model synthesises much of the data, and offers a convincing explanation for the origin of the NT household codes.

D. Aristotelian Moral Philosophy

Other scholars have sought to find the origin of the NT household codes not through precise, verbatim borrowing of the structure and contents of household codes from Stoic or other first-century philosophies, but in the influence of seminal forms and concepts which shape the entire household code. Recently, for example, several scholars³⁵ have argued that the NT codes are not Christianised versions of specific Stoic *Haustafeln*, but that NT codes reflect the general influence of stereotypical Hellenistic discussions of household duties. This Hellenistic form ultimately owes its shape to Aristotelian philosophy, and two chief characteristics:³⁶ (1) relationships are discussed in terms of three pairs of social classes;³⁷ (2) one of the social classes in each pair is described as "being ruled."³⁸

Balch argues that an Aristotelian tradition existed and influenced the Stoic, other Hellenistic moral philosophy, and Hellenistic Judaism. This Aristotelian tradition is ultimately seen behind the household codes, for it posited a natural order in which men governed women and children, and masters governed slaves. According to Aristotle, this order was ontologically based, for one's role in society was necessitated by

³⁵ D. Balch, "Household Codes," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 3.318-20; "Household Codes," in *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament*, 25-50; *Let Wives Be Submissive*; D. Lührmann, "Neutestamentliche Haustafeln und antike Ökonomie," *NTS* 27 (1980) 83-97; Karlheinz Müller, "Die Haustafel des Kolosserbriefes und das antike Frauenthema. Eine kritische Rückschau auf alte Ergebnisse," in *Die Frau im Urchristentum*, ed. by G. Dautzenberg et al. (Freiburg: Herder, 1983) 263-319; K. Thraede, "zum historischen Hintergrund der 'Haustafeln' des NT," in *Pietas*, FS Bernhard Kötting, *JAC* 8, ed. by E. Dassmann and K. S. Frank (Münster: Aschendorffsche, 1980) 359-68.

³⁶ Balch, "Household Codes," 26.

³⁷ Balch ("Household Codes," 27-28) notes that the three pair structure for the discussion of household duties is found in Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.1253b, 1-14; *Nic. Eth.* 8.1160a, 23-1161a, 10; Arius Didymus 2.148.16-19; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 2.25.4-5; Pseudo Aristotle, *Mag. Mor.* 1.1194b, 5-28; and Seneca, *On Benefits* 2.18.1-2; 3.18.1-4.

³⁸ These three traits are clearly seen in the "concerning household management" (περὶ οἰκονομίας) material found in Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.1253b.1-14 (cf. also *Mag. Mor.* 1.1194b.5-28).

psychological distinctions based not on culture but nature (φύσις).³⁹ Thus men are to rule the household since "a slave can have no deliberative faculty, a woman but a weak one, a child an imperfect one."⁴⁰ Other later writers affirmed ontological distinctions between the sexes as the basis for female submission.⁴¹ The Colossian code clearly affirms subordination, but not on the basis of nature, but based on what is "fitting in the Lord" (3.18). The context of the Colossian code also militates against Aristotelian ontological inferiority, for it articulates spiritual unity in Christ in spite of race, nationality, or social status (3. 11). Thus it appears the Aristotelian model has been modified,⁴² but has nevertheless had its influence (some have thus said Colossians reflects a "mild patriarchalistic setting"⁴³).

Thraede believes the NT household codes reflect a moderating or middle position between egalitarianism and absolute patriarchalism.⁴⁴ He argues that both ends of the spectrum were present in first-century moral teachings, with Plutarch and Musonius espousing egalitarianism, Philo articulating patriarchalism, and the NT codes representing the middle position.⁴⁵ The Stoics and Plutarch, however, were not as

³⁹ Cf. W. W. Fortenbaugh, "Aristotle on Slaves and Women," in *Articles on Aristotle*, vol. 2, ed. by J. Barnes, B. Schofield, and R. Sorabji (London: Duckworth, 1977) 135-39. Fortenbaugh demonstrates that "Aristotle was able to accept the demand of Plato that a difference in role or pursuit be tied to a relevant difference in nature (*Rep.* 454B4-E4; cf. *Pol.* 1259b36-8) and at the same time to reassert the claim of Georgias that the virtues of slaves and women are different from those of free men because their activities or roles are different (*Meno* 71D4-72A5; cf. *Pol.* 1260a15-17, 27-8)."

⁴⁰ Aristotle *Pol.* 1.13, Walford.

⁴¹ Philo argues that Eve fell into sin because of her "unstable and rash mind" for "in human beings the mind occupies the rank of the man, and the sensations that of the woman" (*De Virt* 19, Yonge). Given this perceived ontological difference, it is understandable that Philo says wives should serve their husbands "in the spirit of reasonable obedience in all things" (*Hypoth.* 7.3, Yonge). Like Aristotle, he speaks of children and slaves as belonging to the "inferior class" (*Decal.* 165) though he does not base their placement there on nature. Josephus boldly declares "a woman is inferior to her husband in all things. Let her therefore be obedient to him" (*Cont. Ap.* 2.25). Cicero (*De Off.* 2.57) approvingly cites Aristotle who places "boys, weak women, slaves, and the free men most like slaves" in the same state based on their sensual orientation. This is similar to the ideology of Aristotle *Pol.* 1.1254a14-1255b16 where Aristotle speaks of slavery (and subordination) necessitated by nature.

⁴² Balch notes a few other distinctions between the Aristotelian household code pattern and that found in the codes of Colossians and 1 Peter (*Let Wives Be Submissive*, 96-97), for these two NT codes: drop guidelines regarding household income; reverse the order of family members (the Aristotelian codes list masters, husbands, and fathers before slaves, wives, and children, Aristotle *Pol.* 1.1253b6-8; *Mag. Mor.* 1.1194b5-29); omit discussion of the city in favour of the "house."

⁴³ Thraede calls it "die patriarchalisch-milde Fassung" ("Haustafeln des NT," 367).

⁴⁴ Thraede says the social ethic of the NT household codes "war in jenem frühen Moment die Entscheidung für die damalige realistische-humane Mittelposition, die, wie gezeigt, Kritik an zu viel Liberalität enthielt, aber auch nicht einfach Herrschaft als solche restituieren wollte" ("Haustafeln des NT," 367).

⁴⁵ Kathleen O'Brien Wicker, however, writing before Thraede's work appeared, takes the opposite position, arguing that "Conjugal Precepts" is actually based on the Aristotelian concept of virtue being the mean state between virtue and vice, for Plutarch repeatedly describes marital virtue in terms of the control of passions through reason and moderation ("First Century Marriage Ethics: A Comparative Study of the Household Codes and Plutarch's Conjugal Precepts," in *No Famine on the Land*, FS John McKenzie [Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975] 141-53). Thus Wicker believes the household codes of Plutarch, not the NT, evidence an attempt to find the "golden mean." I largely agree with Wicker, though I take issue with her definition of Aristotelian virtue as "the mean state between

thoroughly egalitarian as some texts suggest.⁴⁶ While these philosophers did encourage women to study philosophy⁴⁷ and espoused the moral equality of the sexes,⁴⁸ in practice, they retained a fairly traditional, hierarchical gender orientation.

Balch notes, for example, that Musonius advocates that men learn spinning and women exercise in the gymnasium, but says that domestic work is still generally more suitable for women, and outdoor work more suitable for men.⁴⁹ In discussing sexual ethics, Musonius says that both sexes should be monogamous, having sexual relations only with their spouse. And yet, in building his case, Musonius says that unless men adhere to this sexual ethic "the stronger in judgment" [the self-controlled woman] will be "inferior to the weaker" [the promiscuous male]. Furthermore, "it behooves men to be much better if they expect to be superior to women."⁵⁰ Thus in practice, Musonius is not egalitarian, but retains clear strains of Aristotelian hierarchicalism.

Plutarch evidences a similar disparity between theoretical egalitarianism, and practical hierarchicalism.⁵¹ In "Advice to Bride and Groom" ("Conjugal Precepts") he says wives should study astronomy, philosophy and geometry,⁵² and "share with their husbands in intellectual advancement,"⁵³ and yet she is to worship only the gods her husband believes in.⁵⁴ Husbands and wives should commit themselves and their resources together for the common good, but the common property to which both husband and wife contribute "ought to be said to belong to the husband even though the wife contributed the larger share."⁵⁵ The husband should give his wife greater respect than anyone else and should be sexually faithful to her,⁵⁶ and yet sensible wives should "keep silent while their husband in their fits of anger vociferate"⁵⁷ and should accept their husbands' sexual liaisons with paramours or maidservants and not become

the extremes of virtue and vice" (146). Aristotle defined virtue as the golden mean between two negative extremes (*Mag. Mor.* 1187a5). For example, in *Magna Moralia*, the virtue temperance is the mean state between profligacy and insensibility to pleasure (1191a35), gentleness is the mean state between irascibility and lack of spirit (1191b25), and liberality is the mean state between ostentation and niggardliness (1192b1).

⁴⁶ Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive*, 143-49.

⁴⁷ Musonius, *Or.* 3 "That Women Too Should Study Philosophy"; *Or.* 4 "Should Daughters Receive the Same Education as Sons?"; Plutarch, "Bravery of Women," 242F.

⁴⁸ Musonius, *Or.* 3.46.32 speaks of virtue equally fitting to the nature of both genders.

⁴⁹ Musonius, *Or.* 4.46.13-31.

⁵⁰ *Or.* 12.86.38-88.4, Lutz. Note that Musonius' student Hierocles assumed that husbands would rule their wives (*Stob.* 4.22.23; 4.503.12-16; Balch *Let Wives Be Submissive*, 2-5, 144).

⁵¹ For a general discussion of this disparity in Plutarch's "Conjugal Precepts," cf. Wicker, "First Century Marriage Ethics."

⁵² 145 C, D.

⁵³ 145E, Babbitt.

⁵⁴ 140D.

⁵⁵ 140F, Babbitt.

⁵⁶ 145A.

⁵⁷ 143C, Babbitt.

angry.⁵⁸ The husband should treat his wife gently, and gratify her,⁵⁹ yet the wife should submit (ὑποτάσσω) to her husband and the husband should exercise control over the wife.⁶⁰

In short, it appears that Aristotelian hierarchicalism has influenced even the more egalitarian philosophers, which in turn influenced the NT household codes. In other words, the NT codes reflect the general influence of stereotypical Hellenistic household code discussions, which appear to have been ultimately influenced by seminal forms and concepts found in Aristotelian philosophy (particularly the three pair structuring of household codes and the identification of one of the social classes in each pair as being ruled by the other). In making this assertion regarding the source of the NT household codes, there is no implication that the Christian communities addressed in Colossians or 1 Peter were directly influenced by Aristotelian sources, for there is no evidence that these Christian communities practiced a direct, verbatim borrowing of the contents of household codes from Aristotelian sources or that they were even personally familiar with Aristotelian sources.

E. Neopythagorean Moralism

David Balch says similarities between the household codes of Neopythagorean moralists and those in the NT evoke the possibility (he makes no firm assertions) that the former influenced the latter.⁶¹ Balch argues that the Pythagorean codes are in fact more similar to the NT codes than are the Stoic codes. For example, while the Stoic codes seldom address household members in terms of inferiors/superiors, this is common in NT and Neopythagorean household codes.⁶² Just as the Colossian and Ephesian codes command wives to submit to their husbands, and the Ephesian code

⁵⁸ "If therefore a man in private life, who is incontinent and dissolute in regard to his pleasures, commits some peccadillo with a paramour or maidservant, his wedded wife ought not to be indignant or angry, but she should reason that it is respect for her which leads him to share his debauchery, licentiousness, and wantonness with another woman" (140B, Babbitt).

⁵⁹ 142E.

⁶⁰ Plutarch states "control ought to be exercised by the man over the woman, not as the owner has control of a piece of property, but, as the soul controls the body, by entering into her feelings and being knit to her through goodwill" (142E, Babbitt).

⁶¹ "Neopythagorean Moralists and the New Testament Household Codes," *ANRW* 2.26.1. 408.

