

The Premise and Paraenesis:
Rhetorical Studies and the Connection of the
Christ Hymn with the Corresponding Paraenesis of Colossians

Philip J. Lowe

The book of Colossians is many things. At times it is direct, yet it is often confounding. It is theology, rhetoric, poetry, instruction, and encouragement. It is both eschatologically intimate and temporally distanced. And while much has been written on the book of Colossians, one pericope has ostensibly demanded more attention than any other: Colossians 1:15-20. In error, even the most-diligent readers have often embraced the epistle's most-pregnant pericope without contemplating its effect on the remaining instruction in the epistle.

Rhetorical studies will be engaged in cooperation with biblical studies to demonstrate the way in which praise and paraenesis are connected in Colossians. In addition to communicating theology and offering praise, Colossians 1:15-20 serves a strategic-rhetorical purpose which will benefit its author in their instruction of the Colossian community in Christ. It will be argued that the paraenetic material in Colossians 2-4 is intimately connected to Colossians 1:15-20 through semantic and theological retrieval. The rhetorical hymn of Colossians 1:15-20 is the premise for the paraenesis in Colossians 2-4.

Importance of Rhetoric in the Roman World

If we are to understand the rhetorical impact of Colossians 1:15-20 on the remainder of the epistle, it is necessary that we grasp the significance of rhetoric in the Roman world. Consequently, grasping the significance of rhetoric in the Roman world presupposes an understanding of rhetoric in ancient Greece. Therefore, our efforts to discuss the rhetorical function of Colossians 1:15-20 must begin with ancient Greece.

From Athens to Rome

An individual living in fourth-century Athens would likely have access to reading and writing materials, however, access to reading and writing materials does not necessitate the

utilization of reading and writing as primary communication methods. The strategic use of rhetoric—rather than written communication—was often the preferred and prevalent method of communication of the Grecian world.¹

The strategic use of rhetoric is evident throughout many spheres of the oral-aural culture. Politically, the use of writing was utilized to record official action or law, however it was oral communication that often accomplished “political agitation.”² The same general process applies to the sphere of business as contractual obligations were often written, but the process of arriving at the terms of the contract primarily took place through oral communication.³ The use of rhetoric also permeated the entertainment sphere with the majority of entertainment coming in the form of conversation or from the stage.⁴ In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, the value of rhetoric is depicted through a phobia of publishing speeches:

καὶ σύνοισθὰ που καὶ αὐτὸς ὅτι οἱ μέγιστον δυνάμενοι τε καὶ σεμνότατοι ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν αἰσχύνονται λόγους τε γράφειν καὶ καταλείπειν συγγράμματα ἑαυτῶν, δόξαν φοβούμενοι τοῦ ἔπειτα χρόνου, μὴ σοφιστὰι καλῶνται.⁵

The Grecian affinity for rhetoric spread with the dominance of Alexander the Great throughout the Mediterranean. George Kennedy furthers our understanding of the augmenting

¹ George Kennedy distinguishes the use oral communication even within the media of written communication, “All literature was written to be heard, and even when reading to himself a Greek read aloud.” George A. Kennedy, *History of Rhetoric: The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton University Press, 1963), 4.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Reading materials were available for entertainment, but their usage rate was inferior to that of oral-aural communication. Ibid.

⁵ Plato, *Phaedrus*. 257d. Kennedy adds depth to our understanding of the Grecian appreciation of rhetoric by noting the importance of Alcidamas’ defense of “extemporaneity” as a corroboration of the Platonic depiction of culture in *Phaedrus*. “Plato goes on to object to writing [in *Phaedrus* 274c5 ff.] because the words cannot explain and argue but always say the same things. His view is not unique: there has been preserved a little work by Alcidamas, *On Those Writing Written Speeches*, or, *On the Sophists*, which defends extemporaneity.” Kennedy, *History of Rhetoric*, 5.

importance of rhetoric, “Schools of Greek grammar and rhetoric appeared in every city and town of any importance and provided an entry into the new society of non-Greeks, as well as a traditional education for the sons of Greek families who settled abroad.”⁶ The curriculum that was produced and taught in the Grecian-education system became the foundation upon which Roman rhetoric would be built.

The Rise of Epideictic

Roman oratory was categorized into a tripartite *genera causarum*: (1) “deliberative oratory” which was often “undertaken in front of the council and assembly of the cities”; (2) “judicial oratory” which was utilized to discern a proper verdict; and, (3) “epideictic oratory” which was the speech of praise and blame.⁷

In the sphere of Roman education, epideictic rhetoric became a standard within the *progymnasmata*.⁸ Laurent Pernot has posited that, “rhetoric was the ‘core’ of ancient curriculum, [thus] we may conclude that anyone who received a quality education... was trained in [epideictic] rhetoric....”⁹ The educational system of Rome would prove instrumental in the rise of epideictic in the religio-political sphere.

While the Imperial period brought forth epideictic rhetoric’s rise to prominence, the activity of the Second Sophistic brought forth its rise to power.¹⁰ Pernot describes their influence

⁶ George A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 81.

⁷ Laurent Pernot, *Epideictic Rhetoric: Questioning the Stakes of Ancient Praise* (University of Texas Press, 2016), 18. Cf. Michael C. Alexander, “Oratory, Rhetoric, and Politics in the Republic” in *A Companion to Roman Rhetoric*, William Dominik and Jon Hall (eds.), *A Companion to Roman Rhetoric* (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007), 99

⁸ The *progymnasmata* are preliminary rhetorical exercises.

⁹ Pernot, *Epideictic Rhetoric*, 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

on epideictic's permeation of the Roman elite, "The... Second Sophistic [60 BC–AD 230] formed a professional, social, and cultural network. Teaching rhetoric, public speaking, political influence, fame, wealth, and globe-trotting typified their lives."¹¹ They were "connected to the Roman government and the civic aristocracies."¹² This upswing in epideictic's popularity is corroborated by its augmenting status in the educational and religio-political spheres.

This is the rhetorical environment in which we now engage our text.¹³ The book of Colossians is not void of rhetorical context or purpose. It was composed within a predominantly oral-aural culture. The text we read today was likely first dictated to an amanuensis who was tasked with drafting the text (primary orality).¹⁴ After its final drafting, the text was then taken to be read aloud to its intended audience (secondary orality).¹⁵ Therefore, what we often read silently in isolation was originally composed and read aloud in an oral-aural culture with rhetoric impacting every stage of its development.¹⁶

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ On literacy rates in the first-century, see Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 496-504. On the difficulties of utilizing texts even if literate (e.g. *scriptio continua*), see Paul J. Achtemeier, "Omne Verbum Sonat: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1990): 3-27. Cf. Carol Harrison, *The Art of Listening in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1-14.

¹⁴ Walter Ong describes primary orality as operating without the aid of texts, see Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World* (New York: Routledge, 2007). Cf. Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel. The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

¹⁵ "Secondary orality" is perhaps best described and summarized by Tobias Nicklas as the process "in which the producer had heard an oral version of a story that had itself been inspired by a written one (e.g. if people who had read written Transfiguration stories had begun repeating them orally)." See Tobias Nicklas, 'Early Christian Literature', in Tom Thatcher et al. (eds.), *The Dictionary of the Bible and Ancient Media* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 95-9. Cf. Michael Labahn, 'Secondary Orality', in Tom Thatcher et al. (eds.), *The Dictionary of the Bible and Ancient Media* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 362-3.

