

TRAVIS R. NILES

The Image of the Invisible God

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*
599

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Travis R. Niles

The Image of the Invisible God

An Exegetical Study of Colossians 1:15–20

Mohr Siebeck

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*For my parents,
Bob and Suzanne Niles*

Preface

Composing a doctoral thesis often feels like crossing a glacier in a whiteout. Getting one's bearings is difficult and whether the goal is up to the summit or down to high camp, you need to keep moving. But it's also because such a trek is no solo expedition: without competent instructors, one cannot learn the craft of mountaineering properly, and without the companionship of a good rope team, there is a chance you won't get off the glacier at all. And so, I am grateful for a minimalist index card that has hung on my wall throughout this whole doctoral ascent. It was given to me by my friend Mark J. Edwards, a steady companion during my time at Princeton Theological Seminary who also introduced me to the world of mountaineering in British Columbia where, in a former life, I was a glacier-crossing backpacking guide. His card simply reads, "Travis – Climb on."

Now, the climb is over: the present monograph is a revised version of my doctoral dissertation, which I defended before the Faculty of Theology at the University of Bern on November 11, 2021. By the time I submitted the thesis, I had had the unusual but good fortune of having two *Doktorväter*: Prof. Reinhard Feldmeier (Göttingen) and Prof. Rainer Hirsch-Luipold (Bern). Following Prof. Feldmeier's retirement, I transferred to the University of Bern and Prof. Hirsch-Luipold took the reins as the primary advisor. Through numerous conversations in formal and informal settings, they taught me the craft of New Testament exegesis, and their interest in combining exegetical issues with religious-philosophical history and theological questions was exemplary. At every step along the way, they displayed their magnanimity, not only in the collegiality necessary for 'sharing' an advisee, but also by their constant availability for my questions and concerns. Time and again, they embodied Bonhoeffer's notion of "being there for others" (*Dasein für Andere*).

Without the exceptional cadre of colleagues who helped me along the way, this book wouldn't be half of what it currently is. In Göttingen, Jan Basczok, Matthias Becker, Jens-Arne Edelmann, and Michael Wandusim not only showed interest in my work but also were constant friends. The broader circle of colleagues involved in the Göttingen New Testament research colloquium offered constructive feedback. Among those involved, Prof. Florian Wilk and Prof. Jürgen Wehnert deserve special mention. In Bern, I gained new friends and colleagues who accompanied me in the home stretch: Stefano De Feo and David Staub. Here, too, the members of the New Testament research

colloquium offered significant help. Both within and outside of the framework of the colloquium, both Prof. Benjamin Schliesser and Prof. em. Samuel Volenweider were valuable resources. Special thanks are due to Alma Brodersen and Nancy Rahn for reading the section “The Hebrew Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls” and offering helpful remarks.

This monograph was also made possible through various means of institutional support. The research group “Stratification Analyses of Mythic Plots and Texts in Ancient Cultures,” funded by the German Research Foundation and spearheaded by Prof. Annette Zgoll and Prof. Christian Zgoll (Göttingen), provided funding for the project. The Swiss National Science Foundation generously provided funding for open access publication of the work. In addition, various staff members of the theological faculties of Göttingen and Bern played a key role: Susanne Matthies, Elke Schikora, the late Petra God, Marcus Hase, Frank Schleritt, Simone Häberli, and Markus Isch.

This book also wouldn’t be in your hands if it weren’t for the kind acceptance of the manuscript for publication in the second series of *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* by Prof. Jörg Frey and the assistance of Elena Müller, Markus Kirchner, Matthias Spitzner, and Sara Contini at Mohr Siebeck. Many thanks to you all.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family: my parents Bob and Suzanne Niles, to whom this book is dedicated because their love and support never wavered, even when pursuing this project meant moving across the Atlantic; Prof. em. James R. Edwards and his wife Janie, a couple of Germanophiles who kindled my interest in German language and culture; Mark J. and Janine Edwards, who were always there for me during my time in Princeton; Rolf-Joachim Erler-McLean, whose door is always open; and Dylan Johnson, for his camaraderie. Last but not least, for her selflessness and warm spirit, Anni Seeger deserves more thanks than I can give.

Bern,
September 2023

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Abbreviations

<i>AAS</i>	<i>Acta Apostolicae Sedis</i>
<i>AB</i>	Anchor Bible
<i>ABD</i>	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>AJP</i>	<i>The American Journal of Philology</i>
AnBibS	Analecta Biblica Studia
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i>
ARGU	Arbeiten zur Religion und Geschichte des Urchristentums
ASBF	Analecta Studium Biblicum Franciscanum
ASNU	Acta seminarii neotestamentici upsaliensis
<i>ASR</i>	<i>Annali di scienze religiose</i>
<i>BA</i>	<i>The Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BDR	Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch
BPS	Brill's Plutarch Studies
BU	Biblische Untersuchungen
BVR	Bausteine zur Volkskunde und Religionswissenschaft
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
<i>CGCG</i>	Cambridge Grammar of Classical Greek
COMES	Civitatum Orbis MEditerranei Studia
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series
<i>DK</i>	<i>Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker (Diels/Kranz)</i>
<i>DNP</i>	<i>Der Neue Pauly</i>
DSSEL	Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Library
ÉBib	Études bibliques
<i>EC</i>	<i>Early Christianity</i>
EKK	Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
ELCH	English Literary and Cultural History
ESV	English Standard Version
<i>EWNT</i>	<i>Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
<i>FoiVie</i>	<i>Foi et Vie</i>
<i>FPG</i>	<i>Fragmenta Philosophorum Graecorum</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments

FTS	Frankfurter Theologische Studien
HALOT	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
HCS	Hellenistic Culture and Society
HDAC	Histoire des doctrines de l'Antiquité classique
HTKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HUT	Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
KEK	Meyers Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
KST	Kohlhammer Studienbücher Theologie
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
<i>LSJ</i>	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon: With a Revised Supplement</i>
MNS	Mnemosyne Supplements
NA ²⁸	Nestle-Aland: Novum Testamentum Graece, 28th ed.
NEchtB	Neue Echter Bibel
NewDocs	New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTD	Das Neue Testament Deutsch
NTL	New Testament Library
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NVBTA	Nuova versione della Bibbia dai testi antichi
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
<i>OGIS</i>	<i>Orientalis graeci inscriptiones selectae</i>
ÖTK	Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar
<i>PEG</i>	<i>Poetae Epici Graeci</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologiae graecae cursus completus</i>
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
QD	Quaestiones Disputatae
<i>RAC</i>	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i>
<i>RGG4</i>	<i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> , 4th ed.
RNT	Regensburger Neues Testament
SAPERE	Scripta Antiquitatis Posterioris ad Ethicam RELigionemque pertinentia
SBAB	Stuttgarter biblische Aufsatzbände
SBM	Stuttgarter biblische Monographien
Sieenthal	Griechische Grammatik zum Neuen Testament
SNT	Studien zum Neuen Testament
SPA	Studies in Philo of Alexandria
SPhilo	Studia Philonica Annual
STAR	Studies in Theology and Religion
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
<i>SVF</i>	<i>Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta</i>

<i>TBI</i>	<i>Theologische Blätter</i>
TEG	Traditio Exegetica Graeca
THKNT	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
ThKNT	Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
TOBITH	Topoi Biblischer Theologie / Topics of Biblical Theology
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
<i>TWNT</i>	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WSA	Würzburger Studien zur Altertumswissenschaft
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

Abbreviations of the titles of ancient works derive from Patrick H. Alexander et al., eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies*, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999).

Translations

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. The translations of Hebrew and Aramaic texts either derive from or follow those found in the *New Revised Standard Version* and the Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Library.

Introduction

A. Homo Pictor?

Within the last thirty years, the “iconic turn” has emerged as a significant development in the humanities. Also known as “iconic criticism” or “image science,” this research approach seeks to analyze the nature and function of images in the history of human culture, the practice of visual communication, the impact of images in mass media, and the manner in which images not only convey but even constitute meaning.¹ The advent of iconic criticism is not only a reaction to the twentieth-century explosive proliferation of images confronting the consumer due to the rise of mass media but emerges rather from greater depths: the insight that language itself, by and large the chief medium of human communication, depends on the human ability to re-present, to de-pict one thing as another by way of a construed sign. In this sense, not only language, but even thought is “bound to be metaphorical” (*metaphernpflichtig*),² for in our thought and speech, “something becomes visible and plausible *as* something [else]”:³

“Das stupende Phänomen, daß ein Stück mit Farbe beschmierter Fläche Zugang zu unerhörten sinnlichen und geistigen Einsichten eröffnen kann, läßt sich aus der Logik des Kontrastes erläutern, vermittels derer etwas als etwas ansichtig wird. Was der Satz (der ‘Logos’) kann, das muß auch dem bildnerischen Werke zu Gebote stehen, freilich auf seine Weise. Das tertium beider, zwischen Sprachbildern (als Metaphern) und dem Bild im Sinne der bildenden Kunst, repräsentiert, wie wir sahen, die Struktur des Kontrastes.”⁴

As Belting puts it, the ability of images to speak to humans and that of humans to connect with images is grounded in the realization that humans are the

¹ The three scholars most readily identified with the origin of this approach are W.J.T. Mitchell, the herald of the “pictorial turn,” Gottfried Boehm, the chief architect of the “iconic turn,” and Hans Belting, who has called for a transition from a history of art to a history of *images*. The landmark studies by these three authors are: W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986); Gottfried Boehm, ed., *Was ist ein Bild?* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1994); Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1990).

² Cf. Gottfried Boehm, “Die Wiederkehr der Bilder,” in *Was ist ein Bild?*, ed. Boehm (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1994), 11–38, 26–29.

³ Boehm, *ibid.*, 29: “[...] etwas wird *als* etwas sichtbar und plausibel.”

⁴ Boehm, *ibid.*, 31.