⁶² This observation undercuts Crouch's contention that the distinction between superior and subordinate members in the NT household codes is a strong evidence of Jewish Hellenistic, not Stoic or other Hellenistic philosophical influence.

designates husbands as the nurturing head of (authority over) their wives,⁶³ so the Pythagorean Callicratidas asserts nurturing male authority. He states,

It is necessary therefore that the husband should be the regulator, master, and preceptor of his wife. The regulator indeed in paying attention to her affairs; but the master in governing and exercising authority over her; and the preceptor in teaching her such things as is fit for her to know.⁶⁴

Colossians also states that husbands are to love their wives, a sentiment which is mirrored by Charondas "let everyone love his lawful wife, and beget children from her."⁶⁵ In Colossians and Ephesians children are commanded to obey and honour their parents. Balch notes that the Pythagorean writer Perictione issues very similar injunctions: "Parents ought not to be injured either in word or deed; but it is requisite to be obedient to them, whether their rank in life is small or great."⁶⁶ Furthermore, Perictione states "it is requisite to reverence parents both while they are living and when they are dead, and never oppose them. If also they are ignorant of anything through deception or disease, their children should console and instruct them, but by no means hate them on this account."⁶⁷ Several times, in fact, in a discussion of the duties of children toward parents Pythagorean writers use the same terms for honour (τιμάω/τιμή) and obedience (ὑποκούω) as the writers of Colossians and Ephesians.⁶⁸ The lists in Colossians and Ephesians command fathers not to provoke or discourage their children. Balch finds similar sentiments in a Pythagorean text which says "they [fathers] should likewise endeavor to be beloved by their offspring, not through nature, of which they were not the cause, but through deliberate choice, for this is voluntary beneficence."⁶⁹ The Ephesian household code commands fathers to nurture children in

⁶³ Some assert that κεφαλή in Eph 5.23 and elsewhere in the Pauline literature refers to source of origin and not rulership (S. Bedale, "The Meaning of κεφαλή," 211-15; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 502-503; C. Clark Kroeger, "The Classical Concept of Head as 'Source,'" 267-83; R. W. Wall, "Wifely Submission in the Context of Ephesians," *CSR* 17 [1988] 54-61; *pace* W. Grudem "Does ΚΕΦΑΛΗ ('Head') Mean 'Source' or 'Authority Over,'" 38-59). While this meaning for κεφαλή ("source," "origin") is certainly possible in some passages (Eph 4.15; Col 1.18; 2.19), Lincoln notes that the use of κεφαλή in Eph 1.22, the authority structure of Graeco-Roman household codes, and the context of female submission in Eph 5.22-24, make it clear that in Eph 5.23 κεφαλή denotes male authority (*Ephesians*, 368-69).

⁶⁴ *De dom. felic.* 107.4-7. Other Pythagorean texts clearly affirm that the husband is to govern his wife and family (Ocellus, *De univ. nat.* 136.17-25) and the wife is to be obedient to her husband (Ocellus, *De univ. nat.* 198.25-199.1).

⁶⁵ *Prooem.* 62.30-31.

⁶⁶ *De Mul. Harm.* 145.8-18.

⁶⁷ *De Mul. Harm.* 145.23-26; cf. also Pempelus, *De Parent.* 141.14-19; 142.4-6, 11-13.

⁶⁸ The terms τιμάω or τιμή are used in Iamblichus, *VP* 22.18-19; *De Parent.* 141.18-19, 142.4-6; Zaleucus, *Proem.* 227.23-25; ὑποκούω is used in Iamblichus, *VP* 23.8-9; 98.16.

⁶⁹ Iamblichus, *VP* 26.20-22.

the discipline and instruction of the Lord, and the Pythagorean codes also injoin the discipline and moral training of children.⁷⁰

As with the NT household codes, in the Pythagorean codes it is indicated that slaves should obey their masters and allow themselves to be governed,⁷¹ although unlike in the NT lists, the slaves are not directly addressed, and the basis for obedience is the slaves' natural inferiority.⁷² In the Colossian list masters are told to grant their slaves justice and fairness (τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὴν ἰσότητα). The Pythagorean lists do not offer any exact parallels to this, but conceptual similarities are evident. Masters are not to treat their slaves with cruelty⁷³ or oppress them with too much labour.⁷⁴ They should not be treated with severity (ἐπιτάσις) but with moderation.⁷⁵ Furthermore, both the Colossian and Ephesian codes and the Pythagorean codes⁷⁶ refer in a positive manner to the slaves' fear, though the former refer to fear of the Lord, and the latter refer to fear of the master.

Neither Balch nor others argue that there is a direct organic relationship between the Pythagorean codes and those found in the NT, for there is insufficient evidence to justify this conclusion. At the same time, the conceptual similarities between the two sets of lists suggest that both were influenced by common Hellenistic teachings on the duties of household members (ultimately an Aristotelian influence, as is evidenced by the hierarchicalism inherent in the Pythagorean codes), and argue against a primarily Jewish influence on the NT codes. The evidence Balch cites regarding the similarities between the Pythagorean household codes and those found in the NT is striking, and lends credence to the hypothesis that the NT codes were generally influenced by Hellenistic discussions of household duties.

III. Colossian Household Codes

A. Structure and Content of the Colossian Household Code

The Colossian household code is tightly structured and appears to be a self-contained unit, which has led some exegetes to conclude that it is a later interpolation.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Hippodamus, *De Rep.* 100.8-9; Diotogenes, *De Piet.* 76.2-4.

⁷¹ Theano 197.25-27.

⁷² Bryson, *Oecon.* 4.57.

⁷³ Theano 198.9.

⁷⁴ Theano 197.34.

⁷⁵ Theano 198.25-28.

⁷⁶ Zaleucus, *Prooem.* 228.13-14.

⁷⁷ W. Munro, "Col. 3.18-4.1 and Eph 5.21-6.9: Evidences of a Late Literary Stratum?," *NTS* 18 (1972) 434-47; also David Bradley, "The Origin of the Hortatory Materials in the Letters of Paul,"

Like the Ephesian household code, the Colossian *haustafel* is symmetrical, and contains admonitions which address three pairs of social antipodes: wives and husbands, children and fathers, slaves and masters. The placement of the lower social group first is a distinct departure from the Aristotelian household codes, in which masters, husbands, and fathers are addressed before slaves, wives, and children.⁷⁸ The emphasis in the Colossian code is on the submission of the lower social group to the higher, though admonitions are given to both the dominant and the submissive groups, revealing an important element of reciprocity in this code.

The language used in the household codes of Colossians and Ephesians is very similar.⁷⁹ A few obvious differences can be observed between the codes in Colossians and Ephesians and those found in 1 Peter and the Pastorals.⁸⁰ Some of these lexical differences are probably stylistic, and evidence little difference in meaning.⁸¹ Other differences may reflect differing rhetorical and theological purposes. For example, in Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastorals, slaves are referred to as δούλοι, whereas in 1 Peter they are designated οκέται. John Elliott argues that this is a lexical distinction with a difference, and suggests the author of 1 Peter's use of οκέται is paradigmatic, and serves to emphasise the sphere of the household in the social world of the early believers.⁸² Colossians and Ephesians describe masters simply as earthly or human (κατὰ σάρκα κυρίους), whereas the author of 1 Peter, in keeping with his theme of unjust suffering (1.6-7; 2.12, 19-24; 3.9, 13-18; 4.4, 12-16; 5.9-10), discusses unreasonable (σκολλοί) masters.

The inclusion of these six distinct addressees in the Colossians/Ephesians codes (wives/husbands, children/fathers, slaves/masters) is unique among the NT codes. The household codes of the Pastoral Epistles do not address children, and fathers are addressed only obliquely in 1 Tim 3.4, 12.⁸³ The absence of any address to masters in

Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Yale University, 1947, 181. Munro believes both Col 3.18-4.1 and Eph 5.21-6.9 are later interpolations, with the former being drawn from the latter.

⁷⁸ Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive*, 96; Aristotle *Pol.* 1.1253b.6-8; *MM* 1.1194b.5-29.

⁷⁹ While the Ephesian code is much longer than the Colossian code (in the Nestle text, the Ephesian code has 324 words, while the Colossian code has a scant 117 words), the two codes have 70 words in common (J. P. Sampley, *'And the Two Shall Become One Flesh': A Study of Traditions in Eph 5.21-33* [Cambridge: CUP, 1971] 23).

⁸⁰ For a more detailed comparison of the household codes in Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Peter, cf. Sampley, "And the Two Shall Become One Flesh," 19-23.

⁸¹ For example, with respect to slaves, each of the NT codes injoin submission, with Colossians and Ephesians using the verb υπακούω, and the Pastorals and 1 Peter using the verb υποτάσσω. In Colossians and Ephesians, the term κύριος is used for master, whereas in 1 Peter and the Pastorals the noun δεσπότης is used.

⁸² *A Home for the Homeless* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 206; also Selwyn, *1 Peter*, 175.

⁸³ Verner suggests that duties of children and parents were not articulated in the Pastorals in the light of the ascetic tendencies reflected in these epistles, in which widows and widowers chose not to remarry (*The Household of God*, 145).

the Pastorals⁸⁴ and 1 Peter⁸⁵ is an even more curious omission, since both address slaves.⁸⁶ Conversely, elders and young men are directly addressed in 1 Peter, briefly addressed in the Pastorals (1 Tim 5.1; Titus 2.6-7), but not addressed at all in Colossians or Ephesians. Looking beyond the religious community, 1 Peter (2.13-17) and the Pastorals (Titus 3.1; cp. 1 Tim 2.1-2) address the duties of Christians toward governmental authorities, whereas the authors of Colossians and Ephesians are mute on this subject. Unlike the Stoic and other Hellenistic codes, the Colossian code, along

⁸⁴ The majority of modern interpreters have followed the lead of Martin Dibelius (*Die Pastoralbriefe*, HNT 13 [Tübingen: Mohr, 1931] 24-25), who used the term "christliche Bürgerlichkeit" to describe the guiding ethical principle of the Pastorals, in which, based on a delay in the parousia, believers had to learn to exist peacefully in the world (cf. 1 Tim 2.2) by co-operating with the existing social structure. According to this scheme, masters are not addressed in the Pastorals because the ethical goal is peace through accommodation. Thus in the Pastorals godliness (εὐσέβεια) is deferential behaviour which "respects the social structures which make social life possible" (Foerster, "Eusebeia in den Pastoralbriefen," NTS 5 [1958-59] 215; cited by Schrage, *Ethics of the NT*, 260).

Other scholars place great emphasis on the polemical setting of the Pastorals, and conclude that the seemingly lopsided emphasis on the duties of the lower social parties (wives and slaves) stems from the author's attempt to resist Gnostic ascetic and libertine tendencies by reinforcing mundane obligations, including traditional social obligations (Verhey, *The Great Reversal*, 128). Philip Towner emphasises the polemical setting to challenge the longstanding *christliche Bürgerlichkeit* interpretation of the Pastorals. He argues that the motivation for paraenesis in the Pastorals is not the avoidance of conflict (attainment of a quiet, peaceful life) but the attainment of a lifestyle which facilitates "the church's mission by presenting a witness that is generally acceptable to the outsider" (*The Goal of Our Instruction*, 255). He specifically suggests that Christian slaves and women were rejecting the social institutions by which they were defined in that society, and thus for the sake of the church's witness the author of the Pastorals emphasises the responsibilities of slaves and women, not masters and husbands (175-77). Another recent scholar who criticises Dibelius' *christliche Bürgerlichkeit* interpretation based on economic factors is Reggie Kidd (*Wealth and Beneficence in the Pastoral Epistles*, SBLDS 122 [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990] 140-58; 181-94).

⁸⁵ The failure of the author of 1 Peter to address masters, and the slight treatment of the duties of husbands have been variously explained. Selwyn believes the absence of reciprocal duties in 1 Peter to masters and slaves suggests the believers addressed in Colossians and Ephesians had a higher social status than the believers addressed in 1 Peter (*First Peter*, 431). The strong emphasis in 1 Peter on loving the brotherhood (1.22; 2.17; 3.8) and loving one's enemies (2.18-24; 3.9, 16-18) undercuts this hypothesis, clearly implying that slaves, particularly Christian slaves, should be treated with kindness and love regardless of their social status. Best offers a more optimistic explanation, and suggests that conflicts between master and slaves may not have arisen if whole households, including slaves, were converted. Thus the author of 1 Peter perhaps trusted Christian masters "would automatically treat their slaves correctly" (*1 Peter*, NCB [London: Oliphants, 1971] 117). This explanation is unconvincing, since the author of 1 Peter does address husbands and elders, and apparently does not simply assume that they would automatically act correctly. J. Ramsey Michaels suggests masters are not addressed because some of the readers are slaves but few, if any, are masters (*1 Peter*, WBC [Waco, TX: Word, 1988] 122). This explanation is possible but seems improbable. His explanation for the omission of parent/child duties is more plausible: the emphasis in 1 Peter is on belief/unbelief, issues which are not normally confronted in parent/child relationships (122). Lohse offers a more convincing explanation for the omission of duties to masters: Peter's focus is on the believer suffering injustice, a theme hardly applicable to masters in relationship to slaves ("Paraenesis and Kerygma in 1 Peter," in *Perspectives on First Peter*, ed. by Charles Talbert [Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1986] 44). Balch offers a similar explanation, and argues that masters are not addressed and husbands are given little address because the focus in 1 Peter is on suffering, particularly at the hands of non-Christian members of the household (*Let Wives Be Submissive*, 96).