¹⁶ Scrolls could function as reference points during delivery after the memorization process, however, they could also be read aloud in their entirety. For further reading on the complexity and interplay of performance and text, see

On behalf of this reality, Colossians 1:15-20 will now be engaged through a combination of rhetorical and biblical studies. It will be evaluated in light of its strategic-rhetorical intent as well as its profound Christology. After our study is complete, conclusions will be offered regarding its structure and Christology.

Encomiastic Rhetoric to God (Hymn)

Under the umbrella of epideictic rhetoric (speech of praise or blame) we find encomia (praise of a person, place, or thing). Encomia dedicated to the gods carries the specific title of “hymn” (ὕμνος). A rhetorical hymn was discernible by its use of encomiastic *topoi*. *Topoi*, as Pernot describes, were “rubrics and vantage points in the light of which the orator examines his subject.”¹⁷ While there were many lists of developed *topoi* for rhetorical hymn, they can be summarized into three main categories: nature, birth, and power.¹⁸

The *topos* of “nature” was frequently found at the beginning of the encomium and could be used to address the general nature of the god(s), or specifics concerning the god to which the encomium was intended to praise.¹⁹ The *topos* of “birth” brought attention to the birth of the encomiastic subject. Often, the mythology or miraculous narratives which accompanied the birth were included as well.²⁰ The *topos* of “power” describes “the sphere of action of the god and the

Alan Kirk, “Manuscript Tradition as a Tertium Quid: Orality and Memory in Scribal Practices” in Tom Thatcher (ed.), *Jesus, the Voice, and the Text: Beyond The Oral and the Written Gospel* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008), 215-34.

¹⁷ Pernot, *Epideictic Rhetoric*, 31.

¹⁸ Pernot, *Epideictic Rhetoric*, 43. For a list of various *topoi* relating to occasion see, Michael W. Martin and Bryan A. Nash, “Philippians 2:6-11 as Subversive Hymnos: A Study in the Light of Ancient Rhetorical Theory” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 66 (2015): 90-138.

¹⁹ Ibid. Pernot references Quintilian, *Inst.*, 3.7.7 as an example of this *topos* regarding the general nature of the divine and Aristides, *Orations*, 46.5-7 for example of specifics of the god(s) being praised.

²⁰ Ibid. Pernot references Quintilian, *Inst.*, 3.7.7-8 as an example of the specifics included in this *topos*, and *Letter to Alexander*, 5 (often falsely attributed to Aristotle) as an example of mythological information being included, and

spatial representation of the divine strength; the “empire” of the god.”²¹ Each of these *topoi* will play an integral role in our understanding of Colossians 1:15-20 as rhetorical hymn and the premise for the paraenesis in the remainder of the epistle.

Rhetorical and biblical studies to assert the following: (1) Colossians 1:15-20 is understood properly as a rhetorical hymn dedicated to Christ; (2) the hymn follows common *topoi* of its day in a strategic effort to portray a Christology upon which the rest of the letter is built; (3) there is not merely one, but *two* encomia present in the short pericope; and (4) that each encomium is dedicated to Christ as God; and communicates a coherent and distinctly nuanced Christological truth.

Colossians 1:15-18a as Rhetorical Hymn

ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου

Nature

The *topos* of “nature” discusses the general nature of the divine. The “nature” of Christ, then, is that of θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου now revealed.²² There are two possible backgrounds informing the author’s use of this *topos* which have divided various readings of the hymn: Adamic typology and the Wisdom tradition.

Typically, these two readings diverge in their understanding of εἰκὼν in 1:15. The proponents of Adamic typology find compelling evidence in the intertextuality between εἰκὼν

Aristides inclusion of the miraculous narratives in Aristides, *Orations*, 37.2.3; 40.2; 41.3.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Pao links this to Wisdom as the “intermediary being that provides access to the transcendent God. For Paul, Jesus as the true Wisdom is and always has been the image of God, and through him God’s nature and will are made known.” See David W. Pao, *Colossians and Philemon* (HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2012), 91.

(Col 1:15) and צלם (Gen 1:26).²³ Those in favor of the Wisdom tradition oppose a primarily-Adamic understanding of εἰκὼν.²⁴ Macaskill, as a proponent of the text’s reliance upon the Wisdom tradition, attempts to broaden our understanding of εἰκὼν by allowing historical background to expand its semantic range, “It is important to note that in Jewish contexts [εἰκὼν] was not exclusively linked to [humanity], or more broadly to the first couple.”²⁵ While further survey of the pericope will add nuance, we are able to discern a general-Christological communication in this *topos* at this juncture. In this *topos* the author has communicated the nature of Christ through the attribution of divinity, mediation, and the revelation of God.

πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως

Birth

It is imperative that we not anachronistically reduce πρωτότοκος to being primarily a communication of temporality. The semantic range of “firstborn” can either be understood as a communication of temporality as well as ontological status. In this context, Christ as the

²³ Christopher Seitz’s position serves as a microcosm for the nuance involved in the Adamic-typological position. While he does see the aforementioned intertextuality, he also sees Colossians repurposing the creation narrative, “Colossians 1 uses Gen. 1 in its own way, just as has John 1. They both make distinctive contributions in seeing in the Genesis text a literal sense with inherent extension.” See Christopher R. Seitz, *Colossians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2014), 115.

²⁴ Those in favor of the Wisdom tradition dispute the text’s reliance on Genesis 1:26 due to its lack of allusion to the “likeness” of God that is expressed alongside “image” in the creation account. There are more nuanced positions, however, as Wright sees Wisdom (and the identification of Torah with Wisdom) in the Christ Hymn through the intertextuality of Genesis 1:1, Proverbs 8:22, and Colossians 1:15-20. See Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 19-20.

²⁵ Macaskill goes on to note that if we exercise caution before forcing εἰκὼν to fit the Adamic tradition we are then allowed “to recognize the range of ways in which Jesus is represented as performing the mediatorial roles of Wisdom or Torah, but as a human being.” Grant Macaskill, “Union(s) with Christ: Colossians 1:15-20,” *Ex Auditu* 33 (2018): 95.

“firstborn” is best understood in Colossians as a claim to status rather than simply temporal placement.²⁶ A statement involving temporality does not necessitate a temporal interpretation.²⁷

Of course, πρωτότοκος and πάσης κτίσεως are inextricably linked, and should be read as such. Either we read Christ depicted as “the firstborn *of* all creation,” or, we read Christ depicted as “the firstborn *over* all creation.” Rather than a partitive genitive, πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως is best glossed as the “firstborn *over* all creation” (genitive of subordination) as this best communicates the value of this genitive in its syntactic context, and appropriately glosses “status” even if a temporal element is retained in πρωτότοκος.²⁸ Thus, the author has semantically supported the *topos* of “birth”—in line with the encomiastic structure—while pragmatically communicating the domain, authority, and status, of Christ.

²⁶ Quintillian allows for the discussion of the immortal—whether by birth or by merit—but, mentions nothing on how to discuss one that is unbirthed. Quintillian, *The Orator’s Education*, 3.7.9.

²⁷ “Firstborn” is a title applied to the nation of Israel as a collective singular implicating status as well as temporality in Exod. 4:22; Jer. 31:9; Ps. Sol 18:4; 4 Ez. 8:58.

²⁸ Constantine R. Campbell, “Response to Macaskill,” *Ex Auditu* 33 (2017): 108–12. Cf. Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 21; Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 91; Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 111-16. Arnold does well to bring forth the connection of Wisdom and creation, “In the book of Proverbs, wisdom is personified and said to be with God at the creation of the world... (Prov. 8:27, 30). In the Jewish wisdom literature... this personified divine wisdom is described as the image of God: “For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness” (Wisd. Sol. 7:26).” See Clinton E. Arnold, Frank S. Thielman, and Steven M. Baugh, *Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2015), 137.

ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα
ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,
τὰ ὄρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα,
εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες
εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι·

Power

The opening of Colossians 1:16 offers the reader a semantic predicament with the employment of the ὅτι clause.²⁹ The ὅτι clause can produce a reading of explanation (“that is...”) as well as a reading of causality (“because”). However, an explanatory reading would result in a restatement of the prior phrase without amplifying or changing its context in any way. A reading of causality would, however, defend the previous statement and further the text with natural progression by allowing the text to flow smoothly from the previous *topos* to the current *topos*. Therefore, a reading of causality should be maintained resulting in the following reading:

“*because* in him all things were created...”³⁰

The author then moves to a vivid description of Christ’s all-encompassing domain. Both ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς and ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς as well as τὰ ὄρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα describe an unlimited

²⁹ Seitz, *Colossians*, 94-7. Seitz has chosen “that is” in an effort to indicate that an explanation of the preceding text is forthcoming. Of course, Seitz also sees a partitive genitive in πάσης κτίσεως (1:15), which has now informed his reading of 1:16. Therefore, according to Seitz, we have Christ depicted as “the firstborn *of* all creation—that is:...”

³⁰ Constantine R. Campbell, *Colossians and Philemon: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Baylor University Press, 2013), 11. Contra Campbell, N.T. Wright chooses “for” as a gloss for ὅτι. While this rests well within the semantic range of ὅτι, it is a gloss that expresses explanation as well as cause, thus “for” is considered by this author as an inferior representation of the Greek in this instance. See Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 21-2.

A minor predicament—as it relates to this effort—is found in how one understands ἐν αὐτῷ. Campbell takes issue with an instrumental reading (“by him”) which communicates Christ’s role as Creator and Sustainer of all things. He instead opts for a locative reading appealing to its communication of all things being created and sustained by God “in the realm or domain of Christ.” In Campbell’s understanding, the locative reading (“in him”) communicates the same “thrust” of 1:15-20 as a literary unit; the supremacy of Christ. Campbell, *Colossians and Philemon*, 11. While I do not agree with Campbell that an instrumental reading in this instance necessitates an understanding of the supremacy of Christ that is diminished from what a locative reading would communicate, a locative gloss is ostensibly best suited due to the literary context and a more explicit communication of Christ’s supremacy and domain in English.

domain.³¹ This is the “sphere of action” as well as the “spatial representation” of Christ’s domain. If we assume Wright’s assertion that “τὰ πάντα” is then specified with “εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι” it would appear that the specification is intended to guide the hearer’s attention to a specific subset of Christ’s power.³² By nature, Christ’s authority holds supremacy over any other power within creation that might be claimed.³³ Therefore, it can be concluded that the author is emphasizing the totality of domain in Christ alone. With this claim, the previous *topos* has been justified and expounded.

καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων
καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν,
καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας

With the presence of the continuative καὶ, Pernot’s summary of the *topos* of “power” still applies to verse 17, and the totality of Christ’s domain is still in focus. Christ (αὐτός) as “before all [things]” can communicate aspects of temporality and primacy. Again, a temporal gloss does not necessitate a temporal interpretation. “He is before all...” communicates a temporal reality of Christ existing before all, but can simultaneously—and primarily—still communicate status and domain. Thus, one should exercise caution before forcing this text into the false dichotomy of communicating *either* temporality *or* primacy, and should instead opt for a reading that semantically communicates temporality while pragmatically communicating primacy. Thus, under the *topos* of power (vv. 16–18a) we see four central claims: (1) in the domain of Christ all things were created (ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα); (2) in the domain of Christ all things are sustained (τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν); thus, (3) Christ has primacy both temporally and ontologically (καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων). (4) Christ is the head of the body, the church (καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας).

³¹ Campbell’s nuance regarding the reappearance of the locative is helpful in dispelling any overreading, “While ἐν αὐτῷ... is regarded as locative in the sense of the realm or domain of Christ, this instance is more concrete referring to one of the two ‘physical’ locations in which ‘all things’ exist.” Campbell, *Colossians and Philemon*, 11.

³² Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 22. It is also likely that τὰ πάντα is intended as a topical frame, see Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 165-70.

³³ While we may never be certain whether Paul is referencing a cosmic power, or political power nearer to the Lycus Valley, Wright does well to remind the reader that for Paul, “spiritual and earthly rulers were not sharply distinguished.” See Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 22.

The continuative καὶ as well as the topical frame (αὐτός) indicate that the church is both under the domain *of*, and sustained *in*, Christ.³⁴ And while the hymn has communicated an ecclesiology, the author's Christology is still in focus. Wright summarizes the Christology of this clause, "[It is] asserting that the world is now sustained and upheld by Christ, [and it] transfers to him one more aspect of 'wisdom' thought (see Wisdom 1:7; Ecclus. 43:26; and in the NT cf. Heb. 1:3).³⁵ In this *topos*, the author has expanded previous depictions; here, portraying Christ's domain as existing without beginning, without limit, and without exception.

Conclusion

One might deem it odd to offer a conclusion halfway through a pericope. However, it is here that the initial encomium reaches its natural stopping point.³⁶ Each of the *topoi* have been strategically implemented by the author in 1:15–18a, and we will see a repeat of these same *topoi* in 1:18b-20. Thus, having surveyed these *topoi* we are prepared to discern the author's Christology as presented in this initial encomium.

The initial encomia depicts Christ the Creator-incarnate as the revelation of God as well as the agent in which all creation was both created (Col. 1:16) and is sustained (Col. 1:17). In

³⁴ Given the context of the phrase as well as the pericope, τοῦ σώματος should be understood as a genitive of subordination rather than a partitive genitive with τῆς ἐκκλησίας functioning as a genitive in apposition to τοῦ σώματος. Cf. Campbell, *Colossians and Philemon*, 14. On αὐτός as topical framing, see Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 165-70.

³⁵ Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 23. Contra Wright, Beale notes that this is "a reference to the old creation that continues into the overlap of the inbreaking new creation narrated in Col. 1:18-20..." This, of course, furthers his line of argumentation of an Adamic typology functioning as the primary background of Colossians 1:15-20. See Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 119.

³⁶ It should be noted that this dual-encomia theory does not present an obstacle to the poetic structuring of 1:15-20, nor does it presuppose any objection to its poetic background. It should also be noted that encomia generally varied in length, yet short statements summarizing an entire *topos* is not uncommon. Cf. Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1.9.33-4 [1367^b]; *Eth. eud.* 2.1.12 [1219^b]). On the poetic structure of 1:15-20, see N. T. Wright "Poetry and Theology in Colossians 1:15-20." *New Testament Studies* 36 (1990): 449.

Christ, temporal and ontological primacy are found. It is this same Christ who rules and sustains the church (1:18a), and in whom all those in power are subjected (1:16). The Christology of the initial encomia is a depiction of Christ as Creator, Sustainer, and Wisdom.

Christ as Creator is explicitly communicated in the initial encomia. Under this umbrella the concept of wisdom is present. Wisdom was present both *at*, and *in*, creation (Prov. 3:19; 8:22), and it is the ordering principle in which the “earth was founded and the heavens established” (Prov. 3:19).³⁷ Now, however, the invisible God that created and sustains the cosmos has revealed himself in Christ, the manifestation of divine Wisdom. This cosmic and intimate reality will be furthered in the second encomium (1:18b-20).

