

An Early Christian Hymn - (Col. 1: 15-20)

Ralph P. Martin

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Dr. Martin, Lecturer in Theology in London Bible College, has paid special attention to the presence of early Christian *carmina* of various kinds in the New Testament text it was for a thesis on this subject that he was awarded his doctorate by the University of London. An earlier publication—his Tyndale Monograph entitled "An Early Christian Confession"—examines Phil. 2: 5-11 from this point of view^o. In the extract from his thesis which we are glad to reproduce here he presents a similar study of the great Christological passage in Col. 1: 15-20.

STROPHE A

15. Who is the image of the unseen God, the first-born of all creation
16. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth Seen and unseen
Whether Thrones or Dominions
Or Powers or Rulers
All things through him and to him have been created,
17. And he himself is before all things,
And all things in him cohere,
18. And he himself is the head of the body, the church.

STROPHE B

- Who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead,
That he might become in all things himself pre-eminent.
19. For in him willed all the Fulness to dwell
 20. And through him to reconcile all things to him
Making peace by the blood of his cross,
Through him, whether those on earth
Or those in heaven.

The history of the "Form-analysis" of Colossians 1: 15-20 begins with the comprehensive study of Norden.¹ Before his time scholars such as Deissmann and Weiss had noted the unusual character of the verses and had classified the piece as an example of "solemn confession" and "a kind of dogmatic hymn".² Norden, however,

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broke new ground in that he subjected the verses to close inspection and sought to find in them, on the double ground of form and content, "undoubtedly old traditional material" which he thought came originally from Jewish circles which came under the influence of Greek ideas.³ The evidence for this latter description was the use of a Stoic formula (in 1: 16 f.) and

^o Now available on-line at http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/confession_martin.pdf

¹ E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos* (1913), 250 ff.; it is his arrangement of the passage that is followed at the beginning of this article.

² A. Deissmann, *Paulus*, 1911, 75; J. Weiss, *Christus, die Anfänge des Dogmas* (1909), 45 f. (E.T., 84 f.).

³ Norden, *op. cit.*, 253 f.

the division of the cosmos into ὄρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα (i. 16), which may betoken a Platonic influence.

Later comment on this section of the Epistle has carried the observations of Norden considerably farther. This result is seen in the treatment of Lohmeyer in his commentary.⁴ He entitles 1: 13-29 "the order of a primitive Christian worship service" which opens with a thanksgiving prayer (1: 12) which, in turn, follows directly upon an intercession for the assembled Church (1: 11). All the thanks and intercession have a basis in what Lohmeyer calls "the hymnic development of the 'Word of God', as that 'word' is fulfilled in Christ, in the Church and in the Apostle himself". It is natural, therefore, that we should expect a statement concerning Christ at this point, and this expectation is confirmed by the style and the contents of the verses which follow. Since the date of this commentary, the conclusion that "the hymnic character of Colossians 1: 15-20 is long since recognized and generally agreed upon" (Käsemann)⁵ has been widely shared; and many names may be added to the list of commentators who endorse this verdict.⁶ Not all are persuaded that Lohmeyer has arranged the lines in the correct way;⁷ but we may first examine the evidence for the hymnic form of the passage. The twofold test is that of form and content.

I. THE FORM OF COLOSSIANS 1: 15-20

Characteristic marks of hymnic forms are detectable in this section:

i. There is a plausible division into strophes or stanzas. The most unusual arrangement is to divide the verses into two parts:⁸

A: verses 15—18a—Christ and creation

B: verses 18b—20—Christ and the Church

⁴ E. Lohmeyer, *Die Briefe an die Kolosser and an Philemon* (Meyer Comm., 1930), 41.

⁵ E. Käsemann, art. "Eine urchristliche Tauf liturgie", reprinted in *Exegetische Versuche and Besinnungen*: erster Band (1960), 34-51 (34).