“place” of images: “Natürlich ist der Mensch der *Ort der Bilder* [...] ein lebendes Organ für Bilder [...] allein [er] der Ort, an dem Bilder in einem lebendigen Sinne [...] empfangen und gedeutet werden [...]”⁵ Similar conclusions had been drawn previously by Mitchell⁶ and Hans Jonas. The latter’s essay *Homo Pictor: Von der Freiheit des Bildens* (1994) argues that the *differentia specifica* of the human vis-à-vis other animals is the ability to depict objects and experiences of the world in which it lives; this presupposes a capacity for eidetic abstraction from disparate phenomena – the cave dweller does not paint this or that buffalo, but *the* buffalo – which is itself the germ of further stages of rationality. Even though the implementation of such an ability may remain on a relatively primitive level – the cave painting is not the Sistine Chapel – the basic ability to represent one’s world in images constitutes the “transanimal freedom” and basic criterium of the human.⁷ If Hans Jonas is correct to identify the *homo pictor* as the foundation of the *homo sapiens*, then the “turn” towards images advocated by Mitchell, Boehm, and Belting reveals itself as a logical development of the attempt to reflect upon the conditions of human knowledge.⁸

The rise of iconic criticism has also left its mark on theological studies, as can be seen in numerous publications, such as the series *IKON. Bild + Theologie* (Ferdinand Schöningh/Brill, est. 1999), the anthologies *Bild und Tod: Grundfragen der Bildanthropologie*⁹ and *Die Zeit der Bilder: Ikonische Repräsentation und Temporalität*,¹⁰ the monographs *Christologie der Bilder im Johannesevangelium*¹¹ and *Das andere Bild Christi: Spätmoderner*

⁵ Hans Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2002), 57.

⁶ Mitchell said of the relationship between the physical world on the one hand and images as a phenomenon of human consciousness on the other: “If there were no more minds, there would be no more images, mental or material. The world may not depend upon [human] consciousness, but images in (not to mention *of*) the world clearly do” (*Iconology*, 17).

⁷ Hans Jonas, “Homo Pictor: Von der Freiheit des Bildens,” in Boehm, *Was ist ein Bild?*, 105–24, 106–7, 120–24.

⁸ Cf. Gottfried Boehm and W.J.T. Mitchell, “Pictorial versus Iconic Turn: Two Letters,” in *The Pictorial Turn*, ed. Neal Curtis (London: Routledge, 2010), 8–26, 10.

⁹ Philipp Stoellger and Jens Wolff, eds., *Bild und Tod: Grundfragen einer Bildanthropologie*, HUT 68, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

¹⁰ Michael Moxter and Markus Firchow, eds., *Die Zeit der Bilder: Ikonische Repräsentation und Temporalität*, HUT 73 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018).

¹¹ Ruben Zimmermann, *Christologie der Bilder: Die Christopoetik des vierten Evangeliums unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Joh 10*, WUNT 171 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004). In this case, we are not dealing with an attempted appropriation of iconic criticism for NT exegesis; nevertheless, it seems clear that the iconic turn at least provided an impetus for this study (see the chapter “Bild und Bildersprache,” *ibid.*, 61–87).

Protestantismus als kritische Bildreligion,¹² and the chapter dedicated to the interpretation of the New Testament through the use of images – influenced by the iconic turn – in Ulrich Luz’s *Theologische Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments*.¹³ In addition, the four-volume *Handbuch der Bildtheologie* (2007–2020) aims to remedy the differing levels of attention and methodological precision applied to images in the various fields of theology by offering a research tableau wherein such efforts find common theoretical ground and points of departure for the further study of images in a theological context.¹⁴

Yet although the academic study of theology has been influenced by the iconic turn, it would be a mistake to think that the increased occupation with images can be attributed only to the theories of Mitchell, Boehm, and Belting. The late Roman Catholic theologian Alex Stock, professor emeritus at the University of Cologne, had pursued *Bildtheologie* in his publications as early as 1979¹⁵ and made it to be the center of his scholarly work until his passing in 2016. In addition to publishing works on the theology of images prior to the pictorial and iconic turns, he founded a research department for *Bildtheologie* at the University of Cologne in 1998, the aforementioned series *IKON. Bild + Theologie* in 1999, and composed an eleven-volume *Poetische Dogmatik*¹⁶ in which the poems, literature, and images of the Christian tradition become sources for constructive theology. Such a theological use of images would be unimaginable if *Bildtheologie* were grounded solely in modern aesthetical theory, the *Bilderflut* of modernity, or a particular predilection for art. To place the endeavor on that footing would evince, at the very least, a nonchalant or naïve disregard for the history of theological conflict over the propriety of visual depictions of God.¹⁷ The precedent of the liturgical use of images throughout the history of the Christian churches would be a stronger footing, but perhaps still not sufficient from a Protestant theological perspective. In contrast to this anthropologically determined viewpoint, Alex Stock proposes seeing the history of images in the Christian churches as a history of God’s self-revelation:

¹² Malte Dominik Krüger, *Das andere Bild Christi: Spätmoderner Protestantismus als kritische Bildreligion*, Dogmatik in der Moderne 18 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

¹³ Ulrich Luz, *Theologische Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2014), 313–57.

¹⁴ Reinhard Hoeps, “Einleitung,” in *Handbuch der Bildtheologie*, ed. Hoeps, vol. 1, *Bild-Konflikte* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2007), 7–23.

¹⁵ Alex Stock, “Bildersturm und Augenweide: Theologische Aspekte der Kunst,” *Diakonia* 10 (1979): 378–87.

¹⁶ Alex Stock, *Poetische Dogmatik*, 11 vols. (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1995–2020).

¹⁷ For an historical overview of the topic, see Reinhard Hoeps, ed., *Handbuch der Bildtheologie*, vol. 1, *Bild-Konflikte*.

“Die Geschichte der Kunst ist in ihrem gesamtem Ablauf Offenbarungsgeschichte. Die Gottesbilder dieser vom 4.–18. Jahrhundert währenden Geschichte stehen in einem Zusammenhang, dessen einheitsstiftende Instanz nicht bloß ein wie immer geartetes Kollektiv (z.B. das Abendland), sondern Gott selbst ist. Insofern ein und dasselbe Subjekt in der Abfolge der Kunstwerke seine Geschichte hat, ist diese als ein in Phasen gegliedertes Epiphaniestikontinuum wahrzunehmen.”¹⁸

Stock knows, however, that the linguistic and iconic worlds mutually condition each other and that the ability to identify particular moments and features in this revelatory history depends on the knowledge one gains from the Bible, other religious literature, and the history of religions.¹⁹ One could support this statement from a Protestant theological viewpoint and say that if there is any solid foundation for the notion that the divine may reveal itself in images, then it must be found in the earliest Christian sources. Image-theologians such as Alex Stock and Reinhard Hoeps are aware of this, and therefore it is not surprising to find references and allusions to the Letter to the Colossians of the New Testament strewn throughout scholarly discussions of a theology of images. Specifically, this means the claim of Col 1:15 that Jesus Christ is the “image of the invisible God.”

Although the presence of such a statement in the New Testament by no means suggests that the propriety of visual depictions of God is guaranteed without further ado, the idea that Jesus Christ is somehow the “image of the invisible God” cracks open the door for just such a discussion. That this and other New Testament verses such as 2 Cor 4:4 and John 1:14 were received in this way, at the very least in the history of Christian images, can be seen in the medieval phenomenon of Christomorphism: “Die Gestalt Christi wird zum Gottes- und eben auch zum Gottvaterbild des Mittelalters. Bis über das Jahr 1000 hinaus gibt es die Darstellung Gott Vaters nahezu ausschließlich im Typus Christi, in Christomorphie.”²⁰ That Col 1:15 was important not only in the practice of crafting images, but also in theological reasoning can be seen by the intensive reception of Col 1:15–20 by patristic theologians generally and during the Arian controversy in particular.²¹

¹⁸ Alex Stock, *Poetische Dogmatik*, vol. 7, *Gotteslehre: Bilder* (Paderbon: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2007), 129. The context of this statement is the discussion of an epochal art-historical thesis of the late German art historian Wolfgang Schöne, and perhaps some minutiae in the formulation would be different if Stock had presented a list of his own theses. It is clear from the further development of his argument, however, that the theology of revelation embedded in the larger statement is indeed Stock’s own position; cf. *op. cit.* 130–31.

¹⁹ Stock, *Gotteslehre: Bilder*, 134.

²⁰ Thomas Sternberg, “Bilderverbot für Gott, den Vater?,” in *Bilderverbot: Die Sichtbarkeit des Unsichtbaren*, ed. Eckhard Nordhofen (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2001), 59–115, 70. Sternberg points out that in some instances, the Holy Spirit as well was depicted Christomorphically (83).

²¹ Alois Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, vol. 1, *Von der Apostolischen Zeit bis zum Konzil von Chalcedon (451)* (Freiburg: Herder, 1979), 102: “Kein

Yet what exactly does Colossians mean to convey by the statement that Jesus Christ is the “image of the invisible God”? To begin with, this statement is a twofold interpretation of the man Jesus of Nazareth: in the first instance, that he is the “Christ,” God’s Messiah, and in the second instance that he is this God’s image. Colossians and other New Testament writings provide us a record of some of the earliest interpretations of Jesus of Nazareth offered by his followers, interpretations presented by a multiplicity of authors, conveyed in a variety of modes – narrative text, epistle, apocalyptic literature – and with a broad array of motifs and themes. Common to them all is the articulation of the identity and significance of Jesus of Nazareth. These sources, however, display that such an interpretation is anything but straightforward.