Colossians 1:18b-20 as Rhetorical Hymn

ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχή

Nature

We are again met with a situation in which we encounter a word (ἀρχή) with broad-semantic range. One can read ἀρχή as semantically expressing temporality while pragmatically—and primarily—expressing an authority and status which is well within its semantic range: “the ruler.”³⁸ Wright is one of many who conflate the two options, “The word “beginning” is too thin to do justice to [ἀρχή], which means ‘first principle’, ‘source’, ‘creative

³⁷ Therefore, the act of being wise is analogous to living along the order of creation, consequently, wisdom *is* the order of creation. Genesis 1:26-31, if read against its ancient Near East contemporaries, depicts YHWH creating female and male in his עַלְמֵי as an extension of his domain on earth. עַלְמֵי can be understood as simultaneously an appreciation of humanity as well as a title with royal implications. It comes with vocational responsibility; one that is depicted as being tragically mishandled in Genesis 3. Colossians 1:15, then, is understood as an allusion to the creation account of Genesis 1 with Christ redeeming and fulfilling the intended vocation of אָדָם. In doing so, Christ is depicted as the high-definition εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου.

³⁸ In a study of this text dissimilar to Bird’s generally excellent scholarship, he neglects the inherent connotations of status within the semantic range of ἀρχή and sees this word communicating temporality *only* as a “fairly obvious echo of Gen 1:1.” See Bird, *Colossians and Philemon*, 55.

initiative’, and again indicates priority in both time and rank.”³⁹ While it can be argued that a temporal gloss is best suited here due to the immediately following *πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν*, one should be hesitant before elevating the immediate syntax above the context and structure of the pericope in its entirety. We have demonstrated that the pericope thus far has primarily communicated the authority and domain of Christ. We will also see in the following section, that the forthcoming context does not necessitate a temporal understanding anymore than *καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων* in the preceding context. Thus, if we are given the choice between reading this phrase as either, “Christ is the beginning,” or, “Christ is the ruler,” it is more than appropriate to discern a reading that is in line with the semantic and theological contexts of the pericope: “Christ is the ruler.”

With this in mind, we can conclude that the *topos* of “nature” has been revisited. While in 1:15 the nature of Christ was that of revelation (*ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου*), here (1:18b) we see the nature of Christ as ruler. While this is not a new claim for the hymn, its forthcoming context will reveal a Christological nuance which the author is bringing to the forefront of the second encomium.

*πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν
ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτός πρωτεύων,*

Birth

Similarly to the initial use of *πρωτότοκος* in verse 15, *πρωτότοκος* in verse 18 is properly understood as a conflation of both time and rank. The remainder of the line (*ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν*) is

³⁹ Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 23; Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 124; Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 95-6. While many force a temporal gloss upon the word in this instance, they rarely do so in 1:16 and 2:15 in which *ἀρχαὶ* is often glossed as “rulers” or “authorities.” While an argument could be made that the context is different at this juncture, a parallel argument could also be made that the semantic and theological context dictate that it is similar.

generally glossed as “from the dead,” but is perhaps better glossed as “out of the dead” to communicate the separation inherent in this use of the genitive.⁴⁰

The introduction of the second line initiates a *ἵνα* clause. While this could constitute either a purpose clause or a result clause, Campbell helpfully notes that “purpose and result are identical in declarations of the divine will.”⁴¹ Thus, the nature of Christ as the ἀρχή (1:18b) is now provided the Christological context of resurrection and new creation. He is the ruler, not only of creation (1:15-18a), but of this new creation in order that he might have primacy in all things (ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων). Thus, with this *topos* the author has continued his depiction of Christ’s domain and extended it from creation (first encomium) to include new creation (second encomium).

ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι
 καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν,
 εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ,
 [δι’ αὐτοῦ] εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς
 εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

Power

Many have translated ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι as “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in him,” however, it should be noted that “of God” is not present in the Greek. Most translations default to inserting the phrase “of God” into their translation of πλήρωμα presumably due to the inclusion of divinity in 2:9. Accordingly, Campbell notes that “cognates of πλήρωμα are found in the OT (LXX) with reference to God filling heaven and earth (Ps 72:19; Isa 6:3; Jer 23:24) and the temple (Ezek 43:5; 44:4).”⁴²

⁴⁰ Campbell, *Colossians and Philemon*, 15.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Campbell, *Colossians and Philemon*, 16. On those who see πλήρωμα as a periphrasis or a circumlocution for God see, Arnold, et al., *Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 138; Bird, *Colossians and Philemon*, 56. Cf. Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 97; Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 24. Beale sees intertextuality between “the fulness dwelling in Christ in Col 1:19 with Ps. 67:17–18 LXX; 68:17–18 MT; 68:16–17 Eng. See Beale, *Colossians and*

A connective καὶ is used before expressing intermediate agency with δι' αὐτοῦ. With context indicating that Christ is the most likely antecedent of αὐτοῦ, and God being the most likely antecedent of αὐτόν, the text is perhaps best understood as God reconciling all to himself through the intermediate agency of Christ.⁴³ Accordingly, the aorist active participle εἰρηνοποιήσας is best understood as the action of God through the blood (means) of Christ's cross.⁴⁴

The concluding lines summarize the power and extent of this reconciliation.⁴⁵ The presence of the textual variant “[δι' αὐτοῦ]” was likely added to sustain poetic symmetry, and is omitted in B D* F G I L 075.⁴⁶ A double marker of condition is indicated with the dual employment of εἴτε, and is utilized to articulate the extent of the aforementioned reconciliation “whether on the earth or in the heavens.”⁴⁷ Thus, in this revisitation of “power” the author has used this *topos* to expand upon its first occurrence (1:16-18b) to include salvific reconciliation on a cosmic scale.

Philemon, 127.

⁴³ “In Paul, this specific verb [ἀποκαταλλάξαι] occurs only in Col 1:20, 22 and Eph 2:16, but the related word group... also occurs in Paul's earlier writings (Rom 5:10, 11; 11:15; 1 Cor 7:11; 2 Cor 5:18, 19, 20). This word group finds its roots in a Hellenistic political background, where it was used in the realm of diplomatic relationships. But Paul transforms this concept. Instead of the guilty party initiating the process of reconciliation, Paul emphasized that it is God, the offended party, who took the initiative while humans were still sinners (Rom 5:8, 10).” See Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 98.

⁴⁴ Campbell, *Colossians and Philemon*, 17. Pao furthers our understanding of “peacemaker” when he adds, “To the Gentile audience in Colossae, “making peace” may also evoke the political propaganda of the early imperial period, where the title “peacemaker” was applied to Roman emperors and generals who established peace by military pacification (Dio Cassius 44.49.2; 72.15.5). Paul's subsequent reference to Jesus' death on the cross thus provides a critique of such power because his reign is established through humility instead of might.” See Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 99-100.

⁴⁵ Wright asserts, “Paul clearly believed that it was possible for human beings to reject God's offer of salvation, and that at the last judgment some, having done so, would thereby be themselves rejected (see Rom. 1:18–2:16; 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:5–10.)” See Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 24.

⁴⁶ Campbell, *Colossians and Philemon*, 17.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

In the second encomium the author has again communicated a profound Christology. Christ as the *πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν* has defeated sin and death through his resurrection. Christ separating from the dead is depicted as the purpose and result of his all-encompassing primacy (1:18). In this resurrection, Christ the Creator has extended his title to include Re-creator. And through this designation the separation of God and Creation has ended; Christ—in whom the fullness was pleased to dwell (1:19)—took on human flesh and dwelt among his people once again. Now, in the wake of the resurrection, God has reconciled all things to himself making peace by the blood of his cross (1:20).