⁶ The following names may be listed: M. Dibelius, *Der Brief an die Kolosser* (Lietzmann), who in the 1913 edition entitled the passage a "Christological excursus", altered this description in the third edition to a "Christological confession", under Lohmeyer's influence; E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology* (E.T., 1955), 247; E. Percy, *Die Probleme der Kolosser- and Epheserbriefe* (1946), 40; J. Héring, *Le Royaume de Dieu et sa Venue* (1937), 165 n.1 ("un psaume christologique"); G. Harder, *Paulus and das Gebet* (1936), 48ff.; R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (E.T., i, 1952) : "In Col. 1, 15-20, the author builds upon a hymn which originally was in praise of the cosmic rank of Christ"; C. Maurer, art. "Die Begründung der Herrschaft Christi über die Mächte nach Kolosser, i. 15-20", *Wort and Dienst, Jahrbuch der Theologischen Schule Bethel*, n.F. 1955, 79-93; G. Schille, *Liturgisches Gut im Epheserbrief* (1953), 61; P. Benoit, *L'épître aux Colossians* (BJ, 1949), *ad loc.*; E. Schweizer, *Erniedrigung and Erhöhung* (1955), 102 f., 110 f., 129 f.; F. C. Porter, *The Mind of Christ in Paul* (1932), 179-200, 221-228; L. Cerfaux, *Le Christ dans la théologie de S. Paul* (1954): "Hymne sur l'oeuvre du Christ" (298 ff.; E.T., 1959, 397 ff.); A. M. Hunter, *Paul and his Predecessors* (1961 ed.), 123 ff., and the same author's *Layman's Commentary* (1960) *ad loc.*; J. M. Robinson, art. "A Formal Analysis of Colossians 1: 15-20", *JBL* lxxvi, 4 (1957), 270-287; J. Jervell, *Imago Dei* (1960), 198 f., 210; D. M. Stanley, *Christ's Resurrection in Pauline Soteriology* (1961), "A hymn from the early Christian Liturgy", 202 ff.; H. Conzelmann, "Der Brief and die Kolosser" (*NTD* 8, 1962), 135 f.: he notes the change of style from 1: 14 to 15, the looseness of the connection between the verses and the internal evidence that verses 15 ff. have been "touched up".

⁷ Lohmeyer's arrangement has been criticized by Käsemann (*loc. cit.*); for other modifications of Norden's analysis cf. Masson, *op. cit.*, 105; J. M. Robinson, *loc. cit.*, 275, 285 ff.; L. Cerfaux, *Christ in the Theology of St. Paul* (E.T., 1959), 399. (An extended note in Dr. Martin's thesis gives full summaries and assessments of these.—ED.)

⁸ This is the usual division; e.g., F. Prat, *Theology of S. Paul* (E.T., 1934), II. 147, n.1.; Stauffer, *op. cit.*, 247; Hunter, *Commentary* 123.

ii. Some sort of rhythm is produced when the lines are set out in the pattern which Ch. Masson has drawn up.⁹ Masson reckoned that some prominent features which are typical of a poetic style are present in Colossians 1: 15 ff. These are the use of parallelism which takes the form of the member of syllables to a line, and includes assonance and the alliteration of the initial and final syllables in the words and phrases in each line (anaphora: epiphora).¹⁰ Masson's theory, which depends for its cogency upon syllabic

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length, is most complicated; and opinion about its truth has been reserved and cautious.¹¹

iii. The use of relatives is a tell-tale mark of liturgica, as Norden has amply demonstrated;¹² and this feature is present in verses 15 and 18.

iv. Certain other stylistic peculiarities which cannot be there by chance are observed. For example, the repetition of words and phrases, especially the copulatives εἴτε... εἴτε in verses 16, 20:¹³ the presence of identical words (for instance, πρωτότοκος in verses 15 and 18, and coming in the same place in each stanza): the use of constructions like the ὅτι—clause in verses 16 and 19: and the incorporation of the formula ἐκ : διὰ : εἰς (as in Rom. 11: 33-35).