⁸⁶ H. Gülzow cites this as evidence that the slave position in the communities represented by these epistles had worsened compared to the position reflected in Colossians and Ephesians (*Christentum und Sklaverei in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* [Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1969] 74, cited by Verner, *The Household of God*, 141). Even if this explanation is correct, it still does not explain the failure of the authors of the Pastoral Epistles and 1 Peter to take corrective measures to improve the condition and treatment of slaves, at least by Christian masters.

with the rest of the NT household codes, does not address one's duties to God. This is a particularly curious omission, since duties to the gods were commonly given in the secular codes,⁸⁷ and the NT epistles are otherwise replete with references to Christians' duties to God.⁸⁸

B. Function of the Colossian Household Code

In order to gain a thorough understanding of the ground and shape of the Colossian household code, one must consider the function and use of the code within the epistle. Unfortunately, as with the vice/virtue lists, the weight of the discussion has fallen predominantly on the origin of the codes. This is undoubtedly due to the *a priori* assumption that NT paraenesis, particularly traditional material, has little or nothing to do with the occasional setting of the epistle in which it is found. The mere fact that the NT codes are not uniform, but differ from each other, while also differing from secular codes, brings this *a priori* assumption into question. In fact, these differences suggest that individual authors to some extent edited the traditional household code material to suit their own epistolary purposes. As Merk posits, the author of Colossians failed to use several categories of traditional material, including duties to God, one's fatherland, and instructions regarding marriages of convenience ("Geldheirat"), but selected the material he chose based on the needs of the community.⁸⁹

W. Schrage, in an article which has received surprisingly little attention in the discussion of the NT household codes, discusses the implications of the fact that the NT household codes reflect the editing of secular codes. He argues that the NT codes do not reflect fixed *topoi* (immutable ethical kernels which are simply repeated throughout the NT) nor do they reflect a bare *ad hoc* ethic generated entirely from specific occasional situations. Hence they join situation relatedness with tradition relatedness, convention with flexibility.⁹⁰ Given the fact that the NT household codes

⁸⁷ Hierocles, *On Duties* ("How to Conduct Oneself Toward the Gods") 1.3.53-54; Pseudo-Isocrates, *To Demonicus* 12-15; Pseudo-Plutarch, *The Education of Children* 7DE; Stobaeus, *Anth.* 2.9.7; 1.3.53.

⁸⁸ The complexity of the influences on the Christian household codes is seen in the fact that though the NT codes do not specifically address duties to God, this refrain is found at the beginning of other early Christian *Haustafeln* such as *1 Clem.* 1.3 ("walk in the laws of God"), *1 Clem.* 21.6 ("reverence the Lord Jesus Christ"), and Polycarp, *Phil.* 4.1 ("walk in the commandment of the Lord").

⁸⁹ *Handeln aus Glauben*, 221; cf. also Cruz, *Christological Motives*, 194-95.

⁹⁰ "Die Haustafeln sind also weder ein unwandelbarer Topos neutestamentlicher Ethik-etwa ihr unveränderlicher, unaufgebar Kern, der stereotyp wiederholt worden wäre-noch bieten sie eine bloß aus dem Augenblick heraus entworfene und auf einmalige Situationen zugeschnittene ad-hoc-Ethik. Sie verbinden vielmehr Traditions- mit Situationsbezogenheit, Konvention mit Flexibilität" ("Zur Ethik der neutestamentlichen Haustafeln," *NTS* 21 [1975] 3-4).

are largely or entirely composed of traditional material, he says every admonition in a given code cannot be explained in terms of the occasional setting. Schrage concludes "so fragt es sich umso mehr, was der Anlaß zur Bildung der Haustafeln als ganzer war."⁹¹ This brings us to the cardinal question of the function of the entire household code in Colossians. The following seven proposals have been given regarding the function of the Colossian household code.

1. To Correct Misunderstandings of the New Life in Christ (Gal 3.28)

An obvious discrepancy exists between Paul's statement in Gal 3.28 that in Christ, ethnic, social, and gender distinctions have been abolished, and the injunctions contained in the household codes which are predicated on gender, age, and social status. Some have sought to resolve this tension by asserting that the NT household codes were given to correct misunderstandings of the nature of the Christian life and Christian freedom. Some early believers are said to have abandoned their earthly responsibilities by appealing to texts such as Gal 3.28, and thus the household codes were given to congregations struggling with these misunderstandings in order to clarify their ongoing responsibilities in the present world.⁹² The fact that Col 3.11, shortly before the household code is given, affirms most of the Gal 3.28 pronouncement is said to evidence that fact that Gal 3.28 was still an important issue for this congregation.⁹³

James Crouch argues that the Christian *Haustafel* appeared rather late in the early Christian church. He believes this observation, combined with his thesis that no non-Christian code can be found which contains the same concerns as the household codes found in the NT, suggests that a situation in the Hellenistic churches precipitated the formation of a Christian *Haustafel*.⁹⁴ He begins to identify the specific situation which engendered the Christian household codes by noting that the code demanded that subordinate members conform to the accepted social standards for relationships. 1 Cor 7.20 is then identified as a pivotal text on the development of the household code, for it is Paul's call to those in an inferior position to remain in that state.⁹⁵ Largely based on his examination of 1 Cor 7, 11, 14 which deal with women and slaves, Crouch believes

⁹¹ Ethik der neutestamentlichen Haustafeln," 4.

⁹² Schweizer states "it is likely that a misunderstanding of the Pauline proclamation about freedom could have played an important role in these [household] rules being introduced" (*Colossians*, 215).

⁹³ Schweizer, *Colossians*, 215.

⁹⁴ *The Colossian Haustafel*, 120.

⁹⁵ *The Colossian Haustafel*, 122.

the early Hellenistic church developed enthusiastic, pneumatic tendencies based on texts such as Gal 3.28.⁹⁶ Thus the early church, including the author of Colossians, responded to this threat to church order by incorporating *Haustafeln* in the paraenetical teachings to provide a corrective against pneumatological excesses and misunderstandings of the believers' (especially women and slaves) freedom in Christ.⁹⁷ He furthermore argues that the Colossian household code evidences an intermediate stage between 1 Corinthians and the Pastorals, a stage in which "a fixed form was created for the purpose of providing Christian teachers with paraenetic material for use in combatting the the excesses created by an overemphasis on the equality created by the Spirit."⁹⁸

Crouch's contention that the Colossians were struggling with pneumatological excesses based on a misunderstanding of their freedom in Christ finds little or no support in Colossians, an epistle which says exceedingly little about the Spirit. Furthermore, based on the warnings against ascetic practice in 2.20-22, it would appear that the Colossians were struggling not with a desire for excessive freedom, but with excessive regulation and inappropriate submission. Finally, research on slavery in 1 Corinthians by Scott Bartchy⁹⁹ brings into question some of Crouch's foundational assumptions, particularly his contention that 1 Cor 7.20-21 evidences the fact that Corinthian slaves were seeking their freedom,¹⁰⁰ and thus the household codes were given as a corrective to help slaves and women accept their traditional social positions.

Bartchy argues that Paul's description of the Corinthians indicates that their pneumatological excesses were not impairing the relationship between Christian slaves and masters, and thus there is no evidence that slaves were misunderstanding their freedom in Christ to include freedom from their earthly master.¹⁰¹ He argues that Gal 3.28 is partially cited in 1 Cor 12.13, but in the light of the fact that there was unrest among the Corinthian women regarding their freedom in the church (cf. 11.2-16; 14.34-36), the male/female phrase from Gal 3.28 is dropped. The fact that the slave/free phrase is retained in 1 Cor 12.13, along with strong historical evidence that

⁹⁶ *The Colossian Haustafel*, 140-41; cf. also Schweizer, *Colossians*, 215.

⁹⁷ "Reduced to its essential imperative, the *Haustafel* demands of its subordinate members that they conform to the standards of society in their various relationships. As Christians, they are to play the role which society expects of them" (*The Colossian Haustafel*, 122). Carrington (*Traditional Materials*, 129) and Yates ("A Reappraisal of Colossians," 110-11), also accept Crouch's model of the function of the Colossian household code.

⁹⁸ *The Colossian Haustafel*, 141.

⁹⁹ ΜΑΑΑΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ. *First-Century Slavery and 1 Corinthians 7.21*, SBLDS 11 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1973).

¹⁰⁰ *The Colossian Haustafel*, 124.

¹⁰¹ *First-Century Slavery*, 129-31.

there was little or no general unrest among slaves of the first century¹⁰² shows that the Corinthian slaves were not seeking liberation due to a misunderstanding of their freedom in Christ. Thus Paul was able to use the issues of circumcision/uncircumcision and slavery/freedom in 1 Cor 7.21-24 because they were not problem issues, as a means of addressing the real problem (women misunderstanding their proper social standing in view of their freedom in Christ—cf. 1 Cor 11.2-16; 14.34-36).

2. To Develop the New Life in Christ (Gal 3.28) through the *Οἶκος*

Instead of viewing the household code as a clarification of misunderstandings of Christian freedom expressed in Gal 3.28, Rengstorf believes the household code is the logical outgrowth of Gal 3.28.¹⁰³ This is primarily based on his view of the household code as an expression of Christian *οἶκος*¹⁰⁴ (in spite of the fact that the NT itself never identifies the household codes as such). While he is correct that in the earlier codes (Colossians and Ephesians) all the individuals addressed are members of the household, it does not follow that the NT codes are primarily an expression of *οἶκος*, emphasising the man as head of the household. In actuality, he misses the fact that the codes emphasise not the dominant individual (husband, father, master—which he asserts is the same person) but the subordinate individuals (wives, children, slaves).

3. To Remind the Readers of Their Baptismal Catechesis

Carrington maintains that a primitive apostolic baptismal catechism can be reconstructed from Colossians by isolating material with a certain pattern found in Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, Thessalonians, and 1 Peter, and omitting certain formulae in Colossians which are typically (and uniquely) Pauline. In this reconstruction, Col 3.5-7 is identified as the Levitical prologue; 3.8, 12-17 as the *deponentes*; 3.18-4.1 as the *subjecti*; 4.2-3, 5 as the *vigilate*; and 4.13 as the *state*.¹⁰⁵ All NT household codes are termed "codes of subordination." The function, then of the household code in Colossians is to remind the readers of their baptismal catechism, and thus to spur them on in their Christian life. Several problems with this thesis were noted in the last chapter, though Crouch identifies some additional problems with identifying

¹⁰² *First-Century Slavery*, 82-87.

¹⁰³ "Die neutestamentlichen Mahnungen an die Frau," 140-41.

¹⁰⁴ "Die neutestamentlichen Mahnungen die Frau," 136-44.

¹⁰⁵ *Primitive Christian Catechism*, 92-93.

the Colossian household code as the *subjecti* portion of a baptismal catechism.¹⁰⁶ To begin with, much of the material in the NT household codes does not deal with submission. Furthermore, Carrington's attempt to overcome this objection appears to be a case of special pleading, for he maintains that the code of submission (except in James) implies submission to the elders,¹⁰⁷ in spite of the fact that nowhere in the entire epistles of Colossians/Ephesians is there any implicit or explicit reference to submission to elders. In fact, the noun *πρεσβύτερος*, while used five times in the Pastoral Epistles, is entirely absent from Colossians and Ephesians. This same pattern occurs with the term *ἐπίσκοπος*, which is used twice in the Pastoral Epistles, and is absent from Colossians and Ephesians.¹⁰⁸

4. To Distinguish Christian From Non-Christian Behaviour

J. T. Sanders believes the Colossian vice/virtue lists and household code were given to mark Christian from non-Christian behaviour.¹⁰⁹ He quickly adds, however, that this was a futile effort since the Colossian vice/virtue lists and household code enjoin behaviour which is indistinguishable from that advocated by Hellenistic moral philosophers.¹¹⁰ Sanders ultimately attributes this supposedly futile effort by the author of Colossians to the assumption, garnered from Paul, that the Christian is to be ethically different and visibly Christian.

Even if for the sake of argument one agrees that the Colossian vice/virtue lists and household code are virtually indistinguishable from Hellenistic popular morality (a premise which I do not accept in its entirety), Sanders has ignored the role of motivation in distinguishing ethical models, since two ethical views can be materially similar but qualitatively different due to divergent motivations. To give a modern example, religious fundamentalists and many feminists have a similar ethic with respect to pornography—it is socially harmful, often leads to the devaluing of and even violence against women, and is morally wrong. At the same time, religious fundamentalists and feminists have such different (even antithetical) bases for their prohibition against pornography, that these are truly two different ethical models of

¹⁰⁶ *The Colossian Haustafel*, 16-18.