The man known as Jesus of Nazareth lived ca. 4 B.C. to A.D. 30 and, as innumerable others before and after him, was executed upon a cross by the Roman authorities administering Judea. In the roughly three years preceding his death, he managed to accrue a number of followers, supporters, and sympathizers; according to the portrayal of all four gospels, he even found sympathizers in the highest circles of the Jewish and Roman authorities.²² Extant literary sources concerning his life paint a picture of a man who wandered about the territories of Galilee and Judea – with isolated episodes in Samaria and the Decapolis – teaching, engaging in debates with religious authorities, and performing healing miracles and exorcisms. The support he gained throughout the period of his public activity is only one side of the medallion: the devotion given by some was mirrored by fierce opposition from others, the latter being the precondition of the political will generated in favor of his execution.²³ Rather than simply denying his importance, some of Jesus’ opponents attempted to detract from his legitimacy by attributing his power to demonic forces (cf. Mark 3:22) or chose instead to plot his ruin (cf. Matt 12:14; Mark 3:6). Even his own family doubted his sanity (Mark 3:21). In sum: the response to Jesus of Nazareth was not uniform. A fine theological point is put on the issue in the

anderer der christologischen Hymnen des Corpus Paulinum hat in einem so viele Themen kontinuierlicher Diskussion unter Vätern abgegeben wie Kol 1,15-20. Es geht um *eikon*, *protokolos* und *archē*; Christus als Haupt war weniger umstritten [...] [Der] Kol-Hymnus hat in besonderer Weise dazu beigetragen, die Problematik der nicaenischen Zeit auszudrücken und – nach Überwindung des Arianismus – die Christologie des Nicaenums auszubauen. Dieser Hymnus kommt damit erst recht in seine theologische Rolle hinein.”

²² Nicodemus, a Pharisee and “ruler of the Jews” (John 3:1, ἄρχων τῶν Ἰουδαίων; cf. 7:47, 50–52); Joseph of Arimathea, stylized variously as a “rich man,” a “disciple of Jesus,” and a “member of the council” (Matt 27:57; Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50–51; John 19:38); and Pilate’s wife, who refers to Jesus as “that righteous man” (Matt 27:19, τῷ δικαίῳ ἐκείνῳ).

²³ Of course, it is not as though a mere dichotomy of ‘firm support’ or ‘fierce opposition’ existed, for there were various degrees of interest and commitment. This is alluded to in the “crowd” (ὄχλος) who may have only been interested in him for the material benefit of his miracles (cf. John 6:22–26) and the followers who turned away from him for the difficulty of his teaching (John 6:60, 66).

account of Jesus asking his disciples first who the general public considers him to be and subsequently asking them, “But who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:27–30). The Gospel accounts of the New Testament, which are themselves interpretations of Jesus, do not obscure the necessity of interpreting Jesus of Nazareth and his significance, but recount it as a basic feature of his life story.

The Corpus Paulinum, of which Colossians is a part, knows this as well. Paul was aware that his presentation of Jesus as the crucified Christ was “foolishness to those who are perishing, but to [those] who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18, cf. 22–23), that he and those who spoke of Jesus in this way gave off a particular “fragrance,” albeit a “fragrance unto death” to some and a “fragrance from life unto life” to others (2 Cor 2:15–16). The Lukan portrayal of Paul’s missionary activity shows a man arguing with his Jewish brothers and sisters to accept his understanding of Jesus,²⁴ a matter which many of them rejected, as did certain Romans either out of fear (Acts 24:24–25) or because the issue was not immediately intelligible to them (Acts 23:29; 25:19). This demonstrates, anecdotally, that no statement made about the identity and significance of Jesus of Nazareth can be considered a given or a simple matter of course.²⁵

The driving question of this historical study, therefore, will be, “What does Col 1:15 mean by the appellation ‘image of the invisible God’ and how does it relate to the image discourse of the world in which it was written?”

B. Working Assumptions of the Study

I. Discourse Analysis

Colossians is of course not the only document of the first century A.D. to employ some notion of an image of God. As I hope to demonstrate, the use of such a notion places Colossians within a broader contemporary discourse concerning the topic, one which transcends linguistic, religious, and regional borders. A discourse, however, is not only constituted by concrete statements made about and sustained reflection offered on a given topic, but is also something more, for any given discourse is a hypothetical structural connection that

²⁴ Acts 13:5, 13–52; 14:1–6; 17:1–5, 10–11, 17; 18:4–5; 19:8; 20:21; 22:1–21; 24:14; 26:19–29; 28:23.

²⁵ Cf. the remarks of Udo Schnelle, *Paulus: Leben und Denken*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 1–25, where he notes that the sources historians use are themselves already constructions of meaning: “Schließlich sind jene Nachrichten, die als historische ‘Fakten’ in jede historische Argumentation einfließen, in der Regel auch schon Deutungen vergangenen Geschehens” (4). Schnelle applies this to Paul (8) while also rejecting the notion that the construal of history in general or in Paul’s case in particular is necessarily subjectivistic (4) or that one must necessarily accept the ontological implications of constructivism (16).

underlies disparate semiotic events: “Diskurse regeln also das Sagbare, Denkbare und Machbare. Sie organisieren Wirklichkeit.”²⁶ Because a discourse represents the subconscious substructure of the knowledge that informs intellectual conversation, intellectuals are often not aware of it; one may think here of Foucault’s concept of an “archaeology” of knowledge.²⁷ The foundations of a discourse are therefore not necessarily the direct object of reflection. For this reason, we must examine linguistic and semiotic usage in order to reconstruct the discourse constituted by the shared assumptions of a particular socio-cultural group, and this reconstruction is always hypothetical. What the philologist and New Testament scholar Matthias Becker has written in the introduction to his comparative study of Luke-Acts with the corpus of Dio Chrysostom may be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to our study as well:

“Bei der vergleichenden Inbezugsetzung von Texten aus der paganen Gebildeten-schicht und des Neuen Testaments können Begriffs- und Motivanalysen zum Bestandteil einer Diskursanalyse werden. Denn sowohl pagane Autoren als auch neutestamentliche Schriftsteller stehen als Kinder ihrer Zeit in breiteren Diskurszusammenhängen, die unbeschadet differierender Denksystematiken, Sondersprachen und Abgrenzungsversuche thematische Überschneidungen erkennen lassen.”²⁸

The purpose of the following analysis, therefore, is not to assert religious-historical “parallels” nor to posit hypothetical literary or philosophical dependencies of one thinker upon another, as though one were drafting a manuscript stemma.²⁹ Instead, the purpose is to determine the uniting characteristics of this discourse in the hopes of elucidating more clearly the peculiarities of the various thinkers and documents under consideration, with the ultimate goal of gaining a clearer understanding of what Colossians means when it names Jesus the “image of the invisible God.”³⁰

²⁶ Achim Landwehr, *Historische Diskursanalyse*, Historische Einführungen 4, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus, 2018), 20–21.

²⁷ Landwehr, *ibid.*, 64–66.

²⁸ Matthias Becker, *Lukas und Dion von Prusa: Das lukanische Doppelwerk im Kontext paganer Bildungsdiskurse*, Studies in Cultural Contexts of the Bible 3 (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2020), 47.

²⁹ On the issue of the foolhardy construction of parallels and dependencies, see Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *JBL* 81, no. 1 (1962): 1–13.

³⁰ What NT scholar Florian Wilk has said of the comparison of Philo’s *De migratione Abrahami* with Paul’s allegorical interpretation in Gal 4:21–5:1 can also be applied to the comparison of Colossians with its contemporaries: “Gerade das Gemenge von Gemeinsamkeiten und Divergenzen aber hilft dazu, das besondere Profil der paulinischen Allegorese der Erzählung von Abrahams ersten beiden Söhnen und ihren Müttern zu erfassen [...]” (Florian Wilk, “De migratione Abrahami als Kontext des Neuen Testaments,” in *Abrahams Aufbruch: Philon von Alexandria, De migratione Abrahami*, SAPERE 30, eds. Maren R. Niehoff and Reinhard Feldmeier [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017], 219–44, 238).

II. Which Traditions?

Yet who should be considered in such a discourse analysis? To begin with, it must be pointed out that this is not an exhaustive study on the theory and use of images and divine images in antiquity. Because the study aims to elucidate Colossians, a document of the first century A.D., the image theory of writers who were active beyond the first half of the second century A.D. will not be considered. Any references to such thinkers will be the exception rather than the rule. Secondly, we will focus on texts that contain reflection on the nature of images and of divine images. Material culture such as the political use of images on the part of Roman emperors or other rulers will be mentioned when appropriate, but will not be a primary focus. Thirdly, the traditions with which Colossians will be brought into dialogue must be determined by the context of the first century A.D. This encompasses two aspects: (1) Colossians as a member of the Corpus Paulinum and thus an early Christian document, and (2) currents in the broader intellectual world of the first century A.D.

As a member of the Corpus Paulinum, Colossians will be read against the background of other Pauline writings that deal with the topic of images. This will not presume any necessity of continuity of Colossians with the protopauline letters nor will it be concerned with multiplying distinctions between them, but rather with elucidating more clearly the meaning of Colossians. Further, as the Corpus Paulinum itself belongs to the emerging Christian movement, we must also consider relevant traditions from the Hebrew Bible and other writings present within the context of ancient Judaism.