Christ is Creator (1:15-18a) and Re-creator (1:18b-20), and his domain is not limited by flesh and blood. Perhaps it is best summed up by Wright, “He has given himself to his world in loving self-sacrifice, to create out of sinful humanity a people for his own possession, with the intention of eventually bringing the entire universe into a new order and harmony.”⁴⁸ Christ as Re-creator allows those in Christ to be re-created. The body of Christ has now been afforded the knowledge of God’s will through Christ’s revelation as well as an opportunity to operate within his domain. This is the intent of Colossians; not only praise, but paraenesis.

From Premise to Paraenesis

The rhetorical hymn of 1:15-20 transitions to a focus on the audience (1:20-23) and brings the intended hearers into an intimate application of the hymn before a description of Paul’s own suffering and ministry (1:24-2:5). The *transitio* in 2:6-7 summarizes what has thus far been communicated, and anticipates the forthcoming content. It connects Colossians 1:3-2:5

⁴⁸ Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 24.

(*exordium*) to 2:6-4:6 (paraenesis).⁴⁹ Copenhaver further develops our understanding of the rhetorical function of this *transitio*, “The *transitio* centers upon the first imperative of the letter, περιπατεῖτε (2:6), which both recalls Paul’s prayer (1:9) and sets the theme for the entire ensuing paraenesis.”⁵⁰ The second use of περιπατεῖτε (4:6) marks an *inclusio* of the entire section of paraenesis.

Our study of the paraenesis in chapters 2-4 will use rhetorical analysis and biblical studies to accomplish three objectives: (1) to demonstrate that paraenesis shares an intimate connection with its theological and rhetorical premise (1:15-20); (2) to discern and categorize the type of connection that each paraenetic unit shares with the premise; and (3) to argue that the author’s paraenetic intention is to provide pragmatic instruction on how to live faithfully in the domain of Christ.

2:8-23 as Negative Paraenetic Comparison (Dissuasion)

Our study of this initial paraenetic connection will be broken down into three sections of warning (vv. 8–15; 16–17; 18–19), and one section of summary and *transitio* (2:20–23), as dictated by its rhetorical structure.⁵¹ It is imperative that we recall the intent of our study which is to showcase these paraenetic connections to the premise of paraenesis in Colossians (1:15-20). Thus, our study does not primarily function as a commentary on the text itself, but as a commentary on its paraenetic connection. We begin with the initial warning within this paraenetic connection: 2:8-15.

⁴⁹ The *exordium* is the beginning of an oration.

⁵⁰ Adam Copenhaver, *Reconstructing the Historical Background of Paul’s Rhetoric in the Letter to the Colossians*: (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 110.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 110-27.

2:8-15: The First Warning

Colossians 2:8-15 begins with the imperative Βλέπετε μή warning his audience to beware of those who desire to take them captive (ὁ σὺλαγωγῶν) through philosophy and rhetoric of emptiness antithetical to the fullness of Christ. This “empty deceit according to the human traditions of the world” may be the author’s recall of “the polemic of both Isaiah (29:13) and Jesus (Mark 7:5ff.) against the transformation of true, living religion into a set of ideas and rules handed on at a purely human level.”⁵² While the details of precisely what the author might be referring to in 2:8 are difficult to discern due to the ambiguity surrounding the epistle’s setting, Wright does well in discerning the influence of 2:8 as a “summary statement whose implications are then worked out.”⁵³

The author then continues with a paraenetic connection to its theological premise in Colossians 1:19 through the means of semantic retrieval. In 2:9 we see, “κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς in Christ. One may recall 1:19 in which “fullness” is depicted as being “pleased to dwell” in Christ, and the author carries this forward with a sense of corporate solidarity in 2:9.⁵⁴ Just as the fullness of deity dwells bodily in Christ, those in Christ have been filled in Christ. Christ is subsequently described as the “head (1:18a; 2:10) of all rule and authority (1:16; 2:10).”

⁵² Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 53.

⁵³ Ibid. While individual word studies are largely outside of the scope of this effort, it should be added that the background of στοιχεῖα is one of polarizing conjecture. We simply do not have enough information to precisely discern what Paul is referring to in his use of the word. It is likely that Paul is referring to local governing deities, yet past this assertion—and even within this assertion—we have very little qualified information. Cf. Ibid., 54; Bird, *Colossians and Philemon*, 76; Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 156.

⁵⁴ Pao sees an interesting allusion to Ps 68:16 (LXX Ps 67:17). See Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 157. Cf. Bird, *Colossians and Philemon*, 52; Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 54.

In 2:11 we are haerkened back to 1:18 with the author's use of σώματος. In 1:18, Christ is stated to be the head of the body, before σώματος is then further defined as "the church." In 2:11, Paul discusses the "body (σώματος) of flesh." The author is intentionally referencing a σώματος antithetical—and therefore in need of being put to death—to the σώματος in 1:18.

Circumcision is made analogous to baptism in Christ through the metaphorical life and death experienced in the baptism.⁵⁵ Christ has previously been depicted as the the firstborn "ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν" (1:18), and now those in Christ are depicted as sharing in this separation "out of death" through the participatory death and resurrection of baptism in Christ, whom God raised "ἐκ νεκρῶν." Those in Christ have now been "made alive together with him." Those in Christ have had their trespasses forgiven through God's cancellation of our record of debt by nailing it to the cross (2:14; Cf. 1:20). Again, the "rulers and authorities" (2:15) suggest semantic retrieval from 1:16 as a triumphal procession is depicted.⁵⁶

The paraenetic comparison (2:16-19) depicts the negative actions of those in antithetical position to the depiction of 2:9-15. It begins with an explicit instruction (2:16) to those mentioned in 2:9-15. They are told to let no one pass judgment on them in regard to what they consume, nor because of their use of the calendar. The author characterizes these as a "shadow of the things to come," but notes that the "substance *belongs* to Christ" ("σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ" in 2:17; σώματος in 1:18).⁵⁷ The paraenesis continues with instruction to those depicted in 2:9-15

⁵⁵ Pao finds allusion in Lev 26:1, 30; Isa 2:18; 10:11; 16:12; 19:1; 21:9; 31:7; 46:6; Dan 5:4, 23; 6:28; cf. Wis 14:8, and interprets the author's phrasing of the circumcision that is performed "by human hands" as an accusation against "those who emphasize physical circumcision of worshiping false gods." Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 160.

⁵⁶ Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 62; Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 167-8; Arnold, et al., *Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 147.

⁵⁷ Emphasis mine.

not to be disqualified by those who do not hold fast to the Head (2:18) which supplies nourishment to the entire body. The body grows with a growth from God just as the gospel in all the world (1:6; cf. 1:10)

2:16-17: The Second Warning

The second warning echoes the structure of 2:8 and “connect[s] the warnings of 2:16-23 to the preceding context as a logical conclusion...”⁵⁸ Μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς κρινέτω in this context expresses a judgment in relation to community. The author is not warning against being subjected to critique, rather he is warning them not to let themselves be ostracized from the community on the basis of the shadow (“σκιὰ” in reference to 2:16) when the “body” or “substance” (σῶμα) belongs to Christ.⁵⁹ For those in Christ, participation in Christ is not subservient to participation in the σκιὰ τῶν μελλόντων, thus those partaking in the σκιὰ τῶν μελλόντων have no authority to exercise communal ostracization in this matter. This is confirmed and intensified in the third warning.