¹⁰⁷ *Primitive Christian Catechism*, 38-39.

¹⁰⁸ The noun *ποιμήν* is used once in Eph 4.11, and nowhere else in the books in question. In Ephesians it is used in a discussion of the edification of the body through the equipping ministry of pastors and teachers; the issue of submission is not addressed or implied.

¹⁰⁹ *Ethics*, 69-80.

¹¹⁰ *Ethics*, 73-75.

pornography. Furthermore, there is nothing in the Colossian household code to suggest that the author believed adherence to the code would necessarily evidence behaviour distinct from that advocated by many Hellenistic moral philosophers or commonly practised by Gentiles (contra Eph 4.17).

5. To Clarify Christian Living in the Present World

Other scholars acknowledge with Sanders that the behaviour commanded in the Colossian household code is not materially distinct from ancient Hellenistic moral philosophy. They argue, however, that the author of Colossians understood this, and capitalised on it. E. Schweizer, in particular, argues that in view of the ascetic tendencies of the Colossian opponents, the author of Colossians wanted to clarify the nature of everyday life in the world.¹¹¹ Thus he developed a theology of "good worldiness" and used the household code to elucidate "whatever one does in word or deed" (3. 17). He states,

New Testament house-tables have, probably, been formed first against the danger of an actual delusion about the baptized as living already in heaven, so that this world and its needs would be of no importance at all for Christians. In the Colossian church, to which this first house-table is addressed, asceticism was highly praised as a means to keep the soul as pure as possible from all contact with the world and its elements, and to enable it to ascend, after having left the earthly and material body, through all four elements to heaven.¹¹²

Schweizer is in my opinion correct in his assessment of the Colossian opponents, and the role asceticism played in attaining heavenly revelations, but unfortunately, he does not relate other aspects of the Colossian opposition to the function of the household code. While the household code does seem to clarify Christian living in this world (cf. esp. the import of 3.17), this model needs further development in the light of the Christological statements in the Colossian code and in the light of the polemical emphasis in Colossians on the lordship of Christ.¹¹³

¹¹¹ "Traditional Ethical Patterns in the Pauline and Post-Pauline Letters and Their Development (Lists of Vices and House-Tables)," in *Text and Interpretation*, FS Matthew Black, ed. by E. Best and R. Wilson (Cambridge: CUP, 1979) 203, 207-208; also William Lillie, "The Pauline House-Tables," *ExpTim* 86 (1974-75) 181; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 218-19.

¹¹² "Traditional Ethical Patterns," 203.

¹¹³ In his brief comments on the function of the Colossian household code, O'Brien does integrate Schweizer's proposal with the polemical setting, and concludes that the code is given to correct the opponents' ascetic tendencies, and to demonstrate how one lives out the lordship of Christ in mundane, daily living (*Colossians*, 218-19).

6. To Harmonise Christian and Non-Christian Behaviour (Apologetical Function)

Dibelius and Weidinger argued that the NT household codes emerged after an obvious delay in the parousia, when the early church had to grapple with ongoing life in this world. Thus Christianised Stoic household codes were supposedly given to help the church live comfortably with the non-Christian world. While this model of a Stoic source for the NT codes has been shown to have numerous flaws, other scholars have modified the hypothesis, placing less stress on the precise origin of the code and emphasising its general function. They assert that the NT household codes primarily have an apologetical function, for they contain traditional Hellenistic social ethics, and hence demonstrate to a hostile world that Christianity does not disturb the social order, particularly in the event that a wife or slave becomes a Christian.¹¹⁴

Graeco-Roman social mores stipulated that the members of the household (children, wives, slaves) were to worship the gods of the *paterfamilias*. Thus the conversion of household members whose *paterfamilias* was not a Christian, violated the social order and could seriously impair the Christian witness in society. The basis for Roman animus toward Judaism was that Judaism disrupted the social order, exciting individuals to abandon the traditional worship, and renounce their family duties. Tacitus charges,

For the worst rascals among other peoples, renouncing their ancestral religions, always kept sending tribute and contributions to Jerusalem...Those who are converted to their ways follow the same practice [i.e., of hating other peoples, being immoral, adopting circumcision], and the earliest lesson they receive is to despise the gods, to disown their country, and to regard their parents, children, and brothers as of little account.¹¹⁵

Philo and Josephus' rejoinder to this attack against Judaism and the Jewish race involved the assertion that the law taught female inferiority and consequent female submissiveness.¹¹⁶ In other words, the Jewish defense was that far from dissolving the traditional Graeco-Roman social order (based on Aristotelian patriarchy), Judaism affirmed it. In a similar manner, many scholars assert that the NT household codes demonstrated that Christianity was generally (with the obvious exception of duties to

¹¹⁴ Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive*, 81-116; Fiorenza, "Christian Mission and the Patriarchal Order of the Household," in *Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM, 1983) 251-84; Goppelt, *Theology of the NT*, 2.169-70; Malherbe, "Hellenistic Moralists and the NT," 307-13; Towner, *The Goal of Our Instruction*, 172.

¹¹⁵ *History* 5.5, cited by Fiorenza, "Christian Mission and the Patriarchal Order," 264.

¹¹⁶ Josephus, *Cont. Ap.* 2.199; Philo, *Hyp.* 7.3, 5.

the gods) not a threat to the existing social order, for they affirmed the rule of *paterfamilias*.

This model seems particularly likely with respect to 1 Peter¹¹⁷ and possibly the Pastoral Epistles,¹¹⁸ for these letters repeatedly relate the household codes to the Christian witness,¹¹⁹ and enjoin wives and slaves to patiently submit, even to non-Christian or unjust superiors.¹²⁰ Thus as Fiorenza notes "Christian slaves and wives, by being submissive and obedient to their 'lords,' can prove that the slanders against Christians are unjustified. Christians are not enemies of the Roman political order, but they support it."¹²¹

The suggestion that the household code serves apologetically to harmonise Christian and non-Christian behaviour seems less likely, however, to explain fully the use of the household code in Colossians, though the fact that the Colossian household code reflects traditional Hellenistic social ethics suggests that this may be one of its functions. Nowhere in the Colossian code is the issue of the Christian witness clearly stated, nor is submission to non-Christian or unjust superiors addressed. Rather, the traditional social order is simply given a Christological basis.¹²² For example, the household code in 1 Peter is prefaced in 2.12 by a command to keep one's behaviour excellent among the Gentiles so that their slander will be proven false. The code in 1 Pet 2.13-3.7 then delineates the excellent, testimony enhancing behaviour in terms of household relationships (cf. esp. 2.15, 20; 3.1-2). The code in Titus¹²³ is prefaced in 1.15-16 by a description of the defiled false teachers whose behaviour evidences the fact that they actually deny the true God. The code in Tit 2.1-10; 3.1 then describes the household behaviour which evidences orthodoxy (cf. esp. 2.5, 7-8, 10). The Colossian

¹¹⁷ Contra Elliott (*A Home for the Homeless*) who emphasises the apocalyptic dualism of 1 Peter, and argues that the writer promotes the cessation of previous relationships, not harmonious integration into society.

¹¹⁸ Cf. especially Towner (*The Goal of Our Instruction*) for he relates the entire structure of theology and ethics (including the household codes) in the Pastorals to the enhancement of Christian witness.

¹¹⁹ 1 Tim 3.7; 6.1; Titus 2.8; 1 Pet 2.13-15; 3.1-2.

¹²⁰ 1 Pet 2.18-25; 3.1.

¹²¹ "Christian Mission and the Patriarchal Order," 266.

¹²² This observation suggests that Lone Fatum's conclusions, while disquieting to many, are at least partially correct. In an article which questions feminist reconstructions of early Christianity and proposes that deconstruction must be carried out with utter consistency until all androcentric values and patriarchal strategies are fully exposed, she argues that "Christian faith and interpretation are rooted in androcentric structures of symbolic values, transmitted and institutionalized through patriarchal organization" ("Women, Symbolic Universe and Structures of Silence. Challenges and Possibilities in Androcentric Texts," *ST* 43 [1989] 62).

¹²³ Some contend that there is too much dissimilarity between this passage and the household codes in Colossians and 1 Peter to call this a household code (Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988] 191). Nevertheless, most scholars recognise the characteristics of a household code here and label it such (Towner, *The Goal of Our Instruction*, 169-99; Verner, *The Household of God*, 91-107).

code, however, is prefaced by a call to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. The code then develops this Christocentric behaviour in terms of household relationships.

If one takes the entire epistle of Colossians into account, the identity of the opponents, and the preface to the code in 3.17, the Colossian household code does not appear primarily to have an apologetical purpose of harmonising Christian and non-Christian behaviour. The primary purpose appears to be the clarification of specific aspects of Christ's lordship in the context of the Colossian opponents.

7. To Clarify the Nature of Christ's Lordship over His Church

Robert Nash's discussion of the function of the Colossian household code takes the Colossian opponents and the resulting Christological emphasis found throughout the Colossian epistle fully into account. Nash argues that the Colossian household code "illuminated the nature of Christ's lordship over the church."¹²⁴ Nash uses several different arguments to arrive at this conclusion. The arguments deal with literary structure, social setting, and polemical occasion. First of all, Nash assesses the literary structure of Colossians to determine the function of the *Haustafel* in its rhetorical setting.¹²⁵ He concludes that 2.6-7 is the *propositio* (basic premise of the argument) of Colossians, and *exempla* are given in 3.5-4.6 to give concrete application to the *propositio*. The *propositio* is repeated in 3.17 with the call to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. A final *exemplum* is given in the form of a household code in 3.18-4.1. Thus the household code serves to clarify and illustrate the nature of Christ's lordship.

Nash's use of the literary structure of Colossians to support the thesis that the Colossian household code serves to clarify the nature of Christ's lordship is cogent. In my previous chapter "Christology and Ethics" it was determined that 2.6-7 is a foundational text for ethics in Colossians, for it is a pivotal polemical statement given in response to the Christological threat exposed in 2.3-4, 8. More specifically, the phrase "Christ Jesus the Lord" in v. 6 is a proclamation of Jesus' cosmic lordship in the light of competing entities. In saying "as therefore you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him" (2.6), the writer indicates that Christ's cosmic lordship should govern all behaviour. While no elaborate lists of virtuous or appropriate behaviour commensurate with Christ's lordship are given in chs. 1-2, they are found in 3.5-4.1.

¹²⁴ "The Role of the *Haustafeln*," 300.

¹²⁵ "The Role of the *Haustafeln*," 156-180, esp. 177-80.

Most significant in this regard is 3.17 ("do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus"), which is a restatement of the *propositio* of 2.6. This verse (3.17), lays the foundation for the household code which immediately follows,¹²⁶ for the code identifies specific ways in the household, the most significant and foundational social institution, one can "do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus." Thus the structure of Colossians does indicate that the Colossian *haustafel* is given to clarify Christ's lordship over the church.

A comparison of the language of the various NT household codes strengthens Nash's argument that the structure of Colossians reveals the code clarifies Christ's lordship. In spite of the fact that the other NT household codes are similar in content, those found in the Pastoral Epistles and 1 Peter are much more theocentric, whereas the codes of Colossians/Ephesians are decidedly Christocentric. For example, the divine appellation θεός is used nine times in the code of 1 Peter (2.15, 16, 17, 19, 20; 3.4, 5; 5.2, 5), whereas it is entirely absent from the Colossian code, which instead uses the noun κύριος seven times to refer to Christ (3.18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 24; 4.1) (a premise I will demonstrate in the following section on the Christological basis of the Colossian code). 1 Peter urges slaves to be submissive, in part based on the fact that it reflects a proper conscience toward God (2.19) and submission finds favor with God (2.19). The author of 1 Timothy urges slaves to honour their masters so that the name of God will not be defamed (6.1), and the author of Titus urges slaves to submit and be honest so that they may adorn the doctrine of God,¹²⁷ whereas the author of Colossians tells slaves to submit out of fear of the Lord (Christ—3.22), knowing that Christ the Lord will recompense faithful earthly service (3.23-24). The author of Titus urges wives to submit to their husbands so that the word of God will not be dishonoured (2.5). The author of 1 Peter explains that a wife's gentle, quiet (submissive) spirit is precious in the sight of God (3.4), whereas the author of Colossians says wives should submit to their husbands because this is fitting in the Lord (Christ) (3.18). This differing terminology is a distinction with a difference, and shows that the lordship of Christ is emphasised in the Colossian code in a unique way through the literary structure of the epistle and language of the code itself.