Correspondences are striking, not only in the recurrence and exact placing of certain terms, but also in regard to three sets of lines:¹⁴

15: <i>Who</i> is the image of the unseen God, the <i>first-born</i> of all creation.	18b: <i>Who</i> is the beginning, the <i>first-born</i> from the dead.
16a: For in him were created <i>all</i> things in heaven and on earth.	19: For <i>in him</i> willed <i>all</i> the Fulness to dwell.
16c: <i>All things</i> through him and <i>to him</i> have been created.	20: And <i>through</i> him to reconcile <i>all things</i> to <i>him</i> .

The correspondences in these lines are not accidental, but designed, to bring out the main emphases in the two orders of creation and redemption. The use of the relative pronouns, the repetition of πρωτότοκος (verses 15b and 18b) and ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ (in verses 16a and 19) the

⁹ Masson divides the hymn into five strophes with Strophes I and II proclaiming the pre-eminence of Christ over all orders of creation, and Strophes IV and V announcing His reconciliation of all things to God. Strophe III (verses 18 and 19) is the "hinge" (*charnière*) which connects the two major parts.

¹⁰ Examples of alliteration are: ἐξουσίαι — ἔκτισται: νεκρῶν — πρωτεύων: κατοικῆσαι — ἀποκαταλλάξαι: σταυροῦ — αὐτοῦ — δι' αὐτοῦ (*tricolon* ?).

¹¹ See the criticism of C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon* (CGT, 1957), 61. He is somewhat sceptical about the general assumption that the author is citing an early hymn (but see 62 for the admission of this possibility); Vincent Taylor, *The Person of Christ* (1958), 63 f., shares this view.

¹² Norden, *op. cit.*, 168 ff., 201-207, 383 ff.

¹³ For the use of the εἴτε style, cf. Norden, *op. cit.* 261. We may instance Apuleius, *Met.* vi. 4 ("sive to Sami... tenes vetusta delubra, sive celsae Carthaginis... beatas sedes frequentas"); *Met.* xi. 2 ("regina caeli, sive to Ceres... seu to caelestis Venus... seu Phoebi soror... seu Proserpina... quoque nomine, quoquo ritu, quaqua facie to fas est invocare: to meis acrumnis subsiste"); and Euripides, *Troad.* 884 ff.

Ζεὺς εἴτ' ἀνάγκη φύσεως
εἴτε νοῦς βροτῶν
προσευξάμην σε

¹⁴ This correspondence is noted by Robinson, *loc. cit.*, 286.

frequent mention of "all" (Norden's *Allmachtsformel*);¹⁵ and the chiasmus in verses 16c and 20:

a τὰ πάντα b καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ
b καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ a τὰ πάντα

are all features which show how the lines and words have been artificially arranged with a view to securing a symmetrical composition. As A. M. Hunter comments, "it betrays the hand of an exacting composer".¹⁶

II. THE CONTENTS OF COLOSSIANS 1: 15-20

It is clear that this passage is a piece of Christological exposition. The Lord Christ is the subject throughout;¹⁷ and the verses have a distinctive aim. This is to establish the absolute pre-eminence of the Son in the realms of creation and reconciliation. His unrivalled supremacy is declared to be absolute over all beings, terrestrial and

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celestial. Hence the recurring word is "all" (eight times in verses 15, 16 (*bis*), 17 (*bis*), 18, 19, 20); and the twice-repeated "in heaven and on earth" (verses 16 and 20) comes in both stanzas.

It is noteworthy that here is an objective statement of fact. No personal allusions are made to the readers, although the writer has them clearly in mind in the verses which come immediately before (verses 12-14: ἡμᾶς... ἡμᾶς... ἔχομεν), and after (verse 21: καὶ ἡμᾶς). This index shows clearly that, although the writer is citing verses 15-20 for the purpose of enforcing, for the Colossians' sakes, the absolute supremacy of Christ, the verses of the hymn make no direct reference to the readers and could very well be a separate composition, written independently of the Epistle and inset by the writer as an appropriate quotation. The hypothesis that Colossians 1: 15 ff. is detachable from its epistolary context is confirmed by the evidence of the language in which it is written.

i. The vocabulary of the piece presents some peculiarities. There are, no less than five *hapax legomena* (as far as the Pauline corpus is concerned): ὄρατά, θρόνοι, κυριότητης, πρωτεύων, εἰρηνοποιήσας. But this is only part of the story. Masson remarks that there are about ten non-Pauline expressions.¹⁸ This difference of language corresponds to a difference in ideas. Masson proceeds: "If the Christology of the hymn represents a development of the

¹⁵ Norden, *op. cit.*, 240 ff.