Secondly, because Colossians is a religious-philosophical document of the first century A.D., any study of it must consider developments and tendencies within the broader intellectual world of that time. The first significant trend, as it concerns our topic, is the resurgence of an interest in Plato's writings. Until the closure of the philosophical schools in Athens in 86 B.C. at the hands of Sulla, the official teachings of the various schools – excepting the Epicureans³¹ – were determined largely by the scholars running them. The texts of the founders of the various schools – Plato, Aristotle, Zeno – played a secondary role to the interpretations of institutional personnel. The closure of the schools and concomitant removal of the scholars significantly changed the situation. What counted as “Platonic” or “Stoic” now had to be gleaned from written

³¹ Michael Erler has pointed out that the development sketched here had already existed in a slightly altered form among the Epicureans: following the death of Epicurus and the last of his original students and thus as early as the second cent. B.C., the *scripta et dicta* of Epicurus assumed an outsized importance and the philosophical philology conducted upon them evinced “noteworthy parallels” to the exegesis of Plato's texts in the Imperial era (“Philologia Medicans: Wie die Epikureer die Texte ihres Meistes lasen,” in *Vermittlung und Tradierung von Wissen in der griechischen Kultur*, ScriptOralia 61, eds. Wolfgang Kullmann and Jochen Althoff [Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1993], 281–303, 289, 303).

sources. Constructive philosophical work took the form of exegesis and in the case of the Platonic corpus, it even attained a spiritual dimension.³² Though the practice of constructive exegesis and commentary itself was no novum,³³ the increased application of it to the founders of the great philosophical schools was.³⁴ As Harold Tarrant has put it, Platonic texts shifted from “fringe reading” to “core curriculum” by the second century A.D., which itself depended in large part on the “infrastructure” developed in the two centuries prior.³⁵ The decentralized nature of the resurgence led, as one might expect, to a multifaceted Platonism. As Mauro Bonazzi points out, the Platonism of the early Roman imperial period can be compared to a “battlefield” in which diverse interpretations of Plato clashed with each other in an attempt to gain hegemonic significance.³⁶ We gain a glimpse of this at the outset of Plutarch of Chaeronea’s *De animae procreatione in Timaeo*, where he states that his opinion on the origin of the soul diverges from that of “most of the Platonists” and must be defended (*An. procr.* 1012b). By mentioning the *Timaeus*, we happen upon that dialogue which generated the most interest among readers of Plato.³⁷

³² Gábor Betegh, “The Transmission of Ancient Wisdom: Texts, Doxographies, Libraries,” in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, 2 vols., ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 1:25–38, 26.

³³ One may think here of the Derveni Papyrus, a fourth cent. B.C. document that perhaps goes back to an original from the fifth cent. and which offers an allegorical exegesis of an Orphic cosmogony (cf. Mirjam E. Kotwick, “Einleitung,” in *Der Papyrus von Derveni*, Sammlung Tusculum, ed. Kotwick [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017], 11–63, 14–17). Cf. further Irmgard Männlein-Robert and Christoph Riedweg, “Hauptsächliche literarische Gattungen philosophischer Wissensvermittlung,” in *Philosophie der Kaiserzeit und der Spätantike*, vol. 5.1 of *Die Philosophie der Antike*, Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie, eds. Christoph Riedweg, Christoph Horn, and Dietmar Wyrwa (Basel: Schwabe, 2018), 64–83, 78–79.

³⁴ Mauro Bonazzi, *Il platonismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2015), 75, notes that the philosophy of the early Roman imperial era consisted in a “return to the ancients” (i.e., Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras, and even Pyrrhus) in the conviction that the truth had been revealed at an earlier time and the contemporary philosophical task was to bring it to light.

³⁵ Harold Tarrant, “From Fringe Reading to Core Curriculum: Commentary, Introduction and Doctrinal Summary,” in *Brill’s Companion to the Reception of Plato in Antiquity*, eds. Tarrant et al. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2018), 101–14, 101–2.

³⁶ Bonazzi, *Il platonismo*, 87; cf. also Mauro Bonazzi, “Plutarch’s Reception in Imperial Graeco-Roman Philosophy,” in *Brill’s Companion to the Reception of Plutarch*, eds. Sophia Xenophontos and Katerina Oikonomopoulou (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 56–65, 60. See also Franco Ferrari, “Metafisica e teologia nel medioplatonismo,” *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia* 70, no. 2 (2015): 321–38, *passim*, on the differing opinions of Middle Platonists regarding the relations of Demiurge of the *Timaeus* to the idea of the Good in the *Republic*.

³⁷ Cf. Thomas A. Szlezák, *Platon: Meisterdenker der Antike* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2021), 458–59; Gretchen Reydams-Schils, *Demiurge and Providence: Stoic and Platonist Readings of Plato’s Timaeus*, *Monothéisme et Philosophie* 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 14; Männlein-Robert and Riedweg, “Hauptsächliche Gattungen philosophischer Wissensvermittlung,” 79; Bonazzi, “Plutarch’s Reception in Imperial Graeco-Roman Philosophy,” 56–

Plutarch, in addition to his aforementioned essay,³⁸ dealt with material from the *Timaeus* in five of his ten *Quaestiones Platonicae* (2, 4, 5, 7, 8). In the first century B.C., Cicero provided a (perhaps intentionally)³⁹ partial translation of the *Timaeus* and treated Platonic thought in *De natura deorum*.

Among the writings of the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, who interpreted the Holy Scriptures of his people with the aid of Greek philosophical traditions, the treatise *De opificio mundi* evinces strong influence by the *Timaeus*. When one inspects Philo's other writings, one might conclude, in the words of David T. Runia, that Philo "had direct access to the actual text of the dialogue and was intimately acquainted with its contents."⁴⁰

Yet why is the renewed interest in Plato's writings in the first century A.D. important for our study? It is grounded in the subject matter itself: Plato's *Timaeus* and *Republic* deliver key remarks and analogies concerning the nature of images, and when one considers the *Cratylus*, *Theaetetus*, and *Sophist* dialogues, one is compelled to conclude that more than any other ancient author, Plato offered the most sustained reflection on the topic. If one were to study a New Testament text in its own context, which includes writers like Philo and Plutarch who adopt and reshape Plato's thought, then it would be reasonable to expect from the exegete at least an elementary awareness of Plato's writings. When it comes to the topic of images, this is doubly true. This does not mean that Platonizing writers of the first century A.D. were always in lockstep with Plato, but simply that any consideration of their writings cannot leave Plato completely out of the picture. And Philo and Plutarch, as we shall see, put the concept of an "image" to serious theological use in their writings.

This leads us to the second noticeable trend of the first century A.D., namely an increased interest in *images*, especially the use of the term εἰκών in a religious-philosophical context. This can be seen not only in the writings of the aforementioned Platonizing writers, but also in the *Olympic Discourse* (*Or.* 12) of Dio Chrysostom, which concerns figural images in the context of theological

57. Franco Ferrari, "Interpretare il *Timeo*," in *Plato's Timaeus and the Foundations of Cosmology in Late Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Ancient and Medieval Philosophy 1/34, eds. Thomas Leinkauf and Carlos Steel (Leuven: Leuven Univ. Press, 2005), 1–12, 1, stakes the claim that the *Timaeus* was the Platonic dialogue that contributed the most to the formation of 'Platonism' as a system.

³⁸ On this categorization of Plutarch's *De animae proc.* and commentary on it, cf. Jan Opsomer, "Plutarch's *De Animae Procreatione in Timaeo*: Manipulation or Search for Consistency?," in *Philosophy, Science and Exegesis in Greek, Arabic and Latin Commentaries*, BICS Supplements 83, 2 vols., eds. Peter Adamson, Hans Baltussen, and M.W.F. Stone (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2004), 1:137–62, 139.

³⁹ Karl Bayer and Gertrud Bayer, "Einführung," in *Marcus Tullius Cicero: Timaeus. De universitate/Timaeus. Über das Weltall*, Sammlung Tusculum, eds. Bayer and Bayer (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 2006), 93–124, 96.

⁴⁰ David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato*, Philosophia Antiqua 44 (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 371.

epistemology. One might even say that in the case of Plutarch and Dio, the use of εικόν as a signifier of a divine image in a cultic setting gains the upper hand vis-à-vis the more traditional terms ἄγαλμα, βρέτας, ἔδος, and ζόανον.⁴¹ Yet the interest in a divine image is not restricted to figural images, for a human being as well can be considered an image of the divine: the Stoic writers Seneca the Younger, Gaius Musonius Rufus, and Epictetus speak of the human as an “imitation” (μίμημα) of God, the divine craftsman’s “work of art” (κατασκευάσμα) that the human must continue to refine and polish so as to display oneself as a worthy divine statue (ἄγαλμα) and thus mold oneself so as to become an image (*imago*) of God.

In conclusion: in the attempt to situate Colossians within the discourse concerning an “image of God” in the religious-philosophical world of the first century A.D., we shall consider the Hebrew Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the writings of Plato, the Wisdom of Solomon, Philo, Plutarch, Dio Chrysostom, the Stoics Seneca the Younger, Gaius Musonius Rufus, and Epictetus, and the Apostle Paul. After setting the stage in this way, we will proceed to an exegesis of Col 1:15–20.

III. Religion or Philosophy?

The reader might ask themselves at this point, “What justifies the comparison of Colossians with the texts of authors such as Plato et al.? Can one really compare *religious* texts with *philosophical* ones? And is an awareness of such philosophical traditions perhaps not above the educational and social standing of the author of Colossians?” Let us begin with the first assumption of this question. The remarks of the foregoing section have likely tipped my hand, so I should state this explicitly: there is no need to posit a dichotomy between religion and philosophy in the era under consideration. “Religion” and “philosophy” may not be identical, but they are nevertheless too bound up with one another so as to justify a dichotomy, and if one were to force such a dichotomy, it would result in a distortion of the sources.⁴² What is often perceived as anti-

⁴¹ On these latter terms as the traditional signifiers, cf. Tanja S. Scheer, *Die Gottheit und ihr Bild: Untersuchungen zur Funktion griechischer Kultbilder in Religion und Politik*, Zetemata 105 (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2000), 8–34.