¹²⁶ Wolter comments on 3.17 "Der Verf. des Kol will mit dieser Ausweitung der Perspektive sicherstellen, daß sich das »Wandeln im Herrn« (2,6) über die in den vorstehenden Versen genannten innergemeindlichen Konkretionen hinaus auch auf *alle* anderen Lebensbezüge erstreckt" (*Kolosser*, 191).

¹²⁷ θεός in this verse is further described as "our saviour" (τὸν σωτήρος ἡμῶν), but the description of God as saviour in 1.3 evidences the fact that this phrase refers to God the Father, not to Christ.

Nash's second argument is a bit weaker, but worth citing. He argues that the social structure of Colossians evidences the function of the household code as a clarification of Christ's lordship. He notes that 4.5-6 demonstrates the fact that entrance into the church brought a degree of separation from one's previous social context. Various passages in Colossians address the distinctions between life in the new group of which Christ is the head, and the former group (1.13, 21-22; 2.20; 3.7-11; 4.5). The household unit was a basic unit of society at this time, and had become a primary sphere of life in the early church. Thus "when the author of Colossians sought to explicate what it meant to 'do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,' he did so in terms of household relationships."¹²⁸

Finally, Nash notes the polemical occasion of Colossians. There was some kind of perceived threat that the Colossians might submit to human teachings, which would be a departure from submission to Christ. Thus in the light of the Christological threat posed by the Colossian opponents, the author clarified the nature of Christ's lordship as it relates to life in the household. This argument is made considerably stronger by our findings regarding the polemical setting of Colossians, viz., that the Colossians were being implored to submit to the cosmic spirits. The author repeatedly emphasises the cosmic scope of Christ's lordship in Colossians (1.15-20; 2.9-10, 14-15, 20-21), and in the paraenesis relates Christ's lordship to the believers' moral behaviour (1.10; 2.6; 3.11, 17). In the Colossian *haustafel*, the writer again places strong emphasis on the lordship of Christ (3.18, 20, 22, 23; 4.1), and demonstrates how the realm of Christ's rule relates to the household, one of the most basic social institutions.

Schrage independently argues that the purpose of the Colossian *Hauptafel* is to clarify the nature of Christ's lordship over his church. He supports this assertion by also appealing to literary structure and polemical occasion. He states,

It is not by chance that the first *Hauptafel* appears in Colossians, whose author attacks the ascetic demands and taboos of the Colossian heretics by demythologizing the cosmos and proclaiming the victory of *kyrios* Jesus over the principalities and powers. This lordship of Jesus Christ is meant to be realized within the Christian household...The purpose of the [Colossian] *Hauptafel* is therefore to subject the life of Christians to the lordship of Christ within the institutions of the secular world.¹²⁹

In summary, I concur with Nash that the purpose of the Colossian household code is to clarify the nature of Christ's lordship over the church. More specifically, the literary structure of Colossians, the Christological language of the household code, the

¹²⁸ "The Role of the *Hauptafel*," 200.

¹²⁹ *Ethics of the New Testament*, 252.

social structure of Colossians, and the polemical occasion all support the thesis that the function of the Colossian code was the clarification of Christ's lordship over the church. The following section will further strengthen this premise by demonstrating that the basis for the Colossian household code is decidedly Christological.

C. Basis for Colossian Household Codes: Christology

Sanders and Beare believe there is a very tenuous Christian basis for the Colossian household code. Beare states,

We cannot fail to be struck by the meagerness of the instruction given to the different family groups, and by the entire lack of appeal to any Christian motive in the exhortations to husbands and to fathers, and the indefiniteness and generality of the Christian motivation adduced in the address to wives and to children.¹³⁰

Both Beare and Sanders base this conclusion on the observation that the content of the Colossian household code is not originally or uniquely Christian, which they in turn attribute to a softening of eschatological imminence. One wonders, however, whether they have *a priori* ruled out the possibility of a Christian basis for this ethical material.¹³¹ Sanders claims the indicative portion of the indicative/imperative in Col 3 functions by a *tour de force*, and is artificial.¹³² Furthermore, the Christological basis for the duties of husbands in Eph 5.25-33 fails to create a truly household code,¹³³ and even the appeal to fearing the Lord in Col 3.22 does not provide a Christian ethic which will help one "bring this life into harmony with the life beyond."¹³⁴ In short, it seems that no amount of evidence in Colossians would satisfy Sanders that the author has given clear Christian theological bases for the household code. On the contrary, the household code portion of Colossians contains more statements of Christological *Begründung* than any other paraenetical section of similar length in the entire epistle.

In spite of the fact that there are few material differences between the Colossian household code and Hellenistic codes of the same period, a strong Christological basis is given for the Colossian code, making it distinctively Christian. Margaret MacDonald notes the traditional, yet Christian nature of the NT household codes:

¹³⁰ *Interpreter's Bible* 11.226; Sanders, *Ethics*, 73-76.

¹³¹ Sanders states "the *Haustafeln*, by the same token do not mark off Christian existence from non-Christian existence, since the regulations are by and large derived from non-Christian sources" (*Ethics*, 75).

¹³² *Ethics*, 69.

¹³³ *Ethics*, 74-75.

¹³⁴ *Ethics*, 75.

Paul's recommendations with respect to women and slaves illustrate how firmly he is rooted in Greco-Roman society. Although he does not make revolutionary recommendations with respect to male/female relations and slave/master relations, he does seek to reinterpret these relations according to new life in Christ.¹³⁵

If the Colossian household code serves to clarify the nature of Christ's lordship over his church, then upon close examination, one would expect to recognise a strong Christological basis for the Colossian code, which is exactly what is found. In fact, there are three types of Christological motives in the Colossian household code¹³⁶: (1) the ἐν κυρίῳ motive (vv. 18, 20); (2) reward by Christ motive (vv. 23-24); (3) fear/judgment by Christ motive (3.22; 4.1).

1. The ἐν κυρίῳ Motive (vv. 18, 20)

Twice in the early portion of the Colossian household code the writer uses the phrase ἐν κυρίῳ as the basis for the stated household duties. Some exegetes such as Lohmeyer deny the Christological significance of this phrase by asserting that it refers to God the Father, and not to Christ.¹³⁷ Other scholars such as Crouch minimise the significance of the ἐν κυρίῳ phrase in the Colossian household code. While Crouch ostensibly recognises that ἐν κυρίῳ and ἐν Χριστῷ are significant concepts in the Pauline and deuterio-Pauline literature, he minimises their import in the Colossian *Haustafel*, arguing that "the addition of ἐν κυρίῳ does not change the content of ethical exhortations. It merely designates the area in which they apply... The addition of ἐν κυρίῳ merely demonstrates that the requirements of the social order are in effect not only in society but also ἐν κυρίῳ."¹³⁸ On the contrary, while the use of ἐν κυρίῳ in the Colossian code does not effect major changes in the material content, it does give it an entirely different basis and motivation. Thus I agree with Moule who notes that the entire household was "transformed in the Lord."¹³⁹ Curiously, Crouch places great emphasis on pneumatological excess in the Hellenistic churches, including the Colossian church, even though so little is said about the Spirit in Colossians that many believe this omission argues against Pauline authorship. Furthermore, in an epistle

¹³⁵ *The Pauline Churches. A Socio-historical Study of Institutionalization in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Writings* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988) 104.

¹³⁶ This is a variation of Cruz's catalogue of Christological motives (*Christological Motives*, 196).

¹³⁷ *Kolosser*, 158, 160.

¹³⁸ *The Colossian Hausafel*, 154-55.

¹³⁹ *Colossians*, 128.

which repeatedly grounds paraenesis in Christology, Crouch seriously de-emphasises the role of Christology. It appears that he develops these twin misconceptions largely due to his failure to analyse the Colossian opponents.¹⁴⁰

There are several cogent reasons for understanding the ἐν κυρίῳ phrase in Col 3.18, 20 as a reference to Christ: (1) As has already been noted, the broad polemical context involves an emphasis on the person and work of Christ who is superior to the cosmic powers. Thus we would expect references to κύριος to refer to Christ, as they clearly do in 1.3, 10; 2.6; 3.17. (2) The restatement of the *propositio* in 3.17 involves an explicit reference to doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. This statement of Christology sets the stage for the succeeding household code, and strongly suggests that the κύριος motivational statements which follow are Christological. (3) In v. 24 κύριος must be Christological, for it is modified by the noun Χριστός. This again suggests that the other κύριος statements in the household code are Christological. (4) The phrase ἐν κυρίῳ is commonly used Christologically in Pauline paraenesis (including Colossians and Ephesians), to describe what a believer is to do or be in relationship to Christ¹⁴¹ and is also used in the Pauline literature of the believer's union with Christ.¹⁴² Thus in keeping with this pattern, we would expect its use in Col 3.18, 20 to be Christological.

In terms of the specific use of the phrase ἐν κυρίῳ in Col 3.18, 20, in both verses the individuals in a subservient social position (wives/children) are admonished to submit to their social superior (husbands/parents) because this is deemed appropriate or obligatory "in the Lord." In 3.18, the submission of the wife is enjoined based on it being "fitting in the Lord" (ὡς ἀνήκειν ἐν κυρίῳ). The use of the verb ἀνήκω to give the basis for this domestic ethic may have Stoic or at least Hellenistic roots.¹⁴³ The term

¹⁴⁰ Crouch writes less than a page on the Colossian opponents (*The Colossian Haustafel*, 151), and suggests that the omission of women in Col 3.11 supports his thesis that the writer of Colossians was contending with enthusiastic excesses. This explanation fails to explain the affirmation of the spiritual equality of slaves and free in the same verse. Curiously, in a monograph on the Colossian *Haustafel* Crouch devotes considerable attention to the occasional setting of 1 Corinthians, and to the significance of various Pauline passages such as 1 Cor 7, 11 and Gal 3.28, but examines virtually no verses in Colossians other than 3.18-4.1. As G. B. Caird notes in a review of *The Origin and Intention of the Colossian Haustafel* "considering that the *Haustafel* with which it is concerned appears in Colossians, the book makes singularly little reference to that epistle" (*JTS* 25 [1974] 177).

¹⁴¹ Bouttier, *En Christ* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1962) 54-61; Moule, *Origin of Christology*, 58-59; Rom 16.2; 2 Cor 10.17; Eph 6.10; Phil 3.1; 4.2, 4; 1 Thess 3.8.

¹⁴² Rom 16.8, 11; 1 Cor 4.17; 9.2; Eph 2.21; 5.8; Phil 1.14; Col 4.7, 17; 1 Thess 5.12.

¹⁴³ Bruce, *Colossians*, 164; Lohse, *Colossians*, 158 n. 23; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 222; H. Schlier, "ἀνήκει, καθήκω," *TDNT* 3.437-40; Aristotle 227; Pseudo Phocylides 80. Lohse argues that the use of τὸ ἀνήκον to indicate "that which is proper" came into Christian paraenesis through Hellenistic moral philosophy mediated through the Hellenistic synagogues. Bruce, O'Brien, Schlier *et al.* believe it was a Stoic influence.

ἀνήκω indicates that which is fitting or proper.¹⁴⁴ It is often used in a legal context,¹⁴⁵ and in the NT indicates that which is morally obligatory.¹⁴⁶ The inflected form ἀνῆκεν found in Col 3.18 is an unexpected use of the imperfect tense,¹⁴⁷ and probably indicates that behind the present duty ("as is fitting") "lies a past determination of what was proper."¹⁴⁸ In other words, the past tense used here possibly "implies an essential *a priori* obligation."¹⁴⁹

The precise meaning of the phrase ἐν κυρίῳ in Col 3.18, and the manner in which it modifies ὡς ἀνῆκεν is debated. Patzia believes it has a broad metaphorical meaning, and indicates that the submission of wives "is the Christian thing to do."¹⁵⁰ Harris and Schweizer believe its meaning is not metaphorical but quite literal, and indicates that Christ is the criterion for determining what is fitting or proper behaviour in the family.¹⁵¹ While the author of Colossians obviously believed submission of wives was "the Christian thing to do," and Col 3.13 makes Christ the standard for behaviour, an analysis of the use of ἐν κυρίῳ phrases in the Pauline literature (including Colossians and Ephesians) renders these two interpretations improbable.

While ἐν κυρίῳ is found commonly in the Pauline literature (40 times) with a fairly broad range of meanings, there is a repeated use similar to the Pauline use of ἐν Χριστῷ¹⁵², in which the phrase indicates the believers' union with Christ, particularly corporate union with other believers. For example, in Rom 16.11 Paul uses this phrase to contrast one's spiritual family (which results from corporate union with Christ) with

¹⁴⁴ BAG, s.v. ἀνήκω; Schlier, "ἀνήκω," *TDNT* 1.360

¹⁴⁵ Schlier (*TDNT* 1.360) notes that in the LXX, ἀνήκει is almost always used in a political or legal sense (1 Ki 27.8; 1 Macc 10.42; 11.35; 2 Macc 14.8). This legal sense is present in Matt 23.23, where it is used to indicate obligation to the weightier matters of Mosaic law (cf. also Phlm 8).