¹⁶ A. M. Hunter, *Paul and his Predecessors*,² 125.

¹⁷ Although, as a surprising fact, he is never named! Cf. Masson, *op. cit.* 104.

¹⁸ Masson, *op. cit.*, 106. Ἀποκαταλλάσσειν is not found in Paul's writing before its appearance in Col. 1: 20, 22. It recurs in Eph. 2: 16, but is absent from the rest of the New Testament. F. Büchsel, *TWNT*, i. 259, thinks that the verb was one of Paul's own coinage (*eine Neubildung des Paulus*); but cf. J. Michl, art. "Die 'Versöhnung' (Kol. 1. 20)", *Theol. Quart.* iv (1948), 451 ff. Masson explains this fact by saying that in the context of the hymn it is exactly the right word forcefully to express the idea of verse 20 and its syllabic length and its ending in -αι are precisely the requirement needed to preserve the strophic symmetry and assonance of the poetic piece. Any other word, even the cognate verb καταλλάσσειν which is found in Paul, at Rom. 5: 10 (*bis*) and 2 Cor. 5: 18, 19, 20, would not do. Likewise with the *hapax legomenon* εἰρηνοποιήσας in verse 20, which is a rough synonym with ἀποκατάλλαξιαι, but is employed, *ex hypothesi*, in synonymous parallelism because its syllabic quantity is the same as the last line of the preceding strophe (τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν), and its initial syllable εἰ- produces assonance with the first syllable of the last line beginning εἴτε.

Christology of Paul which the Apostle would probably not have disagreed with, its conception of the relation between the angelic powers and Christ seems different from Paul's ideas". And Masson has Colossians 2: 15 particularly in mind.¹⁹ F. C. Porter has also maintained that there is a difference between the Christology of Colossians 1 and that of the Pauline *homologoumena*.²⁰ He contends that the Christological picture of this hymn is not a personal one such as we find elsewhere in Paul. The conclusion which the two scholars draw from this verdict is quite distinct. Masson says that the Christology is pre-Pauline and taken over by "Paul"; Porter takes the verses to be a later addition by a post-Pauline hand whose Christology is derived from the Logos doctrine under Greek influence. This latter supposition is doubtful, for there is evidence that Paul's early Christology (in 1 Cor. 8: 6) included "the Logos Christology without the term" Logos, as E. Andrews shows in criticism of F. C. Porter.²¹

ii. The genesis of the hymn is a further argument in support of its pre-Pauline character. E. Käsemann²² has taken up a position which sees the hymn as (a) a Christian adaptation of an original Gnostic hymn. He supposes (along with R. Bultmann)²³ that this original composition of a "gnostic reconciler" has been worked

¹⁹ The point of contrast is that, in the hymn, Christ is the sphere in which the principalities and powers are created (verse 16) and in Him also all things, including these powers, hold together, for He is their sustainer. Yet in Col. 2: 15 He is engaged in conflict with these forces and must subdue and expose them at the cross. "No other passage in Paul provides a stronger expression of the dramatic triumph of the crucified" (R. Leivestad, *Christ the Conqueror*, 1954, 100). Yet there is a third passage which is germane to this problem. In the hymn, at verses 18-20, the spiritual powers are described as fallen creatures which need redemption. It may be argued, then, that Col. 2: 15 simply elaborates what is taught in the hymn, *viz.* that the powers which were created in Christ broke away in some cosmic rebellion (as in Jewish theology and demonology: see Dibelius *ad loc.* for the myth of an angelic revolt) and needed to be dealt with finally as they engaged Christ in conflict at the cross (1 Cor. 2: 6-8).