⁴² Anders Klostergaard Petersen raises the question whether the two phenomena are distinct, the one having to do with reason and the other with revelation, or “should they rather be conceived of as two parallel discourses with a number of noticeable overlapping points?” (“Finding a Basis for Interpreting New Testament Ethos from a Greco-Roman Philosophical Perspective,” in *Early Christian Ethics in Interaction with Jewish and Greco-Roman Contexts*, STAR 17, eds. Jan Willem van Henten and Joseph Verheyden [Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013], 53–81, 55). In his discussion of how one might study Paul in his historical context, Udo Schnelle notes such an overlap in antiquity which consisted in the potential of each phenomenon (*Paulus*, 20: “Jede Philosophie hat religiöses Potential und umgekehrt jede Religion auch philosophisches Potential”) and that the NT writings might be seen as a form of

religious sentiment in ancient philosophers is rather a critique of particular forms and contents of belief, but not of religion itself.⁴³

For example, any portrayal of Plato that lacks indications of a reliance on religious traditions and a concern for the gods and piety would be incomplete to the point of being inaccurate.⁴⁴ As Thomas A. Szlezák states laconically, “Platonische Philosophie ist Religion.”⁴⁵ In his inquiry into the nature of virtue in the *Meno* dialogue, Socrates presents the notion of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) in order to account for the acquisition of knowledge (81a–e). Yet in order to do this, he posits the immortality of the soul and his only justification for the claim is that it derives from “wise men and women,” from “priests and priestesses,”⁴⁶ and from Pindar and other “godlike” poets. In other words, the crux

participation in a broader ancient discourse concerning how to live a successful life under the constraints of fateful powers (ibid.). On the question whether Paul expresses a rejection of philosophy in 1 Cor 1:22–23 (“[...] the Greeks seek wisdom, *but we* preach Christ crucified [...]”), which is relevant for a study of Pauline literature such as this one, cf. Hansjürgen Verweyen, *Philosophie und Theologie: Vom Mythos zum Logos zum Mythos* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), 109–14, who argues that if Paul issues a wholesale rejection of ‘philosophy’ at all, then surely in the sense of a human attempt to attain equality with the gods (109) or a striving to procure and retain the most vast store of wisdom and knowledge possible without any concern for one’s neighbor, i.e. devoid of the impact of Christ’s “being for [others]” upon one’s search for and use of wisdom (113).

⁴³ Gábor Betegh, “Greek Philosophy and Religion,” in *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy*, eds. Mary Louise Gill and Pierre Pellegrin (Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 625–39: “It is no less remarkable that, by and large, the philosophers’ attitude towards traditional religiosity was a mixture of innovation, criticism, and conservatism” (625), and they “conceived of their novel ideas as corrections that can render existing forms of religious worship genuinely meaningful” (626). In this vein, one may think of Seneca’s critique of popular religion in *Ep.* 41.1–2 and 95.47–50; the redirection of religious fervor to a philosophically modified conception of God is particularly stark in the latter epistle (cf. Jordi Pià Comella, *Une piété de la raison: Philosophie et religion dans le stoïcisme imperial. Des Lettres à Lucilius de Sénèque aux Pensées de Marc Aurèle*, Philosophie hellénistique et romaine 3 [Turnhout: Brepols, 2014], 100–9, whose treatment of *Ep.* 95 points out how Seneca reconceptualizes the traditional Roman notions of *religio* and *pietas* on the basis of Stoic theological and ethical doctrines).

⁴⁴ Cf. Szlezák, *Platon*, 568–81. See also Anders Klostergaard Petersen, “Plato’s Philosophy – Why Not Just Platonic Religion?,” in *Religio-Philosophical Discourses in the Mediterranean World: From Plato, through Jesus, to Late Antiquity*, Ancient Philosophy & Religion 1, eds. Klostergaard Petersen and George van Kooten (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 9–36, 18, 35, who argues for viewing Plato’s philosophy as an example of Axial Age religion and even calling it “Platonic religion.” In Klostergaard Petersen’s estimation, this is the legacy of Plato that endured in later periods of philosophical history and which must be distinguished from “Plato’s religion”; i.e., the concrete form of *polis*-religion that Plato practiced.

⁴⁵ Szlezák, *Platon*, 568.

⁴⁶ In this connection, one might also think of the tale of Solon’s encounter with an Egyptian priest in Plato, *Tim.* 22b–23c, wherein the priest is portrayed as a repository of ancient wisdom. By explaining the myth of Phaeton in a manner reminiscent of Greek natural

of Plato's explication of epistemology depends on a rather dogmatic maneuver which invokes a religious tradition and, in so doing, cuts across the grain of a modern understanding of philosophy as an undertaking that is beholden to no other presuppositions than those established by reason. Further, one might think of the role played by Socrates' "sign" or "a certain god" in the dialogues, which often induces a revelatory moment and leads to a breakthrough or abrupt shift in an argument (e.g., *Phaedr.* 242c; *Phil.* 20b–c, 22b).⁴⁷ Beyond such revelatory *content*, the very *process* of reasoning about such ideas – that is, dialectic – is considered a gift (δῶσις) of the gods (*Phil.* 16b–17a).⁴⁸ In addition, a high premium is placed on prayer as a proper preamble to any philosophical undertaking (*Tim.* 27c) and as a fitting conclusion to philosophical revisions (*Phaedr.* 257a–b). And yet at an even more basic level, it is not only the mode of philosophy that is religiously charged, but also its goal: the prudent thinker does what is fitting toward the gods and humanity (*Gorg.* 507a), the philosopher strives to embrace the totality of things human *and* divine (*Resp.* 6.486a),⁴⁹ and because this world is full of vice, "one must attempt" (πειρᾶσθαι χρῆ) to flee it straightaway, and such flight is nothing other than "assimilation to god" (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ; *Theaet.* 176b–c). One might even say that Plato's affirmation of an *imitatio Dei* is the driving force behind his perception of an "ancient antipathy" between poetry and philosophy (*Resp.* 10.607b–c); such an antagonism does not entail a rejection of religion, nor even of poetry *per se*, but rather of certain descriptions of the divine that could only cause harm to

philosophers and which sounds vaguely similar to and anticipatory of the Stoic doctrine of ἐκπύρωσις, this religious figure is depicted as having the upper philosophical hand on the 'young wisdom' (*Tim.* 22b–c) of "the wisest of the seven" Greek sages (*Tim.* 20d, ὁ τῶν ἑπτὰ σοφώτατος). Even though one can doubt the extent to which Greek philosophers were truly familiar with the teachings of Egyptian priests and Persian magi, the fact remains that they were often portrayed as sources of ancient wisdom (Albrecht Dihle, "Die griechische Philosophie zur Zeit ihrer Rezeption durch Juden und Christen," in *Religiöse Philosophie und philosophische Religion der frühen Kaiserzeit: Literaturgeschichtliche Perspektiven*, STAC 51, eds. Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, Herwig Görgemanns, and Michael von Albrecht [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009], 3–19, 4–6), which attests to an ancient philosophical perception of some basic congruence between religion and philosophy.

⁴⁷ In the case of the *Philebus*, a dialogue where Socrates is repeatedly accused of intentionally confusing his interlocutors and leading them into an aporia, it might be asked whether Socrates merely uses the reference to the divine as a way of backing himself out of a philosophical corner. Yet even if this were the case, one would still need to admit that Socrates' interlocutors do not seem to doubt the legitimacy of his appeal to a divine source.

⁴⁸ It could be noted that in *Eth. Nic.* 1179a22–24, Aristotle provides the reverse of the viewpoint that the gods bestow reasoning upon humanity: whoever exercises their mind (νοῦς) makes themselves "most dear to god" (θεοφιλέστατος; Betegh, "Greek Philosophy and Religion," 637).

⁴⁹ Pierre Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 110–11.

the state if humans were to emulate them. Indeed, for Plato, the state requires gods and pious citizens.⁵⁰

Should it be an historiographical error to portray the philosophy of the classical period as a jettisoning of religious concerns, then the failure to take stock of the religious hue of the philosophy of the early Roman imperial era would be an historiographical disaster.⁵¹ Rather than assuming an antagonism between faith and reason, we do better to notice their alliance and, at least for Platonizing authors, the coincidence of metaphysics and theology.⁵² Dio Chrysostom, for example, considered concern for and worship of the gods to be a distinguishing characteristic of the philosopher's way of life, namely one that sets it apart from that of "most people" (*Or.* 70.7).⁵³ Further, the Platonic notion of "assimilation to god" as the goal of life was advocated in one form or another by Philo (*Opif.* 144; *Fug.* 63), Plutarch (*Sera* 550d), and several Middle Platonists.⁵⁴ The former, whose exegesis of the Hebrew scriptures is

⁵⁰ Szlezák, *Platon*, 580: "Mit den *Nomoi* hat Platon einen der frömmsten Staaten entworfen, die je ausgedacht wurden [...]." Szlezák proceeds to argue against the viewpoint that this evinces a change vis-à-vis Plato's *Republic*, claiming that the philosophers of the *Republic* and the citizens envisioned in the *Laws* "philosophisch und religiös erkennbar auf demselben Boden stehen" (581).

⁵¹ At the most, one could perhaps point to Epicurean philosophy as a disposal of religious concerns, but even this would be misleading: the problem was not theology or religious concern *per se*, but rather views of the gods that subject people to fear and superstition; cf. Lucretius, *De rer. nat.* 1.50–79; Diogenes Laertius 10.123–124.

⁵² Mauro Bonazzi, *À la recherche des idées: Platonisme et philosophie hellénistique d'Antiochus à Plotin*, Histoire des doctrines de l'Antiquité classique 46 (Paris: Vrin, 2015), 101: "[...] dans le contexte culturel du monde ancien, l'opposition entre raison et foi n'a pas de sens. Au contraire, pour Plutarque et pour les autres platoniciens, métaphysique et théologie coïncident; il faut donc parler non pas d'opposition entre raison et foi mais plutôt d'alliance: s'il est vrai que la philosophie aboutit à la théologie, il n'est pas moins vrai qu'il n'y a pas de théologie qui ne soit pas en même temps philosophie." Ferrari, "Metafisica e teologia nel medioplatonismo," 322, has pointed out that a common feature of Middle Platonism was a certain "theologization" of the intelligible realm, resulting either in the "coalescence" of the Demiurge of the *Timaeus* with the idea of the Good from the *Republic* into one divine reality or the hierarchization of the two so as to posit a first and a second god (*ibid.*, 324, 333). Ferrari also notes in his monograph *Dio, idee e materia: La struttura del cosmo in Plutarco di Cheronea*, Strumenti per la ricerca plutarchea 3 (Naples: M. D'Auria, 1995), 61–62, that the renewed interest in the *Timaeus* in the early Roman imperial period was likely responsible for the renaissance of a "dogmatic" and "positive" orientation in the Platonic tradition.