¹⁴⁶ Cruz, *Christological Motives*, 197. This is particularly clear in Phlm 8, where Paul says he is bold enough "to command you do what is required" (ἐπιτάσσει σοι τὸ ἀνήκον) though he preferred to issue a gentler appeal.

¹⁴⁷ For a survey of the five possible reasons for the use of the imperfect tense here, cf. Harris, *Colossians*, 178-79.

¹⁴⁸ Harris, *Colossians*, 179; cf. also Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 225. This use of the imperfect form ἀνῆκεν can also be seen in Acts 22.22, and possibly Eph 5.4. Burton notes a similar phenomenon with the English term "ought" which can indicate obligation in the past or present (*Moods and Tenses* §32).

¹⁴⁹ Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 227.

¹⁵⁰ *Colossians*, 88. This use of ἐν κυρίῳ, in which it essentially serves as an adjective to indicate "Christian" does have Pauline precedent, for in 1 Cor 3.1 Paul speaks of his children "in Christ" i.e., his Christian children (cf. Moule, *Origin of Christology*, 54).

¹⁵¹ Harris, *Colossians*, 179; Schweizer, *Colossians*, 165.

¹⁵² Stephen Motyer, "The Relationship between Paul's Gospel of 'All One in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3.28) and the 'Household Codes,'" *Vox Evangelica* 19 (1989) 42-43. Michael Parsons notes the diversity of the Pauline use of ἐν Χριστῷ, but argues that "the primary element of the 'in Christ' formula in Paul is that of the objective reality of the individual believer being identified with Christ in his death and resurrection" ("In Christ' in Paul," 32) (cf. 2 Cor 5.17). Parson's statement requires modification, however, for the Pauline ἐν Χριστῷ statements often emphasise not believers' individual, but corporate union with Christ (Rom 1.6; 8.1; 16.7; 1 Cor 15.22; Gal 1.22; 2.4; Eph 2.13; Phil 1.1; 1 Thess 2.14; so Moule, *Origin of Christology*, 54-58).

one's physical family. He states "Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus." In Eph 5.8 the writer uses the phrase to indicate the Ephesians' corporate position in Christ: "once you were darkness, now you are light in the Lord." In Phlmn 16 Paul speaks of common union with Christ by noting that Onesimus is now a beloved brother "in the flesh and in the Lord."¹⁵³ Thus Moule labels ἐν κυρίῳ and ἐν Χριστῷ "incorporative phrases."¹⁵⁴ Union with Christ is a salient theme in Colossians (1.2; 2.10-12; 3.1-3), and most likely what the author had in view in 3.18 with the phrase ἐν κυρίῳ. Numerous exegetes, in fact, affirm this interpretation of ἐν κυρίῳ, and argue that "fitting in the Lord" in this passage refers to behaviour which is appropriate for those who have been united with Christ.¹⁵⁵

In Col 3.20 children are commanded to submit to their parents in everything, based on the fact that this submission is well pleasing in the Lord (γὰρ εὐάρεστόν ἐστιν ἐν¹⁵⁶ κυρίῳ). The adjective εὐάρεστος indicates that which is pleasing or acceptable, and in the Hellenistic Jewish literature and the NT almost always has God or the Lord as the object.¹⁵⁷ It is not entirely clear in this instance whether κύριος refers to God or to Christ. The previous Christological use of ἐν κυρίῳ in v. 18 suggests it might be a Christological reference, whereas the Mosaic ring to this passage (Exod 20.12; Deut 5.16; cp. Eph 6.1-3) suggests it may refer to God. Harris gives three solid reasons for ἐν κυρίῳ referring to Christ. (1) The conceptual link between ἐν κυρίῳ in v. 20 and ἀπὸ κυρίῳ in v. 24, where faithful service to Christ is said to result in receiving an inheritance from the Lord Christ suggests that v. 20 refers to Christ. (2) Throughout the Colossian household code, κύριος is made the Christological basis for behaviour. (3) The Pauline parallel passages in which κύριος is the object of εὐάρεστος (Eph 5.10; 2 Cor 5.8-9) are best understood as Christological references.¹⁵⁸ These arguments suggest that κύριος in v. 20 refers to Christ, though of the seven uses of κύριος in 3.18-4.1, this one has the most debatable referent.

¹⁵³ Cf. also 1 Cor 9.2; Col 4.7, 17; 1 Thess 5.12.

¹⁵⁴ *Origin of Christology*, 54-69.

¹⁵⁵ Bruce, *Colossians*, 289; Ernst, *Kolossier*, 235; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 222-23; Moule, *Colossians*, 129; Pokorný, *Colossians*, 177. Lincoln (*Ephesians*, 157, 241-42) and Moule (*Christology*, 58-60) note that in the Pauline literature, the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ is typically used to describe what believers are in relation to Christ (Rom 12.5; 2 Cor 5.17), whereas ἐν κυρίῳ is used to describe what believers are to do (Eph 6.1, 10) or become (Eph 2.21; 5.8) in relation to him.

¹⁵⁶ There is a variant reading here, for a few cursives and one uncial (0198) read τῷ κυρίῳ, but the manuscript weight rests with the more awkward reading ἐν κυρίῳ.

¹⁵⁷ BAG, s.v. "εὐάρεστος"; Wis 4.10; Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 1.201; *Test. Dan.* 1.3; Rom 12.1; 14.8; 2 Cor 5.9; Eph 5.10; Phil 4.18. Tit 2.9 is the one NT exception, for in this verse human masters are the ones to please.

¹⁵⁸ *Colossians*, 180.

As with v. 18, there are various explanations of ἐν κυρίῳ in v. 20, and the manner in which it relates to εὐάρεστος. Part of the problem with interpreting this phrase is that we would expect not ἐν κυρίῳ but τῷ κυρίῳ to follow εὐάρεστος. Caird offers a very straightforward explanation: ἐν κυρίῳ has a dative function as the indirect object of εὐάρεστος, and indicates that which is well pleasing to the Lord.¹⁵⁹ This suggestion is improbable, however, for the use of the preposition ἐν to introduce an indirect object is extremely rare (cf. 1 Cor 14.11; Gal 1.16). Lightfoot says ἐν κυρίῳ in v. 20 indicates "that which is judged by a Christian standard."¹⁶⁰ This would be a very unusual use of εὐάρεστος, however, for it normally refers to that which pleases God or the Lord. Moule offers a more creative explanation, and says ἐν κυρίῳ is a sort of "conditional clause" which limits the child's obedience to that which has a truly Christian motive.¹⁶¹ He offers 1 Cor 7.39 in support of this view, for in that text remarriage is conditioned by ἐν κυρίῳ, for a widow is free to remarry as long as it is "in the Lord." The ἐν κυρίῳ phrase in 1 Cor 7.39, however, probably refers to the believers' corporate union with Christ, which leads us to the final interpretation of v. 20. Various exegetes argue that it has the same meaning I argued for in v. 18—corporate union with Christ.¹⁶² Thus εὐάρεστόν ἐστιν ἐν κυρίῳ in v. 20 means "obedience to parents is fit and proper in that sphere in which the Christian now lives, that is, in the new fellowship of those who own Christ as Lord."¹⁶³ This view makes the most sense, particularly in the light of the use of ἐν κυρίῳ in v. 18. The use of ἐν instead of τῷ is best explained as an intentional alteration of a traditional formula or maxim.¹⁶⁴

2. Reward by Christ Motive (vv. 23-24)

In addition to urging adherence to the household code based on what is fitting and pleasing to the Lord for those who are in fellowship through their common union with Christ, the author also urges the readers to follow the code based on the fact that Christ would reward them for doing so. Specifically, slaves are instructed to work heartily, as to the Lord (v. 23), since they will receive the reward of the inheritance for

¹⁵⁹ *Colossians*, 209; also RSV, NIV.

¹⁶⁰ *Colossians*, 227.

¹⁶¹ *Colossians*, 130.

¹⁶² Bruce, *Colossians*, 165; Lohse, *Colossians*, 159; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 225; Pokorný, *Colossians*, 181.

¹⁶³ O'Brien, *Colossians*, 225.

¹⁶⁴ Lohse, *Colossians*, 159; Martin, *Colossians*, 120; Merk, *Handeln aus Glauben*, 217; Weidinger, *Haustafeln*, 51.

servicing the Lord Christ (v. 24). The opening phrase of v. 23 "whatever you do" (ὃ ἐὰν ποιῆτε) resumes the theme of v. 17 "and whatever you do in word or deed" (καὶ πᾶν ὃ τι ἐὰν ποιῆτε ἐν λόγῳ ἢ ἐν ἔργῳ) and applies it to the duties of slaves. The Christological ethic of v. 17 ("do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus") is also clearly reiterated in v. 23, for slaves are called to work as to the Lord, and not to men (ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώποις). The conjunction ὡς used here, is often used to introduce a participial clause which gives the subjective motive or cause for the preceding action or admonition.¹⁶⁵ For example, in Luke 16.1 legal charges are brought against a steward because he was wasting his goods (ὡς διασκοπιζῶν τὰ ὑπάρχοντα αὐτοῦ). In 1 Cor 4.18 Paul notes that some of the Corinthians were puffed up because he was (supposedly) not coming (ὡς μὴ ἐρχομένου).¹⁶⁶ In Col 3.23, however, the participle following ὡς is ellipsed, but this phenomenon is well attested in the NT (2 Cor 2.17; Gal 3.16; Eph 6.7; 2 Thess 2.2), and the participle is implied by the context.¹⁶⁷ Thus slaves were to work as to the Lord, i.e., being motivated by Christ. The significance of this Christological motivation is elaborated in v. 24.

In v. 24 the writer appeals to future rewards from Christ as the basis for faithful service to human masters in the present. The verse begins with the phrase εἰδότες ὅτι, which often introduces a known fact which gives the basis for exhortation or affirmation (Rom 5.3; 6.8-9; 2 Cor 4.13-14; 5.6; Col 4.1). Thus εἰδότες serves as a causal participle and gives the basis for the faithful service enjoined in v. 23. In terms of a positive motivation, the writer recalls the fact that they will eventually receive the reward from the Lord. The obvious irony here is that slaves, who legally could not inherit property, are given ethical motivation and called to serve¹⁶⁸ their earthly masters based on the prospect of future heavenly inheritance from the supreme Master ("the Lord Christ"). The unusual title κυρίῳ Χριστῷ has only one parallel usage in the NT (Rom 16.18), and probably serves to contrast the supreme Lord (Christ) with other earthly lords.¹⁶⁹ The reward itself is described appositionally as "the inheritance,"¹⁷⁰ a

¹⁶⁵ Turner, *Grammar*, 158, §3.

¹⁶⁶ For additional uses of this construction, cf. Luke 23.14; Acts 3.12; 2 Cor 5.20; 1 Pet 4.12.

¹⁶⁷ Blass and Debrunner, *Grammar*, §425.4; Robertson, *Grammar*, 1140; Turner, *Grammar*, 158 n. 1.

¹⁶⁸ In light of the absence of γάρ (or another conjunction) it is best to take δουλεύετε as an imperative (so Ernst, *Kolosser*, 237; Martin, *Colossians*, 123; Merk, *Handeln aus Glauben*, 218; Moule, *Colossians*, 131; Lohse, *Colossians*, 161; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 229; contra Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 227; NASV; NIV; RSV, who take it as an indicative).

¹⁶⁹ Lohse, *Colossians*, 161 n. 65; Moule, *Colossians*, 131; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 229.

¹⁷⁰ Robertson, *Grammar*, 498.

theme which has already been discussed in Colossians (1.5, 27; 3.1-4, though only 1.12 uses precise inheritance terminology).

3. Fear/Judgment by Christ Motive (3.25; 4.1; 3.22)

In v. 25 a negative eschatological motivator is given to stimulate slaves¹⁷¹ to serve their masters faithfully, viz., the judgment of the Lord. Schulz contends that the futuristic eschatology found here and in the previous verse (as well as 3.6) is merely an echo of early Christian expectation of the parousia.¹⁷² While differences between the realised eschatology of Colossians and that found in the Pauline *homologoumena* have been noted (in Colossians believers are described as already having been raised with Christ), the fact that paraenesis is clearly grounded positively and negatively on futuristic eschatology makes this more than just a faint echo of a half forgotten eschatological truth (though it is not a dominant chord in the epistle).