It is difficult to disentangle the arguments about the literary character of Col. 1: 15 ff. from the debate as to apostolic authorship. C. F. D. Moule, who accepts the Pauline authorship of the Epistle, draws attention to an important fact that in a passage like this the use of rare terms and unusual constructions may be expected if the piece is liturgical. And if it is a hymn, it is *prima facie* more likely to have been taken over by the epistolary writer than composed *currente calamo* in view of its complex structure and its use of rhetorical devices.

²⁰ F. C. Porter, *op. cit.*, 179 ff.; and similarly, D. M. Stanley, *op. cit.*, 207: "The spirit of the passage... is... more reminiscent of the Johannine than of the Pauline writings" 208: "the hypothesis that the hymn took its origin from the school of John (in Asia Minor)".

²¹ E. Andrews, *The Meaning of Christ for Paul* (1949), 161 ff.

²² E. Käsemann, *loc. cit.*, 39 ff.

²³ R. Bultmann, *Theology*, i. 176, 178. This understanding of the hymn's background is shared by J. Jervell, *op. cit.*, 209 ff., at least as far as the first strophe of the hymn is concerned. He believes that Col. 1: 15-20 contains a fragment of Hellenistic-Christian theology, but maintains that the stylistic differences which mark out the hymn from its neighbouring verses can also be discerned within the hymn itself, as Lohmeyer had noticed, though he failed to explain it (*Komm.*, 42).

Verses 15-18a are an accumulation of statements which are not logically joined together. There is a tendency to repetition which is characteristic of the hymn-style. The repetition sets forth the person of the mediator. But the construction of verses 18b-20 is different. There are no accumulated statements and no solemn style in the writing. The line of thought is reasoned and logical, carried along by a consecutive clause (verse 18b ἵνα γένηται...), a two-line causal clause (verse 19) and a participial clause (verse 20a). But the end of verse 20 takes up the solemn style once more with such sonorous expressions as εἴτε... εἴτε; τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς—τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

Furthermore, Jervell observes, while the language of the first strophe is non-Pauline (contrast Col. 1: 15 and Rom. 1: 20) and the ideas there unknown to us from his authentic letters (for him the Man in the image of God is Adam, not Christ in His pre-existence), the second strophe is replete with Pauline theological terms: reconciliation, Christ the first to rise from the dead (we may add here Acts 26: 23) and redemption through His blood. The literary evolution of the hymn, according to Jervell, is that a piece of gnostic teaching of the first Man has been taken over from the Hellenistic Church (this is verses 15-18a, omitting τῆς ἐκκλησίας; and verse 20c) and applied to Christ who is thus identified with the first Man; and set by Paul's school into a framework of redemption by the second strophe and the insertion of τῆς ἐκκλησίας in verse 18.

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over and made suitable for Christian circles by the author of Colossians. The myth of the Primal Man in a Jewish-Hellenistic form lies at the heart of the passage and has been re-shaped in a Christian context by the writer. At the same time, for the author of the Letter, the true setting of the hymn is (b) that of a baptismal liturgy which is described in verses 12-14. His evidence for regarding the whole section as "an early Christian baptismal liturgy" is partly the liturgical language which is used and partly the presence of ideas which were associated in the Christian mind with baptism, especially the concept of the image of God in Christ and the believer and the thought of the new creation.²⁴ Allied to this goes the idea of victory over the evil spirit-forces which Christ won and which is made available to the baptized as he dies with Christ and rises again (Rom. 6: 4 ff.). The entire hymn explicates what it means to be "in Christ" by setting forth the drama of a cosmic salvation in which the Redeemer secures a universal "pacification" of all hostile forces and becomes the Head of the cosmic body. The writer has "christianized" this gnostic thought by the insertion of the words "the church" in verse 18, as he has "accentuated" the distinctly Christian motif of redemption by adding to the text of the gnostic myth the phrase "making peace by the blood of his cross" (verse 20).