⁵³ καὶ καθόλου βίος ἄλλος μὲν τοῦ φιλοσοφοῦντος, ἄλλος δὲ τῶν πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων· ὁ μὲν πρὸς ἀλήθειαν καὶ φρόνησιν τεινῶν καὶ θεῶν ἐπιμέλειαν καὶ θεραπείαν τῆς αὐτοῦ ψυχῆς [...].

⁵⁴ For a treatment of the *topos* of ὁμοίωσις θεῷ in other Middle Platonists, see Paolo Torri, "The *telos* of Assimilation to God and the Conflict between *theoria* and *praxis* in Plato and the Middle Platonists," in *Thinking, Knowing, Acting: Epistemology and Ethics in Plato*

influenced by various currents of the Hellenic philosophical tradition, perceives the result of a philosophically informed education in the scriptures to be a “blessed and happy life” (μακάρια καὶ εὐδαίμων ζωή), for such a person will have been “formed by the doctrines of piety and holiness” (*Opif.* 172, δόγμασιν εὐσεβείας καὶ ὁσιότητος χαραχθεὶς). Plutarch, also a philosopher who served in a religious capacity as the priest of Apollo at Delphi, conceived of the search for truth as a form of worship of and longing for the gods (*Is. Os.* 351e–f) and considered knowledge of the gods to be the highest human good (*Is. Os.* 351c–d). Rather than demolishing traditional beliefs, the goal is to interpret them “as befits the divine and philosophically” so as to avoid falling into superstition or atheism (*Is. Os.* 355c–d; cf. also *De superstitione*) or “moving that which cannot be moved,” namely “ancient traditional faith” (*Amat.* 756b).⁵⁵ This does not necessarily entail fideism nor the suspension of reason nor even the discarding of tendencies of Academic skepticism, as has been argued convincingly by Jan Opsomer.⁵⁶ Instead, it means working towards a “philosophy that has theology as its end” (*Def. orac.* 410b).⁵⁷ The religious hue of the philosophy of the early Roman imperial period might also be demonstrated, further, by a considerable interest in the “sign” of Socrates: no fewer than four treatises were devoted to the topic, one by Plutarch (*De genio Socratis*), Apuleius (*De deo Socratis*), and two by Maximus of Tyre (*Dissertationes* 3 and 8, ed.

and *Ancient Platonism*, Brill’s Plato Studies Series 3, eds. Mauro Bonazzi, Filippo Forcignanò, and Angela Ulacco (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 228–50.

⁵⁵ On Plutarch’s use of πίστις, cf. Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, “Religiöse Tradition und individueller Glaube: Πίστις und πιστεύειν bei Plutarch als Hintergrund zum neutestamentlichen Glaubensverständnis,” in *Glaube: Das Verständnis des Glaubens im frühen Christentum und in seiner jüdischen und hellenistisch-römischen Umwelt*, WUNT 373, eds. Jörg Frey, Benjamin Schliesser, and Nadine Ueberschaer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 251–72, esp. 260–70.

⁵⁶ Jan Opsomer, “Divination and Academic ‘Scepticism’ according to Plutarch,” in *Plutarchea Lovaniensia: A Miscellany of Essays on Plutarch*, Studia Hellenistica 32, ed. Luc Van der Stockt (Leuven: Université Catholique de Louvain, 1996), 164–94, 171; Jan Opsomer, *In Search of the Truth: Academic Tendencies in Middle Platonism* (Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1998), 174–86.

⁵⁷ Though the notion of collecting historical material for the construction of a philosophy that has theology as its end is expressed by Cleombrotus and not Plutarch himself, and although he does not consider Cleombrotus to be a cipher for Plutarch, Peter Van Nuffelen suggests that this motive is a fitting description of Plutarch’s philosophical project (Peter Van Nuffelen, *Rethinking the Gods: Philosophical Readings of Religion in the Post-Hellenistic Period* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011], 50). Ferrari, *Dio, idee e materia*, 23, thinks Plutarch himself would have opted for the term “epopteia” rather than “theology” due to the former’s promise of reconciling the theological-metaphysical aspect with the mysterious-cultic one.

Trapp).⁵⁸ In addition, one may speak of two complementary tendencies in this period: the “sacralization of the sage” and the “sagacitization of the saint.”⁵⁹

Yet even if it is correct to consider the early imperial era as a period of religious philosophy and philosophical religion,⁶⁰ what of the second objection mentioned above? The notion that the works of the aforementioned philosophers is above the paygrade, so to speak, of the author of Colossians could be construed in two ways: first, whether it is legitimate to compare Colossians with ‘the great texts of great authors,’ and secondly, whether we can rightly assume that the author of Colossians had any exposure to the thought of figures such as Plato, Philo, or Seneca.

As to the first objection, we might point out that even if one were to maintain the thesis that certain New Testament writings should be classified as “minor-league literature” (*Kleinliteratur*),⁶¹ this should not preclude the philosophical comparison of any of them with works of “great literature.” The theological content conveyed by a piece of writing cannot be estimated on the basis of the aesthetic quality of the writing. Notwithstanding the grade of subjectivity involved in aesthetic judgments, we might say that even if one were to follow the rules of composition pedantically, this would be no guarantee of exquisite – let alone interesting – content.⁶² To exclude the possibility of comparing the theological content of one writing with another on the basis of such a judgment would be akin to judging significance on the basis of length, for example the conclusion that Paul’s Letter to Philemon is his most insignificant letter because it is short.⁶³

The second construal of the second objection does appear at first to have somewhat more heft. Was the author of Colossians aware of the writings of thinkers like Plato et al. and familiar with their content? Would the author have come from a sufficiently high social standing so as to have come into contact

⁵⁸ Reinhard Feldmeier, *Gottes Geist: Die biblische Rede vom Geist im Kontext der antiken Welt*, Tria Corda 13 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 96, n. 4.

⁵⁹ Reinhard Feldmeier, “‘Göttliche Philosophie’: Die Interaktion von Weisheit und Religion in der späteren Antike,” in *Religiöse Philosophie und philosophische Religion der frühen Kaiserzeit*, 99–116. Feldmeier describes the “Sakralisierung des Weisen” in the pagan realm (99–103), the “Sapientialisierung des Heiligen” in Hellenistic Judaism (103–13), and the use of the concept of wisdom in the NT, primarily in the Corpus Paulinum (113–16).

⁶⁰ See the various contributions in the volume *Religiöse Philosophie und philosophische Religion der frühen Kaiserzeit: Literaturgeschichtliche Perspektiven*, STAC 51, eds. Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, Herwig Görgemanns, and Michael von Albrecht (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

⁶¹ Martin Dibelius, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1919), 2.

⁶² See below, “Prioritizing Function over Form: One Modern and Three Ancient Examples,” regarding Ps.-Longinus.

⁶³ *Pace* Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, “Die Paulusbriefsammlung,” in *Grundinformation Neues Testament*, 5th ed., ed. Niebuhr (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), 193–287, 260.

with such writings or perhaps to have known contemporary philosophers? To begin with, the notion that the author of Colossians must have had awareness of those philosophical corpora with which Colossians is to be compared is superfluous to requirements, for our study does not concern a synoptic comparison of, say, the whole of Philo's corpus with Colossians, but simply the understanding of their respective "image" concepts (focused primarily on the lemma εικόν). Further, the flow of information and the exchange of ideas is a complicated, messy process. It is possible that the author of Colossians was influenced by other philosophical uses of εικόν without knowing the sources firsthand.⁶⁴ The upshot of this circumstance is that there is no need to attribute motives to the author of Colossians for any shift in meaning; it is not as though we should picture the author brooding over the possible nuances of the term as used in other writers and then devising a scheme for how to bend or break them.

As for the social standing of our author, it should be pointed out that social standing is not necessarily a reliable indicator of exposure to philosophy or philosophical ability. The example of Dio Chrysostom is helpful here. His orations were often addressed to the public and not to small enclaves of philosophers, and the topics he addresses reveal to us what the orator believed his public audience would be able to understand.⁶⁵ Among them is the *Olympic Discourse* concerning the sources of knowledge of God, which included divine "images" (εικόνας) such as the Pheidian Zeus. Dio must have reckoned to his audience the ability to follow his thought on this topic. Indeed, neither Dio nor his audience would have required an encyclopedic knowledge of the philosophical history of the term εικόν in order to use or to understand the term in some meaningful way, and because lexical determination and semantic content do not overlap perfectly and thus lead to a variety of meanings for a term across its range of users, it is not necessary that either Dio or the author of Colossians

⁶⁴ Dietmar Wyrwa, "Verwendbarkeit philosophischer Konzepte für jüdische, christliche und gnostische Theologien," in Riedweg, Horn, and Wyrwa, *Philosophie der Kaiserzeit und Spätantike*, 83–103, 87, points out how conscious or unknowing appropriations of philosophical concepts on the part of Jewish and Christian authors might be traced back, in some case, to secondary channels: "Dass jüdische und christliche Theologen in einen Diskurs mit der griechisch-römischen Geisteswelt eingetreten sind und ihren Glauben auch in philosophischen Kategorien expliziert haben, schlägt sich am greifbarsten auf literarischen Kommunikationswegen nieder, auch wenn Zeugnisse für andere Kontexte, wo sich Diskursfolien boten, nicht fehlen. Hier, auf literarischem Gebiet, variieren die Wege und Formen der Adaptation stark. Es gibt integrierte oder ausgewiesene Übernahmen. Sie können bestimmte Motive, Topoi, Themen und Argumentationsfiguren umfassen, die in mehr oder weniger bewussten Anspielungen, in benannten Zitaten oder Referaten auftreten und die oftmals nicht direkt den Originalquellen entstammen, sondern durch sekundäre Instanzen vermittelt sind."