The use of the conjunction γάρ, instead of a disjunctive conjunction (ἀλλά or δέ) is significant, and indicates continuity and subordination to the previous verse.¹⁷³ Γάρ is best understood as having an illative function here, for it gives the negative basis for the primary admonition of the passage found in v. 23 ("work heartily, as to the Lord"). The negative basis for serving earthly masters faithfully is that (unlike earthly masters), Christ meets out fair and exacting judgment; wrongdoers will receive¹⁷⁴ appropriate recompense for their evil deeds. Baumert, in a study of the terminology of this passage, concludes that the verb κομίζω used here echoes LXX language in which one must bear responsibility for one's behaviour (Lev 20.17; Ezek 16.52, 54, 58).¹⁷⁵ Thus Col 3.25 indicates wrongdoers will have to bear the shame and guilt resulting from their sinful behaviour at the judgment seat of Christ.¹⁷⁶ This judgment language, particularly the element of *jus talionis* is an example of what Käsemann terms

¹⁷¹ Some contend that v. 25 applies to masters based on the use of γάρ to introduce the verse, and based on the use of ἀδικέω which seems less suitable to a slave who had no legal rights (Martin, *Colossians*, 123-24; G. Schrenk, "ἀδικέω," *TDNT* 1.160). The structure of the Colossian household code, with masters being directly addressed in 4.1, and the fact that ἀδικέω is used to describe a slave in Phlm 18, suggests, however, that v. 25 is a portion of the address to slaves.

¹⁷² *Neutestamentliche Ethik*, 559, cited by Wedderburn, "Theology of Colossians," 52.

¹⁷³ O'Brien, *Colossians*, 229.

¹⁷⁴ The verb used here for receive (κομίζω) is also found in a well attested variant reading of 2 Pet 2.13, where it describes false teachers who will receive wrong for their wrong doing.

¹⁷⁵ *Täglich sterben und auferstehen. Der Literalsinn von 2 Kor 4,12-5,10*, SANT 84 (Munich: Kösel, 1973), 410-31, cited by O'Brien, *Colossians*, 230.

¹⁷⁶ Baumert, *Sterben*, 424; Bruce also relates this passage to the tribunal of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5.10) (*Colossians*, 169-70).

"sentences of holy law."¹⁷⁷ Though these sentences of holy law (1 Cor 14.38; Gal 1.9) are often described in the NT as executed by God,¹⁷⁸ Christ is also repeatedly described as the eschatological judge,¹⁷⁹ which is the picture found in Col 3.25.

Though some assert that futuristic eschatology plays little or no role in Colossians,¹⁸⁰ a clear futuristic refrain echoes in vv. 24-25, for the attainment of the reward (ἀπολήμψεσθε) and the execution of judgment (κομίζεται) is still in the future.¹⁸¹ Thus I part company with Conzelmann who states that in Colossians, the anticipation of the parousia "no longer determines...the paranesis."¹⁸² Clearly vv. 24-25 present futuristic eschatology as positive and negative motivators for present ethical behaviour. Thus while the eschatology in Colossians is largely realised, and futuristic eschatology does not play the dominant role it plays in most of the undisputed Pauline literature, it still shapes a portion of the Colossian paraenesis.

In 4.1 the judgment by Christ motive is applied to masters who are urged to treat their slaves justly and fairly, since they also have a Master in heaven. This statement immediately following v. 25 clearly implies judgment by Christ, and is a very significant development of Christian ethics. Ultimately, the ethical motivation is the same for slaves in v. 24 and masters in v. 25—both are to act properly because they have a heavenly Master (who executes just judgment).¹⁸³ Earlier I noted the assertion by Beare and Sanders that the content of the Colossian code is indistinguishable from secular codes, thus eliminating the possibility of it being a truly Christian code. In reality, while the content of the Colossian code is materially quite similar to secular Hellenistic codes, there are subtle, yet very significant differences arising from the

¹⁷⁷ "Sentences of Holy Law in the New Testament," in *New Testament Questions of Today*, trans. by W. J. Montague (London: SCM, 1969) 66-81. On Käsemann's discussion of *jus talionis* as a characteristic of "sentences of holy law," cf. esp. 67-70.

¹⁷⁸ Rom 2.5-10; 12.19; 14.10-12; 1 Cor 3.17; 2 Pet 2.4-9; Rev 19.1-3.

¹⁷⁹ Matt 16.27; 25.31-46; Rom 14.10 ^{26r} *et. al.*; 1 Cor 16.22; 1 Cor 4.4-5; 5. 10; 2 Thess 1.7-9; Rev 22.12. Dunn argues that at least for Paul, there is no essential difference between the judgment seat of Christ and the judgment seat of God, for Christ acts as God's representative (*Romans* 9-16, 809).

¹⁸⁰ Lohse, "Pauline Theology," 216; Sanders, *Ethics*, 69-70.

¹⁸¹ Motyer correctly notes ("The 'Household Codes,'" 43-45, 48) that while the expectation of an imminent parousia has faded for the writer of Colossians, there is still an eschatological expectation which governs ethics. He describes this expectation in terms of the traditional Pauline "already...not yet" scheme, for while equality for all Christians is part of the already (3.11), a full experience of equality lies in the future "not yet," with the impartial, just judgment of Christ (3.25). Though Christ has already defeated the cosmic powers (2.15), the believer can still be ensnared by the powers (2.8, 20-22), and thus full liberation from the powers is part of the "not yet." While the flesh as a ruling principle has already been cast off through baptism and union with Christ (2.11), full social liberation from the flesh (i.e., humans) is part of the "not yet," for slaves must still obey their fleshly masters (3.22). What Motyer fails to recognise adequately, however, is that the content of the "already" has changed in Colossians, for believers are described as having already been raised.

¹⁸² *Interpreting the New Testament*, 202-203.

¹⁸³ So Cruz, *Christological Motives*, 205.

differing bases, particularly from the thoroughgoing Christological basis. This Christological transformation of a traditional Hellenistic code is quite evident in Col 4.1, for in this verse the absolute authority of the householder is mollified,¹⁸⁴ for he ceases to be the ultimate authority in the home, but becomes the penultimate authority, since he now has a master in heaven, viz., Christ Jesus.¹⁸⁵ In light of the absolute authority given to the male under *patria potestas*,¹⁸⁶ this is a very significant shift in household authority, and demonstrates the fact that the NT codes were not simply plagiarisms of secular codes to which κύριος phrases were added; they were truly transformed by being given a new basis.¹⁸⁷

Finally in v. 22 slaves are admonished to obey their masters in everything, not with eyeservice as menpleasers but in singleness of heart because they fear the Lord (φοβούμενοι τὸν κύριον). "Fear" was commonly discussed in the household codes (Eph 5.21, 33; 6.5; 1 Pet 2.17; 3.2). Merk believes the participial clause "fearing the Lord" serves as a positive contrast to "not with eyeservice as menpleasers" and hence is not actually the basis for the ethical admonition ("noch nicht die Begründung").¹⁸⁸ The context of this verse argues against this interpretation, however, for the following three verses develop the concept of service based on rewards (v. 24) and judgment from the Lord (v. 25). This observation, combined with the fact that fearing the Lord is used elsewhere in the household codes as a motivation for behaviour (Eph 5.21) suggests

¹⁸⁴ Ben Witherington notes that the Colossian household code does not reject patriarchal family structures, but modifies and limits the authority of the householder through the concept of "in the Lord" (*Women and the Genesis of Christianity*, ed. by Ann Witherington [Cambridge: CUP, 1990] 153). Frank and Evelyn Stagg believe male authority patterns of first-century Judaism are softened in Col 3 through the direct address to wives, and by making the wife the agent, not the object of submission ("The Domestic Code and Women," in *Women in the World of Jesus* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978] 189-92). M. Parsons similarly argues that household code guidelines for slaves are radically transformed by the NT authors through reciprocal duties and the faith relationship with Christ ("Slavery and the New Testament: Equality and Submissiveness," *VoxEv* 18 [1988] 91-93).

¹⁸⁵ Wendland asserts that the NT codes resulted from the taking over of the contents of Hellenistic Jewish moral codes, which were then given a new authority, the lordship of Christ, so that "damit beginnt aber schon der Prozeß der Relativierung der sozialen Autoritäten und Mächte, wie die Antike ihn nicht kannte. Der Hausherr und Vater, der Sklavenbesitzer hat fortan keine absolute Autorität mehr; den Herren wird gesagt, daß sie einen Herrn im Himmel haben (Kol. 4.1); darum sollen sie den Sklaven geben, was 'recht und billig' ist. Alle sind jetzt dem Kyrios Christus verantwortlich. Für diesen Herrn soll alles Tun im Hause geschehen, ihm und nicht den Menschen gilt jetzt der Gehorsam im eigentlichen Sinne" (*Ethik des Neuen Testaments*, 67-68).

¹⁸⁶ For example, note the widespread understanding in the Roman world that the householder had the power of life and death over both his slaves and his children (on the householders right to take the life of his own children, cf. W. Barclay "The *Patria Potestas*," in *Educational Ideals in the Ancient World* [London: Collins, 1959] 267-70; on the householders right to crucify his slaves, cf. M. Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977] 51-63).

¹⁸⁷ Cf. also Lohse who argues that the addition of the κύριος phrases in the Colossian household code "is not a mere formal element whose only function is to Christianize the traditional material. Rather, the entire life, thought and conduct of believers is subordinate to the lordship of the Kyrios" (*Colossians*, 156).

¹⁸⁸ *Handeln aus Glauben*, 218 n. 125.

that in fact, fearing the Lord is given as a motivation for behaviour. The writer's ethical motivation to believers based on fear/judgment of Christ can be better understood by Balz' observation: "as faith and awe, hope of salvation and fear of judgment, cannot be fundamentally separated in the NT, many primitive Christian injunctions are to be understood in terms of both love and fear."¹⁸⁹ Thus Christian slaves are admonished by the writer of Colossians to obey their masters not out of fear of their human masters, but out of fear of Christ,¹⁹⁰ their heavenly Lord.

IV. Summary

Most scholars agree that the NT household codes are drawn from pre-existing traditional material. Numerous proposals have been given regarding the exact source for the NT codes, including Stoicism, Hellenistic Judaism, early Christianity, and Neopythagorean moral philosophy. The model which seems to make the most sense of the complex data, however, is the Aristotelian moral philosophy model. It explains the origin of the NT household codes not through precise, verbatim borrowing of the structure and contents of household codes from Stoic or other first-century philosophies, but in the influence of seminal forms and concepts drawn from Aristotelian philosophy. This influence explains the widespread ancient Hellenistic belief that the male should rule the household based on the ontological inferiority of females and slaves. The Colossian household code affirms male authority over the household, but does not base it on male superiority.

In terms of structure and contents, the Colossian household code is tightly structured and symmetrical. It contains admonitions which address three pairs of social antipodes: wives and husbands, children and fathers, slaves and masters. The placement of the lower social group first is a distinct departure from the Aristotelian household codes, in which masters, husbands, and fathers are addressed before slaves, wives, and children. The emphasis in the Colossian code is on the submission of the

¹⁸⁹ "φοβέω," *TDNT* 9.214.

¹⁹⁰ Lohmeyer argues that since "fear of the Lord" in the OT always refers to God, "fear of the Lord" in Col 3.22 also refers to God (*Kolossier*, 158). The general use of κύριος in the Colossian household code strongly argues for a Christological reference in v. 22, as does the strong thematic link with the judgment of Christ in v. 25. Furthermore, other than the Psalms (Ps 22.23; 25.12; 115.11), the LXX repeatedly speaks not of fearing κύριος but θεός, particularly in the Torah (Gen 22.12; 42.18; Ex 9.30). This pattern is maintained in the NT which speaks almost exclusively of fearing θεός (Luke 18.2, 4; 23.40; Acts 10.2; 13.26; 1 Pet 2.17; Rev 14.7; only Col 3.22 and Rev 15.4 speak of fearing κύριος). This pattern reveals that the phrase "fearing the Lord" (κύριος) in Col 3.22 is unique, and its meaning should be determined by the immediate context.

lower social group to the higher, though admonitions are given to both the dominant and the submissive groups.

The function of the Colossian household code has received inadequate attention in view of the extensive evaluation of its origin. Various theories of its function were discussed, for scholars posit that it served to correct misunderstandings regarding new life in Christ based on Gal 3.28, to develop the new life in Christ, to remind readers of their baptismal catechesis, to distinguish Christian from non-Christian behaviour, to clarify Christian living in the world, and to harmonise Christian and non-Christian behaviour. It was concluded, however, that the literary structure of Colossians, the Christological language of the household code, and the polemical occasion all support the thesis that the function of the Colossian code was the clarification of Christ's lordship over the church.