The two theses of Käsemann are not necessarily to be taken together. It is possible to hold that the *auctor* of the Letter has utilized an existing gnostic myth, and yet to place the Christian adaptation of the hymn in another setting than a baptismal one. G. Bornkamm places it in a Eucharistic one.²⁵ And it is equally conceivable to see baptismal motifs in the hymn and yet to

Critical assessments of Käsemann's theory of a pre-Christian Gnostic *Vorlage* are given by Schweizer, *op. cit.*, 102 f. ("very improbable"); E. Percy, *ZNTW*, xliii (1950), 184; E. Lohse, art., "Imago Dei bei Paulus", *Libertas Christiana*, 1957, 127.

²⁴ Liturgical ideas which are associated with baptism are:

(i) The attribution of Sonship to Christ (cf. the synoptic accounts of His baptism in Jordan, Mark 1: 11, etc.; the adjective ἀγαπητός is in Mark 1: 11 and Col. 1: 13),

(ii) The verbs ῥύεσθαι and μεθιστάναι.

(iii) The terms φῶς, μερίς, and κλήρος, all of which speak of the new existence of the baptized Christian. More particularly, Käsemann sees in the teaching on the new creation (i.e. the reconciliation of the cosmos and its renewal after the pattern of the image of God which is Christ Himself) the clearest sign of a baptismal motif. The thought of the "new man" who is re-made in the likeness of Christ in baptism (Eph. 4: 22 ff.; Gal. 3: 27; Rom. 6: 3-6) lies in the background of the hymn, especially when Col. 2: 9-15 is used to interpret it. That there are many verbal similarities between the two passages is obvious, with the *tertium comparationis* the use of the term ἀπέκδυσις, "putting off". On the cross Christ divested Himself of the "principalities and powers" in His triumph over them (2: 15). This is the meaning of the line of the hymn which proclaims a universal pacification of the cosmic powers (1: 20). But the same technical term is used (in 2: 11) for the appropriation of Christ's victory in the Christian "circumcision"; and the same imagery of "putting off" and "putting on" comes easily to be applied to the baptismal rite, as the baptizand takes off and then puts on his clothes (Gal. 3: 27). The baptism is likened to a death (Rom. 6: 3 ff.) in which the believer dies to those very powers which sought to enslave his Lord (Col. 2: 20; 3: 3). His new life is akin to a re-birth as (here again with the employment of the ἀπέκδυσις imagery) he puts off his old nature (3: 9) and puts on the new nature which is being renewed after the image (εἰκόν) of its creator (3: 10; cf. 3: 12, "put on").

According to Käsemann, therefore (and he is followed by Jervell, *op. cit.*; 202 f.) the main teaching of the hymn is the victory over the cosmic powers. This doctrine proclaims the conquest of Christ and shows how His Church too may rise above the tyranny of "Fate" in a world which feared the malevolence of these unseen forces of the upper air. The Christian is delivered from the régime of the powers and called to share the triumph of the Lord. He enters into this triumph at baptism when he dies and is re-born. This explains why "den liturgische Charakter des Stückes erklärt sich aus dem Charakter der Taufhomologie" (47). So also H. Conzelmann, *ad loc.* (*NTD*, 8, 1962) who pronounces this hypothesis "very likely". Similarly, W. Nauck, *Die Tradition and der Charakter des ersten Johannesbriefes* (1957), 48, speaks of Käsemann's view as "highly probable": cf. 50.

²⁵ Bornkamm, art. "Das Bekenntnis im Hebräerbrief", *Gesamm. Aufsätze*, Band II (1959), 196. His two main arguments are (i) that the hymn is introduced by the participle εὐχαριστοῦντες in verse 12 which leads us to

affirm the Pauline authorship in the sense that Paul has taken over and incorporated into an Apostolic letter traditional catechetical material.²⁶ But in either case it seems clear that Paul

expect a "Thanksgiving prayer" which as such finds its liturgical setting at the communion service (cf. *Didache* 10: 7), and (ii) Christological hymns as a liturgical genre developed in a Eucharistic setting—here drawing upon Lietzmann's theory of liturgical origins (*Festgabe für Harnack*, 1921, 241 ff., and *ZNTW*, xxii, 1923, 262 ff.). Col. 1: 15 ff. is a Christological confession as its structure shows. *Ergo*, its origin is Eucharistic.