⁶⁵ These were, for example, topics such as the comparison of Homer and Socrates (*Or.* 55), the nature of philosophy (*Or.* 70), two discourses on virtue (*Or.* 8, 69), two on slavery and freedom (*Or.* 14, 15), and one on the notion that only the wise are happy (*Or.* 23).

be fully cognizant of the way εἰκὼν had been used by past thinkers in order for *their* uses to be influenced by and compared with them.

C. Outline of the Study

In order to elucidate the meaning of the expression “image of the invisible God” as it is applied to Jesus Christ in the Letter to the Colossians, this exegetical study will unfold in four steps:

1. In the first section, I will lay the groundwork for situating Colossians within the image discourse of the first century A.D. by investigating antecedent traditions such as texts preserved in the Hebrew Bible and other extant Hebrew texts and the conception of images in Plato before proceeding to an examination of figures and writings of the early Roman imperial period: the Wisdom of Solomon, Philo of Alexandria, Plutarch of Chaeronea, the orator Dio Chrysostom, the Stoics Seneca the Younger, Gaius Musonius Rufus, and Epictetus, and finally, the Apostle Paul.

2. In the second section, I will address prolegomena concerning Colossians and particularly Col 1:15–20. There are two reasons for the special focus on Col 1:15–20: (1) this is where the syntagma εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου (“image of the invisible God”) occurs for the first time in the New Testament and in religious-philosophical literature in general, and (2) any delineation of what the concept means in Colossians must begin by analyzing this passage and drawing inferences concerning its determinate content.

3. There then follows in the third section an exegesis of Col 1:15–20.

4. The fourth section assembles the raw material yielded by the exegetical study in order to provide a synthesis of the concept “image of the invisible God” presented to us in Colossians. On the basis of this synthesis, the image concept of Colossians will be situated within the image discourse of the first century A.D. by bringing it into dialogue with the material discussed in the first section. The aim thereby will be to bring the contours of the image concept of Colossians into sharper focus.

Following the study, I will offer brief reflections on questions that might arise from a reading of Col 1:15–20.

Chapter 1

Image Discourses

A. The Hebrew Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls

In the Hebrew Bible, two contrary image discourses come into view: the programmatic aniconic and the iconic. The “programmatic aniconic”¹ concerns the prohibition of (cultic) images found in legal texts and the aniconic rhetoric of the prophets, which contributed to the development of the former.² The “iconic” concerns the notion that the human being is the image of God.³

In order to make some sense of the seeming contradiction in the image discourses of the Hebrew Bible, it is necessary to assume an historical approach and thereby elucidate the genesis of both of its aspects. To begin with, a note on historiographical method. Models of the history of ancient Israelite religion that portray the presence and use of images as a history of decline from an initial issuing of the Law on Sinai downwards to a continuous history of ‘apostasy’ – in other words, as a transition from an aniconic monolatry to some form of iconic syncretism that provoked prophetic criticism – are no longer recognized by critical scholarship, for they: (1) are contradicted by iconographical and epigraphical evidence;⁴ (2) rely on an uncritical retelling of the

¹ Borrowed from Tryggve N.D. Mettinger, the term “programmatic aniconism” signifies any cultic aniconism grounded in a prohibition of images and is to be distinguished from “de facto aniconism,” namely any cultic aniconism not grounded in an explicit prohibition of images (Tryggve N.D. Mettinger, *No Graven Image? Israelite Aniconism in its Near Eastern Context*, ConBOT 42 [Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1995], 17–18).

² On this point, cf. Jill Middlemas, *The Divine Image: Prophetic Aniconic Rhetoric and its Contribution to the Aniconism Debate*, FAT 2/74 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), *passim*; cf. Mettinger’s remark that, chronologically, “the prophets have here preceded the Law” (Tryggve N.D. Mettinger, “The Veto on Images and the Aniconic God in Ancient Israel,” chap. 7 in Mettinger, *Reports from a Scholar’s Life: Select Papers on the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Andrew Knapp [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015], 135–52, 146).

³ The “iconic” can also encompass the theological anthropomorphism of the biblical traditions; the connection between this anthropomorphism and the notion that the human being is the image of God – the latter being the focus of this section of the study – has been elaborated by Andreas Wagner, *Gottes Körper: Zur alttestamentlichen Vorstellung der Menschengestaltigkeit Gottes* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2010).

⁴ Cf. Silvia Schroer’s monograph *In Israel gab es Bilder: Nachrichten von darstellender Kunst im Alten Testament*, OBO 74 (Fribourg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag/Vandenhoeck

‘metanarrative’ of the Hebrew Bible, thus confusing the literature of the Hebrew Bible with the historical character and development of ancient Israelite religion;⁵ and (3) do not account for the interweaving of various sources from disparate times, places, and authorial circles in the composition of the Pentateuch, the Deuteronomistic History, and the prophets.⁶ The last point is crucial for our topic, for as we shall see, the two aspects of the image discourse of the Hebrew Bible derive from different Pentateuchal sources.

The aniconic texts to be discussed here are found in Hosea, Deutero-Isaiah, the Decalogue,⁷ and other texts from Deuteronomy (4; 16:21–22).⁸ Smaller in number are the texts concerning the human as the image of God (Gen 1:26–27; 5:3; 9:6), all of which are found in the Priestly Document.⁹

I. The Aniconic Discourse

There are two chief models for explaining the genesis of the prohibition of images as we find it in the Decalogue, each grounded in a competing view of the history of Israelite religion prior to the exile. The first model supposes a veneration of Yahwistic images that gave rise to the prohibition, and the second model supposes a transition from a “de facto” aniconic YHWH cult to a “programmatically aniconic” YHWH cult spurred on by increasing confusion of a cultic symbol – such as a bull-throne or cherubim-throne – with YHWH and also by further theological reflection.¹⁰ The debate concerns not so much the

& Ruprecht, 1987), and eadem, *Die Ikonographie Palästinas/Israel und der alte Orient: Eine religionsgeschichte in Bildern*, 4 vols. (Fribourg/Basel: Academic Press/Schwabe: 2005–2018).

⁵ Even more broadly, Christoph Levin remarks of the largely exilic/post-exilic character of the Hebrew Bible: “Das Alte Testament beginnt, wo das Alte Israel endet” (Christoph Levin, *Das Alte Testament* [Munich: Beck, 2011], 21).

⁶ Angleika Berlejung, “Geschichte und Religionsgeschichte des antiken Israel,” in *Grundinformation Altes Testament: Eine Einführung in Literatur, Religion und Geschichte des Alten Testaments*, 6th ed., ed. Jan Christian Gertz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 59–192, 70; Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *Der Gott der Lebendigen: Eine biblische Gotteslehre*, TOBITH 1, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 97–99.

⁷ Following the assumption of Rüdiger Lux that the version of the Decalogue found in Exodus postdates the version of Deuteronomy, the Exodus version will not be considered for a reconstruction of the genesis of the prohibition of images (Rüdiger Lux, “Das Bild Gottes und die Götterbilder im Alten Testament,” *ZThK* 110, no. 2 [2013]: 133–57, 139, n. 27).

⁸ Other polemical aniconic texts derive from the Deuteronomistic History and Pss 115, 135. On the Deuteronomistic History, cf. Jan Christian Gertz, “Tora und Vordere Propheten,” in *Grundinformation Altes Testament*, 193–312, 285–312.

⁹ Cf. Gertz, *ibid.*, 238.

¹⁰ Some chief representatives of the first view are Christoph Uehlinger, Herbert Niehr, Oswald Loretz, and Karel van der Toorn. The latter view is championed chiefly by Trygve

question of the existence of material evidence – no clearly identifiable cultic image of YHWH has been found¹¹ – but rather the questions of what kind of religion ancient Israelite religion was like, namely like other Mesopotamian religions that employed cultic images or more like Western Semitic cults with a de facto aniconism, and also whether stelae and items used as pedestals for a deity should be classified as “cultic icon” or “cultic symbol” – in other words, what can be considered “aniconic.” Yet regardless of which model is more historically accurate, the institution of a *prohibition* of images, rather than reliance upon willing adherence to a widespread aniconic mindset, was one of the distinguishing marks of ancient Judean religion following the exile.¹² In what follows, I will trace the literary evidence for the development of the aniconic aspect of the image discourse of the Hebrew Bible.

The earliest aniconic statement stems from the eighth century B.C.¹³ and occurs in Hosea 8:6a, when the speaker criticizes the “calf of Samaria” and says, “For it is from Israel, an artisan made it; it is no god!” Tryggve N.D. Mettinger supposes that the critique was directed at a mistaken notion among the people that the calf image erected by Jeroboam in Dan and Bethel (cf. 1 Kings 12:28–29) at an earlier point in Israel’s history came to be confused with YHWH, and he also notes that the lack of any appeal to an image prohibition – which would have strengthened Hosea’s case – suggests that the image prohibition had not yet arisen.¹⁴ It is precisely this lack of a reference to an image prohibition that proves instructive for identifying the motivation of Hosea’s critique: his objection rests on the distinction between a man-made item and God, for nothing which is made can be divine. Accordingly, he continues: “For the calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces” (Hos 8:6b; NRSV rev.).¹⁵ In

N.D. Mettinger (*No Graven Image?*, 195; see also the chapters “The Veto on Images and the Aniconic God in Ancient Israel,” and “A Conversation with My Critics: Cultic Image or Aniconism in the First Temple?,” chap. 7 and 8 in Mettinger, *Reports from a Scholar’s Life: Select Papers on the Hebrew Bible*) and also by Othmar Keel, “Warum im Jerusalemer Tempel kein anthropomorphes Kultbild gestanden haben dürfte,” in *Homo Pictor*, Colloquium Rauricum 7, ed. Gottfried Boehm (Munich/Leipzig: Saur, 2001), 244–82.

¹¹ André Lemaire, *The Birth of Monotheism: The Rise and Disappearance of Yahwism* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeological Society, 2007), 63.

¹² Christoph Dohmen, “Anikonisch,” *RGG4*, 1:503; Christoph Uehlinger, “Bilderverbot,” *RGG4*, 1:1574–77, 1576.