2:18-19: The Third Warning

With the community of those in Christ still in view, the author uses καταβραβεύετω (2:18) as an amplification of κρινέτω (2:16). This warning regarding those “insisting on asceticism and worship of angels” shares structural parallels with 2:16 (cf. 2:8) as well as a similar shift to the author’s commentary on why his opposition is lacking (2:18b-19; cf. 2:9;

⁵⁸ Copenhaver, *Reconstructing the Historical Background of Paul’s Rhetoric in the Letter to the Colossians*, 118.

⁵⁹ Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 63. Copenhaver dispels the notion of Platonism as the primary background to the contrast of shadow and substance in v. 17. Instead, he likens the contrast to the earlier contrast of emptiness and fullness in 2:8-10, see Copenhaver, *Reconstructing the Historical Background of Paul’s Rhetoric in the Letter to the Colossians*, 118.

2:17).⁶⁰ The logic of the author is presented through a contrast of the “mind” (νοῦς) puffed up by “vanity” or “emptiness” (εἰκῆ) and the “body” (σῶμα) connected to the head (cf. asdf) which “grows with a growth that is from God (2:19; cf. 1:6). The implication is a clear distinction between the “old self” and the “new self”—which the author will soon bring into focus—seen here through the contrast of emptiness (of the opposition) and fullness (of Christ).

It is implied that the body grows with the growth of God because it shares intimacy with the head. The communal aspect of “the body” is brought further into focus through an intensification of the body metaphor with the authors reference to the joints (ἀφῶν) and ligaments (συνδέσμων). Ecclesiological unity is determined by Christology.

2:20-23: Summary and *Transitio*

This *transitio* works in rhetorical unison with 3:1-4 as a bridge between 2:8-19 (warnings) and 3:5-4:6 (exhortations). The author has intentionally used 2:20-23 to provide a summary and amplification of the warnings in 2:8-19 while continuing in the comparison.⁶¹ The comparison of life in Christ, and death to the world is amplified beginning in 2:20.

The author has already spent time warning his hearers about the “elemental spirits” of the world in 2:8, however, in 2:20 we see the initial warning of 2:8 now placed within a rhetorical question. If his hearers have already died to these “elemental spirits” why are they submitting to the dogmatization according to human precepts and teachings as if they had never died to these “elemental spirits” at all (2:20-22)? The implication of the rhetorical question is found in the

⁶⁰ A detailed exegesis of this passage is beyond the purview of this effort. It is worth noting that Copenhaver presents an excellent argument that this text functions within the opposition of two separate rhetorical parties. For his discussion of a Jewish and pagan opposition, see Copenhaver, *Reconstructing the Historical Background of Paul's Rhetoric in the Letter to the Colossians*, 195-234.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 120.

following verse. These dogmatizations fall short of Christ in that they have only “the appearance of wisdom,” but they have no value in actually “stopping the indulgence of the flesh” (2:23).

Paul has contrasted the nature of these dogmatizations as having the “appearance of wisdom” with Christ in whom the “fullness of wisdom” is hidden (2:3).⁶² Furthermore, if 2:20-23 is understood as a summary and amplification of 2:8-18, then what the author is depicting with the warnings of 2:8-23 is properly understood to be antithetical—both in ethic and identity—to those who have been “filled in Christ” (2:10), and operate in his domain (2:6-7). Those who have been liberated from the domain of the world and transferred to the domain of Christ (1:13, 15–20) need not submit to the dogmatization of those depicted as still under the authority of Christ, yet doing life as if they were not (2:20-23).⁶³

2:8-23: Connecting the Premise and Paraenesis

The paraenesis of 2:18-23 is strategically connected to its premise in 1:15-20 both theologically and semantically. We have demonstrated that 1:15-20 is an expression of Christ’s domain in creation as well as re-creation. The domain of Christ is the primary-connection point of this paraenetic unit, and the paraenetic unit focuses on the interrelation of those “in Christ” as well as those “out of Christ.”

⁶² Ibid., 122.

⁶³ Ibid., 123. It should also be noted that this function of persuasion within epideictic rhetoric often presents alternative views and actions in an effort to persuade the audience toward the intended goal of persuasion. Thus, the possibility of specific opposition in Colossians is viable, however, the refutation of specific opposition is a more-appropriate function of judicial rhetoric rather than epideictic. In Colossians, a strong argument can be made that there is no specific opposition in view, and that the author is instead utilizing oppositional rhetoric to present a generalized “opposition” in an effort to persuade his hearers toward an ethic that aligns with their new life “in Christ.” This would allow for a more-appropriate understanding of opposition within epideictic rhetoric, and it simultaneously alleviates the problems inherent in our inability to identify a specific “Colossian heresy.” Cf. Ibid., 125-6.

The author has not chosen the *hapax legomenon*, *συλαγωγῶν* (2:8), haphazardly. Outside of the context of Christ's domain, the use of *συλαγωγῶν* simply has no evident-conceptual reference. If *συλαγωγῶν* is not a reference to the concept of Christ's domain, its inclusion would be an outlier both linguistically and rhetorically.⁶⁴

Evidence of retrieval is seen through the conceptual metaphor of the "body" (2:9, 17, 18-19), in relation to the initial use of the metaphor (1:18). This same evidence is continued through the related metaphor of the "head" in 2:9 and 2:19 (cf. 1:18); as well as the various corresponding metaphors of "death," "life," "circumcision," and "uncircumcision," all of which are threaded throughout the paraenetic unit. The "fullness" of Christ (2:9) as well as those "filled" in Christ (2:10) are directly connected to 1:19. Conversely, the contrast of "emptiness" or "vanity" (*εἰκῆ*, 2:18) is applied to the minds of the author's opposition. The concepts of resurrection (vv. 12-13, 20), victory over opposition (v. 15), and wisdom (v. 23), all bear a direct connection to the premise of 1:15-20. The connection of this paraenetic unit to its premise is evidenced by clear and repeated retrieval of both Christology and semantics.

The intention of the paraenesis now comes into focus. We have demonstrated that the premise has directly informed the paraenesis, however, the rhetorical connection is not equivalent to its desired outcome. To conclude that the desired outcome of the paraenetic unit is to have the audience respond appropriately is oversimplification. In pursuit of a more-appropriate conclusion we turn back to the interrelated concepts of domain and authority.

⁶⁴ Demetrius cites Theophrastus 58 (Frag. 696, 3rd century BCE), referencing the 'essentials of persuasiveness' which negate the need for 'punctilious detail' in favor of omitting detail in an effort to allow the audience to come to an implied understanding. See, Demetrius, *Eloc.* 222. Cf. Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.2.71; Catrin Williams, "How Scripture 'Speaks': Insights from the Study of Ancient Media Culture" in David Allen and Steve Smith (eds.), *Methodology in the Use of the Old Testament in the New: Context and Criteria* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019).

Περιπατεῖτε (2:6; cf. 4:6) is the genesis of *inclusio* functioning within the *transitio* preceding the paraenetic unit of 2:8-23. The authority of Christ (as a function of his domain) is referenced repeatedly. Christ is titled as “Lord” (v. 6), the dwelling place of God (v.9), the “head of all rule and authority” (v. 10); and is ascribed agency in the victory of God through the forgiveness of sin and triumph over his opposition (vv. 14-15). Each warning offered in 2:8-23 is intended to dissuade the audience from subjecting themselves to the hallow authority of the rhetorical opposition: those who live within the boundaryless domain of Christ, but do not adhere to its Christological ethic.