N. A. Dahl, art. "Anamnesis: Mémoire et Commémoration dans le christianisme primitif", *ST*, i (1947), 69-95, has repeated this line of argument, apparently quite independently, and with greater detail. He has three points in favour of the, Eucharistic origin of Col. 1. This passage is not a hymn, but a hymnic predication of Christ.

i. He finds the relative style ("He who is") a sign of the passage's *milieu*, especially as this style became fixed in the later liturgies of the Church (e.g., Hippolytus's Eucharistic Prayer in *Apost. Tradit.* iv. [Dix, 7 f.l]).

ii. The whole passage is governed by the participle εὐχαριστοῦντες (verse 12). This is a Eucharistic prayer which introduces a Christological section.

iii. The confession (or, as he prefers to call it, "rémémoration") of Christ forms a two-part scheme divided between creation and redemption. The accent falls upon the superiority of Christ over the principalities and powers. This feature re-appears in the later Church orders—e.g., *Apost. Const.*, which has the same two-fold division, with the *Trisagion* intercalating between the two. The first part is developed, with a series of Old Testament motifs, but is opened with some hymnic predications and the mention of creation, of which Christ is the mediatorial agent, as in Col. 1 (A.C. viii. 12. 7 f.).

This resemblance corroborates "véritablement la supposition que les passages christologiques dans Col. 1 se sont fixés sous l'influence de la forme sous laquelle il était fait mémoire du Christ au repas du Seigneur" (82, n. 1).

For a short, critical comment on Bornkamm's view, cf. Jervell, *op. cit.*, 199, n. 104a.

²⁶ And, of course, these are not strict alternatives. *Tertium datur*, which is the view of most older and many contemporary scholars, viz. that Col. 1: 15-20, although hymn-like in form, has no baptismal connections and is not a revision of an existing hymn.

Some scholars find it still possible to affirm the apostolic authorship of both the Epistle and the hymn (which Paul is drawing upon as his own earlier work) on the ground that Col. 1: 15 ff. is the logical expression of his thinking about Christ as it unfolded in reaction to the rise of the false teaching at Colossae. Earlier (in 1 Cor. 8: 6) he had already placed the Lord Jesus in a cosmic setting and affirmed His pre-eminence over the "gods many and lords many" of the pagan world. At Colossae a heretical tendency in the Church there called forth a development of this teaching of the cosmic Christ. The Christological side of this "Colossian heresy" implied that there were powers controlling the natural world which needed to be reckoned with, and that the work of Christ was insufficient. Paul addresses himself to the refuting of this incipient gnosticism by the stress he places on the office of Christ as the sphere within which the work of creation takes place. He is the One through whom all created life came into existence, and this includes the angelic hierarchies: the Thrones, angelic lords, celestial powers and Rulers, mentioned in verse 16. In Him also all things, including these powers, hold together and He is their sustainer. Moreover, He is the final goal towards which the whole creation tends. Two features of this developed thought are clear, according to many commentators. The first is that Pauline Christology in Colossians springs directly out of Paul's earlier teaching in 1 Corinthians. "The Corinthian statement finds its amplification and expansion in this great affirmation sent to the church at Colossae" (E. Andrews, *The Meaning of Christ for Paul*, 1949, 162); cf. V. Taylor, *op. cit.*, 52.

The second conviction which many writers share is that Paul's Christology arose in his attempt to counter the false teaching at Colossae. As L. Cerfaux expresses it, "Paul conçoit la théologie chrétienne en antithèse avec le syncrétisme cosmique" (*Introduction à la Bible*, ed. A. Robert and A. Feuillet, 1959, 494). This "cosmic syncretism" developed in an atmosphere of Hellenistic Judaism and called forth from the Apostle this exposition of the person and role of Jesus as the Wisdom of God. The background of Wisdom Christology in speculative Judaism seems clearly evident.