If the Colossian household code served to clarify the nature of Christ's lordship over his church, then a clear Christological basis should be discernible in the code, which is exactly what we found. Three types of Christological motives in the Colossian household code were specifically identified: (1) the ἐν κυριῷ motive (vv. 18, 20); (2) reward by Christ motive (vv. 23-24); (3) fear/judgment of Christ motive (3.25; 4.1; 3.22). The ἐν κυριῷ motive found in 3.18, 20 refers to behaviour appropriate and pleasing to the Lord by those in the community of believers who have been united with Christ. The reward by Christ motive in 3.23-24 gives a positive basis for the faithful service of slaves to their masters, viz., future reward by Christ. The fear/judgment by Christ motive gives a negative motivation to slaves (3.22, 25) and masters (4.1), all of whom are given household duties based on the future judgment of Christ.

Chapter Eight

Summary and Conclusions

I Summary

In the light of the growing body of literature on Colossians and on NT paraenesis, I have sought to fill a *lacuna* in recent research by examining the ground and shape of the Colossian paraenesis. Since I did not restrict the definition of "paraenesis" to traditional, non-occasional moral exhortation, but employed it to refer to the broad range of moral exhortation, I evaluated not only the traditional Colossian paraenesis in 3.5-4.1, but the paraenesis in 1.9-12; 21-23; 2.6-7; 3.1-4 as well. I also analysed the hymn in 1.15-20 since it provides the basis for the exhortations in 1.21-23, and since it is quoted or alluded to four times in ch. 2, which indicates that it has significance in the polemic of the epistle. Finally, in order to evaluate the extent and manner in which the Colossian paraenesis may have been shaped by contingency, I evaluated the nature of the Colossian opponents.

My primary aim was to analyse the ground or basis for the Colossian paraenesis. Secondly, I have sought to analyse the shape of the Colossian paraenesis in terms of the behavioural, historical, and rhetorical nature of the exhortations. Behaviourally, I have clarified the nature of the exhortations themselves, i.e., what did the author specifically implore the Colossians to do or to avoid? Historically, I have examined the origin of the Colossian paraenesis, particularly the vice/virtue lists and the household codes. Rhetorically, I have analysed the role of the paraenesis in the overall argument of the epistle.

The Colossian Opponents

In examining the Colossian opponents I concluded that while it is very difficult, if not impossible, to give the opponents a specific place in the history of religions, it is possible to describe the salient features of the opposition. The evidence in Col 2 indicates that the opponents represented a Jewish/pagan syncretistic cult. The Jewish influence on the Colossian opponents is seen through their promotion of the attainment of revelation or wisdom through heavenly ascent (2.18). Thus the writer of Colossians emphasises the believers' revelatory need which Christ abundantly fulfills (1.9-14, 24-29; 2.2-7, 20). The author's discussion of bondage to the "elements of the

world" and to the "principalities and powers" evidences a pagan mystery influence, for the ancients believed that the cosmic powers had to be placated through ascetic practice.

While the opponents were probably not directly denigrating Christ, the author perceived their teachings to be a threat which could lead the Colossians away from Christ (2.3-4, 8, 19).

The Colossian Hymn: 1.15-20

In view of the perceived Christological threat, the author utilises the Colossian hymn as part of his response to the Colossian church. The hymn also provides the basis for the ethical injunctions which follow (1.21-23). Regardless of the origin and prior form of Col 1.15-20 (a pericope which exhibits hymnic characteristics), the author used it because he considered it true to the Christological tradition the Colossians had received, and believed it would provide an anchor against spiritual defection in the face of the opponents' teachings (1.22-23).

The hymn through a series of predications and affirmations praises the person and work of Christ. These Christological predications were evidently considered germane to the Colossian situation. Through the use of the hymn the author reminded the Colossian believers that if they wanted a revelation of God, it was to be found not through placating of the cosmic spirits or angels, or through mystical heavenly ascent, but in Christ, in whom "the fulness of God was pleased to dwell" (1.19; 2.9). Furthermore, they did not need to fear, placate, or seek the mediation of any cosmic beings, for Christ is absolutely pre-eminent over all earthly and cosmic entities (1.15, 17-18; 2.10). They were created by him and for him (1.16). Furthermore, through his work on the cross, he has triumphed over them (2.15) and restored the world to its proper created order through a cosmic reconciliation (1.20).

The reconciliation affirmed in the hymn has clear ethical implications. Since Christ is supreme over all creation, and through his work on the cross has reconciled the entire created order, putting it back into its place under his rulership, human believers should be living under his lordship. The author of Colossians does apply this reconciliation message to the Colossians in 1.22-23, and repeatedly calls them to live under the lordship of Christ (1.10; 2.6; 3.11, 17, 22-23).

Christology and Ethics: Col 1-2

Given the fact that the author considered the Colossian opposition a threat to Christian practice (2.20-23) and to Christology itself (2.19), one might expect him to emphasise and even link Christology and paraenesis in this epistle. This is precisely what is found, for Christology and paraenesis are linked throughout Colossians, and in chs. 1-2 they are linked in 1.9-10, 20-23; 2.6-7.

In 1.9-10, the development of paraenesis is shown to be Christological, for the desired behaviour is defined as "worthy of the Lord," i.e., Christ Jesus. The expression of Christian paraenesis is fourfold: fruit bearing, increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthening with power, and giving thanks to God. The development of Christian ethics is progressive, for the believer is called to grow and increase in Christian character.

In 1.20-23 the person and work of Christ are directly connected with Christian paraenesis based on cosmic reconciliation (v. 20). The Colossians who had been engaged in evil deeds (v. 21) were personally reconciled by God (v. 22). The purpose of their reconciliation is expressly ethical, for they were reconciled in order to be presented to God in a state of moral completeness. The ethical implications of the hymn are drawn out in vv. 21-23, for the supremacy of Christ affirmed in 1.15-20 is immediately applied to the behaviour of the Christian community.

In 2.6-7 Christology is made the direct basis for moral behaviour. In the face of opposition which threatened to lead them astray (vv. 4-5), the writer goes on in v. 6 to challenge the Colossians to continued spiritual growth. More specifically, he calls on them to walk in a manner consonant with the inception of their faith (their reception of apostolic Christological tradition). The author does this by utilising the indicative/imperative construction, for they are called to walk in the present (imperative) based on their reception of Christ in the past (indicative). Hence paraenesis is grounded in Christology. The Christology emphasised here is the lordship of Christ. In view of competing cosmic powers vying for the Colossians' allegiance, the lordship of Christ is emphasised (as it is throughout chs. 1-2) and made the basis for their manner of living.

Dying and Rising with Christ: 2.11-13; 3.1-4

In spite of the fact that some scholars assert the largely realised eschatology of Colossians can provide little basis for ethics, paraenesis is given a firm eschatological and soteriological grounding in this passage. In Col 3.1-4, the inferential use of the

conjunction οὐν in v.1, the conditional clause in 3.1, and the dying/rising with Christ theme all serve to give a firm theological basis for paraenesis. Dying and rising with Christ described in 3.1-4 is based on 2.11-13. Col 2.11-13 affirms that fact that the believer is united with Christ in baptism based on Christ's representative death, so that believers participate in his historical death and resurrection. This union with Christ and identification with his death and resurrection is made the basis for paraenesis, for the believer who has died and been raised with Christ is to set his or her mind on the heavenly things (as opposed to the ethically fleshly realm, v. 2). Furthermore, believers who have died with Christ are to consider their physical body parts dead to sinful vices (v. 5).

The paraenesis given in Col 3 is given in the context of the indicative/imperative construction, and reflects the eschatological tension of the believers' life between the ages. This tension shows that the eschatology in Colossians is not entirely realised. On the contrary, realised as well as futuristic (apocalyptic) eschatology is appealed to as the author establishes the basis for ethics in this epistle.

The Vice/Virtue Lists: 3.5-17

Vice/virtue lists were commonly employed in the ancient world by Jewish, pagan, and Christian moralists, and all single source proposals regarding the origin of the NT lists have proven unsatisfactory as a complete explanation for the lists, which are probably an amalgam from various sources.

More important than the origin of the lists is their function and rhetorical purpose. Secular identification, warning against secularisation, and evidence of new life are purposes for some of the NT lists, but the primary purpose for the lists in Colossians is to describe the behaviour of the Christologically governed lifestyle which is commanded, but not specifically described in 2.6.

The basis for the vice/virtue lists in Colossians is soteriological and Christological. The soteriological new life believers have by virtue of their death and union with Christ is the first basis given (vv. 5, 9-10). Secondly, the use of the indicative/imperative construct in 3.1-5 highlights the concept that believers have been united and raised with Christ (indicative), and this forms the basis for the "put on...put off" admonitions in 3.5f. (the imperative). The Christological basis for the vice/virtue admonitions is seen in v. 11, a teleological summary statement ("Christ is all and in all"). This statement indicates that all creation (including Christ's spiritual creation the church) was created by him and exists for him. A second instance in

which Christology forms the basis for paraenesis involving moral vices/virtues is found in 3.13, where believers are admonished to forgive others based on Christ's forgiveness. The final, and strongest Christological foundation for paraenesis is in 3.17, where in a global statement the writer states that everything the believer says and does should reflect the fact that Jesus is Lord.

Both vice lists which contain five vices each, and the virtue list which contains five virtues, were shown to be essentially traditional material. The first vice list in v. 5 primarily emphasises sexual sin. The second list in v. 8 emphasises vices which disrupt the social order and harm interpersonal relationships. These relationships are deemed extremely important in the light of the new corporate entity in which all who have been united with Christ share a common life which transcends ethnic, political, and social differences. The five virtues given in v. 12, along with the corollary exhortations in vv. 13-16 continue to address relational health and unity among believers by advocating relational harmony (vv.12, 15), love (vv. 13-14), and mutual edification (v. 16) among believers.

The Household Code: 3.18-4.1

Most scholars agree that the NT household codes are drawn from pre-existing traditional material. The model which seems to make the most sense of the complex data, however, is the Aristotelian moral philosophy model, which views the origin of the NT household codes not through precise, verbatim borrowing of the structure and contents of household codes from Stoic or other first-century philosophies, but in the influence of seminal forms and concepts drawn from Aristotelian philosophy. This influence explains the widespread ancient Hellenistic belief that the male should rule the household based on the ontological inferiority of females and slaves. The Colossian household code affirms male authority over the household, but does not base it on male superiority.

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The function of the Colossian household code has received inadequate attention in view of the extensive evaluation of its origin. The literary structure of Colossians, the Christological language of the household code, and the polemical occasion all indicate that the function of the Colossian code was the clarification of Christ's lordship over the church.

If the Colossian household code served to clarify the nature of Christ's lordship over his church, then a clear Christological basis should be discernible in the code, which is exactly what we found. Three types of Christological motives in the Colossian household code were specifically identified: (1) the ἐν κυριῷ motive (vv. 18, 20); (2) reward by Christ motive (vv. 23-24); (3) fear/judgment of Christ motive (3.25; 4.1; 3.22). The ἐν κυριῷ motive found in 3.18, 20 refers to behaviour appropriate and pleasing to the Lord by those in the community of believers who have been united with Christ. The reward by Christ motive in 3.23-24 gives a positive basis for the faithful service of slaves to their masters, viz., future reward by Christ. The fear/judgment by Christ motive gives a negative motivation to slaves (3.22, 25) and masters (4.1), all of whom are given household duties based on the future judgment of Christ.

II Conclusions

After analysing a broad array of paraenetical material in Colossians, some conclusions can now be drawn.

1. There is a clear and consistent relationship in Colossians between theology and ethics, for paraenesis is repeatedly given a firm theological foundation. The ground for the Colossian paraenesis is primarily Christological (1.9-10, 20-23; 2.6-7; 3.11, 17-18, 20, 22-23), sometimes soteriological (2.11-12; 3.1-4, 9-10), and occasionally eschatological (3.1-4, 24-25).
2. Much of the paraenesis in Colossians, particularly the vice/virtue lists and the household code, is traditional paraenetical material which reflects first-century Hellenistic moral exhortation.
3. The traditional paraenetical material in Colossians is not traditional material *simpliciter*, for the role of humility (3.12), the nature of love (3.13-14), the placement of the householder under the authority of Christ (4.1), and the

Christological foundation for paraenesis (3.11, 17, 18, 22-23) make it distinctly Christian.

4. The writer of Colossians considered the opponents' teaching to be a threat to an orthodox understanding of the person and work of Christ. Thus ultimately, the use of traditional material in Colossians was affected by the occasional setting, for the traditional material served to affirm (in the hymn) and clarify (in the vice/virtue lists and household code) the lordship of Christ.

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