3:1-4:1 as Positive Paraenesis (Persuasion)

3:1-4: Paraenetic Introduction and *Transitio*

Chapter three is a continuation of the minor *transitio* that was initiated in 2:20. While 2:20-23 summarizes and amplifies its preceding content, 3:1-4 introduces and anticipates the exhortations to come (3:1-4:1). The author’s persuasion in 3:1-4:1 begins with what Wright refers to as a “contrast like that of the religion in 2:16-23.”⁶⁵ Paul sets out to persuade his hearers with two imperative commands: ζητεῖτε in 3:1 and φρονεῖτε in 3:2. His commands to seek and set their minds on the things above are rooted in the reiterated confirmation of their death (to the world) and their life (in Christ). Paul adds further persuasion to his reiteration in 3:4 by affirming their forthcoming glory in and with Christ.

⁶⁵ Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 70-1.

3:5-11: The “Old Self”

The author connects 3:5 to its preceding context with οὖν, and exhorts his hearers to put to death (Νεκρώσατε) what they have already died to in Christ.⁶⁶ The use of περιπατήσατέ ποτε brings forth the ethical implications consistent with the use of περιπατέω throughout Colossians (1:10; 2:6; 3:7; 4:5), and ὅτε ἐζήτε ἐν τούτοις (3:7) implies that they should no longer live in the ways associated with the “old self” as they have already died to them.⁶⁷ The ramifications of this death are picked up in the author’s call to “put them all away” (3:8), and again with the metaphor of “putting off the old self” and “putting on the new self” (3:9-10). The new self—unlike the old self—has been “renewed in the image (εἰκόνα) of its creator” (3:10; cf. 1:15). “Here,” (ὅπου) carries an implied location in this “new self” in the domain of Christ, and it is depicted as no longer carrying the boundaries of culture and ethnicity (3:11) that are so common in the “way they once walked.”⁶⁸

3:12-4:1: The “New Self”

Now that the exhortation to remove the “old self” has been completed, the author turns to a command to put on the “new self” with a descriptive list of five virtues paralleling the five vices mentioned in 3:8. The “new self” is a depiction of faithful obedience in Christ’s domain as

⁶⁶ While the focus of this effort does not allow for individual study of each vice mentioned in 3:5-9, an excellent study of each word can be seen in Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 216-21.

⁶⁷ On περιπατέω and its function as metaphor see, Robert Banks, “‘Walking’ As a Metaphor of the Christian Life: The Origins of a Significant Pauline Usage,” in *Perspectives on Language and Text: Essays and Poems in Honor of Francis I. Andersen’s Sixtieth Birthday July 28, 1985*, Edgar W. Conrad and Edward G. Newing (eds.), (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 303-314. Cf. Andrew E. Steinmann, and Michael A. Eschelbach, “Walk This Way: A Theme from Proverbs Reflected and Extended in Paul’s Letters” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 70 (January 2006): 43–62; Michael J. Seufert, “A Walk They Remembered: Covenant Relationship as Journey in the Deuteronomistic History” *Biblical Interpretation* 25 (2017): 149–71; Monte J. French, “Walking with God: Conceptual Metaphor Theory and the Use of Περιπατέω in Ephesians,” (Master’s Thesis, Denver Seminary, 2019).

⁶⁸ Cf. Karin B. Neutel, *A Cosmopolitan Ideal: Paul’s Declaration ‘Neither Jew Nor Greek, Neither Slave Nor Free, Nor Male and Female’ in the Context of First-Century Thought* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015).

played out in the day-to-day lives of the author's intended audience.⁶⁹ The conduct of those "in Christ" among one another appears to be at the forefront of the author's intentions in 3:12-4:1 in a way that it previously was not. Of course, this community is one that embodies the love of Christ, in Christ, as defined by Christ, thus the appeal to love (3:14) is fitting.

Copenhaver identifies peace (3:15) as a "bonding agent" alongside love in a way that echoes the language of 2:16-19.⁷⁰ The peace of Christ should be allowed to rule (βραβεύτω) in their hearts in a way in which those outside of Christ should be disallowed from ruling (καταβραβεύτω). In 3:16, the author instructs his hearers to let the λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐνοικεῖτω ἐν ὑμῖν πλουσίως. "Dwell" (ἐνοικεῖτω) is employed in the same manner as it was first employed in 1:19. Ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ modifies the way in which the audience is commanded to instruct and admonish one another which has implicit connection to Christ as Wisdom in 1:15-20. This description is then rooted, once again, in a communal aspect in cooperation with those in Christ (3:16).

Another *transitio* is found in 3:17 which offers a summary of 3:1-16, and employs a title for Christ (κυρίου Ἰησοῦ) that is common, but is unseen throughout Colossians until its use in 3:17. In accordance with what is clearly a *transitio*, and in accordance of the linguistics of 3:18-4:1, it is likely that κυρίου Ἰησοῦ is a foreshadowing of what is to come in the household code in which the author intentionally utilizes κύριος rather than Χριστός when referring to Christ.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 235.

⁷⁰ Copenhaver, *Reconstructing the Historical Background of Paul's Rhetoric in the Letter to the Colossians*, 131.

⁷¹ Ibid.

The *Haustafel* of 3:18-4:1 affirms the normative-household structure of its time, however, it is modified to function within the domain of Christ. Thus, the author has not sought to call their hearers to abandon the culture of their day, but to live within their culture now subservient to, and in obedience of, Christ. The “new self” as depicted in 3:1-17 is now applied to the household in 3:18-4:1.

The call for wives to submit to their husbands is not “that of the slave, or the doormat.”⁷² “Submit” (ὑποτάσσεσθε) is a middle present imperative. Thus, they are not called to submit on behalf of any inherent superiority found in the opposite sex (Col. 3:11; cf. Gal. 3:28), ὑποτάσσεσθε signifies “That the wives should voluntarily subject themselves to their husbands.”⁷³ Husbands being called to love their wives and not to be harsh with them offers Christological limitations to their domain within the household; simultaneously re-dignifying the female. Children are called to obey their parents as this “pleases the Lord,” and with this call to obedience they are provided ecclesial responsibility and dignity. Thus, the author has dictated new cultural norms of children within this domain of Christ.⁷⁴ The slave is commanded to be

⁷² Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 80.

⁷³ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 259. Cf. Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 323; Bird, *Colossians and Philemon*, 114; Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 80. Pao adds further insight into the nature of this text which benefits the reader not only in exegesis, but also in presentation, “This call appears within a significant modification of the social convention reflected in Hellenistic household codes. In those codes, the fundamental principle is on the obedience of the subordinate members to the male head of the household. In Paul’s code, however, the focus on the lordship of Christ as emphasized in the note that immediately follows (v. 18b), as well as the attention given to the duty of the husband in v. 19, shifts the focus of this code. The power of the husband is critically and substantially relativized. With this code being a reaction to the secular convention, therefore, these qualifications deserve serious considerations. This reading is consistent with the thought of this letter that consistently emphasizes the lordship of Christ. In our contemporary appropriation of this passage, the central point must be a christocentric one. Consequently, a translation such as CEV’s can be misleading, despite its intention to soften the idea of subjection: “A wife must put her husband first.” Paul’s point for this code is rather: “A wife/child/slave must put the Lord first.” Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 260.

⁷⁴ Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 80.

dignified in their work, as their work—properly understood—is for the Lord. In the words of Wright, “Even if they are treated like animals or worse, slaves are still to regard themselves as fully human beings.”⁷⁵ In conclusion of the pericope, the “master” is called to a Christocentric ethic of just and fair treatment of the slave as they too are informed that they are also under this domain in Christ (4:1).⁷⁶

3:1-4:1: Connecting the Premise and Paraenesis

Similarly to the paraenetic unit of 2:8-23, the paraenetic unit of 3:1-4:1 is connected to its premise in 1:15-20 both theologically and semantically. The theme of Christ’s domain is again the primary-conceptual background for this unit, and the paraenetic unit focuses primarily on those “in Christ” rather than their interrelation with those “outside of Christ” as was the case in the initial paraenetic unit.