C. F. Burney, *JTS*, xxvii, 160 ff. sees in the phrase πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως (1: 15) a direct allusion to Prov. 8: 22, *yhwh qanani reshith darko*, "The LORD begat me as the beginning of His way". The term *reshith* is linked by the Rabbis with the corresponding term in Gen. 1: 1, *bereshith*. The Apostle makes use of this Rabbinical identification, and gives an elaborate exposition of Gen. 1: 1. Every conceivable meaning which the Rabbis could extract from the terms *reshith* and *bereshith* is boldly reapplied to Christ as the Fulfiller of the Wisdom of Prov. 8: 22 ff. All this is with a view to showing that "the entire 'fulness' and plenitude of the Divine Being" is "concretely (Paul's word is σωματικῶς) embodied in Christ, because... it is God's good pleasure 'that in Him should all the fulness dwell'" (A. E. J. Rawlinson, *The New Testament Doctrine of the Christ*, 1926, 164 f.). That the identification of Christ with Wisdom on the basis of the various meanings of *reshith* is not so straightforward as Burney makes out is argued by Jervell, *op. cit.*, 200 ff.

(or the Christian author of Colossians) is drawing upon liturgical forms which have a hymn-like quality about them.

iii. The circumstances of the writer as a prisoner is another factor which militates against the production *currente calamo* of a rhythmical passage, in liturgico-hymnic vein, as he dictates a pastoral letter.²⁷ The elaborate way in which the chapter is built up suggests that what we find in the epistolary context had independent existence; and that the author's mind turns to a Christ-hymn, known to himself and his readers. The hymn is used at an appropriate place to buttress an argument and to enforce an appeal which was already in the writer's mind.

Our conclusion, then, is that Colossians 1: 15-20 embodies an

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early Christian tribute, set in hymnic form, to the Church's Lord, which the writer borrows from the liturgical praxis which was familiar both to himself and his readers.²⁸

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Against the first of these suppositions it is argued that 1 Cor. 8: 6 is itself traditional teaching which Paul had taken over. Furthermore, while this text declares that Christ is the agent in Creation—an office accorded to Wisdom in the Old Testament and the Apocrypha—Col. 1 takes the thought considerably further, proclaiming that He is creation's goal and the agent of a cosmic reconciliation which embraces every order of life. Nowhere else does this Christological claim soar higher in the Pauline literature. Col. 1 is far more than an expansion of ideas latent in the earlier Letters. It is new teaching with broader horizons and vaster implicates.

The current argument against the Pauline authorship of Col. 1 as a polemical document takes its point of departure from the understanding of the nature of the "Colossian heresy". This is a full-blown gnosticism with a maturity which dates it later than the apostolic age. The Colossians hymn has therefore little to do with it, except to show how the writer of Colossians had himself come under the spell of its teaching in that he uses a hymn which has a pre-Christian history. As Masson puts it, however, the purpose of the citation of the hymn is not as an antidote to heresy, but in praise of Jesus Christ (107). See further G. Bornkamm, "Die Häresie der Kolosserbriefes", *Gesamm. Aufsätze*, Band I (1952), 139-156; H. Conzelmann, "Die Irrlehrer vom Kolossä", *NTD* 8 (1962), 146-148.

²⁷ Masson, *op. cit.*, 106: "On se représente difficilement Paul se livrant dans sa prison à un travail de rédaction aussi délicat".

²⁸ The most recent theory in regard to the hymn begins with verses 15, 16a, c, 18b, 19 and 20a, which form (according to E. Schweizer, art. "The Church as the Missionary Body of Christ", *NTS*, viii, 1, 1961, 6-10) three couplets of exactly parallel lines. This was the original Colossian hymn, which the author of the Epistle worked over, partly by way of amplification and partly by way of correction, by the insertion of certain Pauline phrases (e.g., verses 16b, which clarifies the point that the cosmic powers are subject to Christ; 18a, which identifies Christ as "the head of the body, the Church"; 18c, which declares that Christ is pre-eminent; 20c, which relates the victory of Christ to His atoning death, in the Pauline manner).