Of course, the resurrection and ascension come into immediate focus beginning in 3:1 in connection with Christ’s place at the right hand of God (cf. Ps. 110:1; Eph. 1:19-22) as conceptual amplification of authority and domain.⁷⁷ He is also referenced as returning in glory, and those “in Christ” are to share in his “glory” upon his return (3:4).⁷⁸ The concept of

⁷⁵ Ibid., 81. It should be noted that it is not the author’s intention in this epistle to overthrow the entire economic system of Rome. Here, his intention is to call the slave to responsibility in their work in a way that is pleasing to Christ. In fact, this is his intention with each party mentioned in 3:18-4:1. Each of the parties are afforded dignity and responsibility in their daily roles now repurposed and reimagined “in Christ.”

⁷⁶ For further readings into slavery in ancient Rome, as well as in the New Testament, see, J. Byron, “Paul and the Background of Slavery: The Status Quaestionis in New Testament Scholarship,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 3 (2004): 116–39. Cf. T. D. Still, “Pauline Theology and Ancient Slavery: Does the Former Support or Subvert the Latter?” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 27 (2005): 21–34; J. Glancy, “Resistance and Humanity in Roman Slavery,” *Biblical Interpretation* 21, (2013): 497–5.

⁷⁷ Michael J. Vlach, “The Kingdom of God in Paul’s Epistles,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 26 (2015): 59–74.

⁷⁸ “כבוד” [(LXX, δόξα)] is ‘a summary term for the self-manifestation of God as he reveals himself to Israel in various phases and characteristics of his divine nature’ (Ex 33:18; Ps 25:7; 29:19, 20; 31:19; 97:21; esp. Ps 104:23; Hos 3:5).” Haley Goranson Jacob, *Conformed to the Image of His Son: Reconsidering Paul’s Theology of Glory in Romans* (IVP Books, 2018), 30. Jacob further argues in her Adamic reading of glory in Romans 1 that, “Moreover,

resurrection is implied through its antithetical and conceptual referent with the metaphor of “death” in 3:5 (and its subsequent commands in 3:5-9). An analogous-conceptual metaphor comes in the clothing metaphor(s) appearing with the language of “taking off” and “putting on” in relation to the “old self” and the “new self” (3:9-10; 12; 14). All of which are related as descriptions of those that are either “outside Christ” or “in Christ.”

The semantics of this unit also bear a striking resemblance to its premise outside of what has already been demonstrated (1:15-20). The new self is depicted as being “renewed in knowledge” after the “image” (εἰκόνα, 3:10; cf. 1:15) of its creator. The audience is commanded to let the “peace” (εἰρήνη, 3:15; cf. 1:20) of Christ rule in their hearts (as an extension of domain), as well as to let the word of Christ “dwell” (ἐνοικεῖτω, 3:16; cf. 1:19) in them “abundantly” or “richly.” All of their teaching and admonishing of one another is to be done in “wisdom” (3:16).

With the dependance of this second rhetorical union on the premise of 1:15-20 now demonstrated, we are able to discern the desired outcome of this unit. With the first and the second paraenetic unit has come a shift in arena in which the desired outcome might come to fruition. The first unit focused on the relation between those “in Christ” and those “out of Christ,” however, this second unit focuses on the relation of those “in Christ” amongst one another. As the paraenesis focuses ecclesiologically inward, we are given insight into the

in each text Israel is described as becoming subject to the nations (Jer 2:14-16; Ps 105:41-42, 46 LXX) because of their “exchange of glory” (i.e., worship of idols). The reader can assume on this basis that Israel’s glory was their honorable position as rulers over the land they were to possess (Lev 20:24; Num 33:53; Deut 5:31-33; see esp. Deut 28:63-64; 30:5, 16-18; Josh 23:5). 168 Israel forsook that created purpose by submitting themselves to idols and thus to other nations (see Sir 49:5). As with that of all humanity in Adam in Romans 1:23, the nature of Israel’s glory was their honorable status associated with dominion and authority.” This same understanding of glory and authority—less the Adamic connotations to the extent that she would see them—at play in Colossians 3:4. See, *Ibid.*, 106.

author's depiction of community in Christ as persuasion toward community in Christ. Of course, the community in Christ is composed of various subsets of relationship.

At this juncture (3:18-4:1), the focus of domain and authority does not shift, rather it becomes much-more intimate. Culture, along with all its socially-ascribed power and authority, must be subjected to the domain of Christ if community in Christ is to be realized. Only under the domain of Christ can the "old self" be stripped away, and the "new self" be seen. Thus, in 3:1-4:1 the author has presented a paradigm through which the audience can faithfully operate within the domain of Christ in their ecclesial context, and its natural extension through interrelational dealings.

4:2-6: Summary and Final Instructions (Peroratio)

Copenhaver summarizes *peroratio* well, "Rhetorically, the peroratio serves not only to summarize the letter, but also to include final information and clarification, and to emphasize the strongest arguments of the discourse."⁷⁹ The pericope accomplishes this in multiple ways: (1) the message of the epistle is summarized with an evangelically-guided mission; (2) Ἐν σοφίᾳ περιπατεῖτε πρὸς τοὺς ἕξω not only ends the inclusio initiated in 2:6 with the second and final use of περιπατεῖτε, but it also calls them to do so in wisdom; and (3) those not obedient to Christ as Ruler are referred to as "outsiders" (ἕξω); making explicit what has been implicit throughout the epistle.⁸⁰

The epistle to the Colossians then arrives at its conclusion in 4:7-18. The conclusion is laced with an amalgamation of individuals serving as a microcosmic depiction of unity under the

⁷⁹ "Aristotle, *Rhet.* 3.19.1; Cicero, *Inv.* 1.52.98-99; [Cicero], *Rhet. Her.* 2.30..." Copenhaver, *Reconstructing the Historical Background of Paul's Rhetoric in the Letter to the Colossians*, p. 135, n. 205.

⁸⁰ Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, 82-3. Cf. Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 293-4.

cosmic domain of Christ. The final sentence marks a Pauline signature, a reminder for his hearers to remember his chains, and the end of the book of Colossians.

Conclusion

Colossians 1:15-20 serves as the theological premise for the paraenesis Colossians 2-4, and this inseparable connection of theology and ethic transcends temporality. As readers of Colossians, we exist in this connection. As teachers of the Scriptures, we exhibit this connection. In this regard, the rhetoric of Colossians serves as a microcosm for both sheep and shepherd alike.

An understanding of how to faithfully operate within Christ's domain is predicated upon an understanding that *all is* Christ's domain. Therefore, any attempt to affect the ethic of those in Christ is predicated upon first affecting the theology of those in Christ. In Christ, it is our *location* ("in Christ") that determines our ethic. Conversely, for those under the domain of Christ operating as though they were not, their perception of the ethic of those in Christ will affect their theology.

Our study of Colossians has now led us to an ecclesiological finding that is as profound as it is unimpressive. Theology, at its most-fundamental level, is not further cruciformed by stunning production, eloquent speech, artisan coffee in the church lobby; the incorporation of business strategy, building additions, baptism totals, or book sales. No, at its most-fundamental level, theology is only further cruciformed by the fruit of faithful *theology*. The epistle to the Colossians, therefore, depicts a rhetorical realization of a theological truth: that our theology not only informs, but determines, our ethic and worship.

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