¹³ Cf. Konrad Schmid, “Hintere Propheten (Nebiim),” in *Grundinformation Altes Testament*, 313–412, 378, with index 6 in the same volume, 611; Mettinger, “The Veto on Images,” 145, sees this utterance as the genesis of the prohibition of images: “The actual polemic against images can thus be traced back to Hosea in the eighth century, though scarcely earlier. To judge by the evidence, it began with this prophet, received its peripeteia in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic Historical Work, and its finale in Deutero-Isaiah (e.g., Isa 40,18–20; 41,6f.; 44,9–20).”

¹⁴ Mettinger, *ibid.*, 145–46.

¹⁵ Note the exegetical ׀ at the beginning of the clause.

offering this critique and condemnation, Hosea reveals a key component of his view of God, summarized by Andersen and Freedman in the following way: “What can be made can be destroyed [...] [this is the] final proof that the calf of Samaria is not a god.”¹⁶

The next stage in the development of the *Bilderdiskurs* of the biblical traditions occurs in Deuteronomy’s legal core (12:1–26:15). Thematic and linguistic connections between Hosea and Deuteronomy have given rise to the theory that the northern tradents of Hosea contributed significantly to the shaping of this legal core.¹⁷ Two texts ought to be highlighted, namely Deut 12:3–4 and 16:21–22. In Deut 12:3–4, Moses instructs the Israelites to enter the promised land and to annihilate the cultic sites and paraphernalia of the land’s inhabitants, namely their altars, pillars, sacred poles, and cultic images (לִפְסֵי). Moses continues: “You shall not act this way (לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂוּן כֵּן) toward YHWH your God” (Deut 12:4 [own trans.]). Instead, the Israelites are to worship at the site YHWH chooses for them (vv. 5–7). The context of Deut 12:2–7 makes it clear that the speaker’s concern is the centralization of the YHWH cult – one of two hallmarks of Deuteronom(ist)ic theology¹⁸ – and therefore the phrase “You shall not act this way” (לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂוּן כֵּן) in 12:4 should be read not as a prohibition of images, but rather as a prohibition of constructing multiple cultic sites. Nevertheless, the severity of the text’s iconoclasm is remarkable. Whereas Hos 8:6b could be understood as a pronouncement of divine judgement that YHWH will execute, Deut 12 introduces the *sanction of* and *demand for* iconoclasm. We are not yet dealing with an image prohibition such as we find it in Deut 5:8, but one might characterize the destruction of foreign cultic images in the endeavor to prepare the way for the one cultic site of the one true God as a demonstrative enactment of Hos 8:6.¹⁹

The next text does introduce a prohibition, albeit a prohibition of cultic symbols: in Deut 16:21–22, Moses prohibits the erection of Asherah poles and massebahs next to YHWH’s altar. Again, this is not a prohibition of images

¹⁶ Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea*, AB 24 (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 496.

¹⁷ For a summary of the debate, see Bill T. Arnold, “Deuteronomy, Hosea, and the Theory of Northern Origins,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Deuteronomy* (ed. D.C. Benjamin; Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190273552.013.20>; Mettinger, “The Veto on Images,” 145, also notes the connection.

¹⁸ The other hallmark is “Monoyahwism” (Gertz, “Tora und Vordere Propheten,” 258).

¹⁹ And yet again, it might be going too far to conclude that iconoclasm is a *necessary* consequence of Israelite aniconism, as is suggested in an *RG4* article by Christoph Dohmen (“Anikonisch,” 503). The thrust of Deut 12:1–7 does not seem to be an effort to assign cultic images to a moral category, which could itself lead to a general antipathy towards images and provide a permission structure for iconoclasm in all times and places. Instead, and as mentioned, it seems that the point of Deut 12:1–7 is to command the Israelites to pave the way for the centralization of YHWH’s cult during the conquest of Canaan.

per se, but rather the eradication of cultic practices which might associate YHWH with the attributes of other deities. Whereas the first item is clearly associated with the goddess Asherah,²⁰ who was sometimes portrayed as YHWH's consort in pre-exilic cultic sites,²¹ the meaning of the second item depended on its function and was not always condemned.²² We might say that the driving motor in this passage is the promotion of monolatric Yahwism and the exclusion of material objects that might confuse the worshipper as to YHWH's identity.

Pinpointing the chronology of the components of the next phase of development – and thus their relation to one another – is difficult, but when it comes to Deutero-Isaiah and the redaction of Deuteronomy,²³ we are dealing with the late-exilic/early post-exilic period (mid to late sixth century B.C.).²⁴

Deutero-Isaiah is known for representing a principled monotheism: it is not the case that YHWH is one God among others whom the Israelites are bound to worship due to YHWH's privileged status as it is enshrined in the Law (Deuteronom(ist)ic "Privilege Law"),²⁵ but rather that YHWH alone is God and no other god exists (Isa 41:4; 43:10b; 44:6b, 8; 45:5–7, 22; 46:5, 9–10). Yet what is the driving motivation of this view? The critique of cultic images that is interwoven through Isa 40–48 can give us an indication. First, this critique must be understood in the larger context: the overarching theme of these chapters is the affirmation that YHWH is the deliverer of his people Israel (45:5–17; 46:3–4), the one who will establish justice, aid the poor and needy, open the eyes of the blind, and free the captives (cf. 41:17–20; 42:1–9). In order to make this claim, the author distinguishes between YHWH as the one who not only created the world, but who also has the power to change it (40:4–5) and

²⁰ Christian Frevel, *Aschera und der Ausschließlichkeitsanspruch YHWHs*, BBB 94, 2 vols. (Weinheim: Beltz Athenäum, 1995), 1:209–10.

²¹ Feldmeier und Spieckermann, *Der Gott der Lebendigen*, 98.

²² Dale W. Manor and David N. Freedman, "Massebah," *ABD* 4:602.

²³ The composition and transmission history of Jer 10:1–16, which presents a critique of idols similar in theme but shorter in length compared with Deutero-Isaiah, seems reason enough to Jack R. Lundbom to conclude that the Hebrew text of Jer 10:1–10 does *not* depend on Deutero-Isaiah (Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, AB 21A [New York: Doubleday, 1999], 577–82); cf. Georg Fischer, "Jeremia/Jeremiabuch," *RGG4*, 4:414–23. The priority of the LXX text is the majority opinion, but Fischer explains the weaknesses of this view (416–17).

²⁴ Konrad Schmid estimates the *terminus ante quem* of the literary archetype (*Grund-schrift*) of Deutero-Isaiah to be 539 B.C. ("Hintere Propheten (Nebiim)," 342). On the difficulty of dating the various strata of Deuteronomy, cf. Gertz, "Tora und Vordere Propheten," 253.

²⁵ Jan Assmann's treatment of "exclusive monotheism" in *Monotheismus und die Sprache der Gewalt*, 5th ed. (Vienna: Picus, 2009) elucidates the implications of the difference between "having" and "being" in the first commandment: "You shall *have* no other gods before me" (Deut 5:7).

who will outlast it (40:6b–8; cf. 44:6b, “I am the first and I am the last”).²⁶ Repeatedly, the author distinguishes between the transitory and feeble character of creation and the God who created it, punctuated by the question: “To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness (תַּמְלִיךְ) compare with him? An image (לְפָסֵל)? – A workman casts it [...]” (40:18–19a; cf. 40:25–26a). As occurs multiples times in these chapters, the author returns to the overarching theme of the difference between YHWH and the world (v. 21) after issuing a critique of images (vv. 18–19a). This is summarized well in 40:28–29: “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.” In the following chapters, Deutero-Isaiah satirizes iconic worship by pointing out how the relation between artisan and image is the inverse of the relation between the might of the Creator and the feebleness of the creation.

After the affirmation that there is no god besides YHWH (Isa 44:6b, 8), the speaker pursues this thought further through a critique of cultic images (Isa 44:9–20). Those who make an image (לְפָסֵל) are nothing, for they are not helped by them: “their witnesses” (עֵדוּתָם) neither see nor know anything (Isa 44:9). In 44:12, Deutero-Isaiah lampoons the production of an image in which the artisan becomes hungry, thirsty, and weak in the process of constructing his god, which one might read as the inversion of the relation of YHWH to the poor, needy, and thirsty in 41:17–20. He also portrays the production process as a performative contradiction of the artisan’s desire to be aided by the image: not only does he select material that is nourished by natural phenomena (wood from trees nourished by rain), revealing that the ‘god’ is dependent upon the created order even before its formation, but he also uses half of his wood to warm himself and constructs an image from the other half, not realizing that he has helped himself before requesting aid from his god. Deutero-Isaiah’s conclusion in 44:18–20 is that the maker of images has a “deceived mind” (לֵב לִדְרוֹגָה), for he cannot even recognize the contradiction to which he commits himself.

That the relation of YHWH to Israel is the opposite of the relation of an artisan to a crafted image is underscored again in Isa 45:9–17 and 46:1–7. In the first passage, YHWH is portrayed as the potter and humankind as clay, inverting the relation of artisan and image presupposed in the production of cultic images. YHWH is affirmed as the “maker” (עָשָׂה) of Israel who will deliver

²⁶ On the soteriological concern and the interest in underscoring YHWH’s power in Isa 40–48 as key aspects of Deutero-Isaiah’s monotheism, see Matthias Albani, “Monotheism in Isaiah,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Isaiah*, ed. Lena-Sofie Tiemeyer (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2020), 219–48, 223–25. Albani subsequently notes: “The monotheistic argument in Isa 40–48 is not an independent topic but serves, above all, to underpin the central historical message of hope – liberation by Cyrus and the triumphant return of life from exile” (226).

Israel, and one of the results will be that the artisans who make images will be confounded and the nations from which they come will realize that YHWH is the only God (Isa 45:14–16). Following the claim in 45:20 that images cannot save, images are portrayed in Isa 46:1–2 as nothing other than a burden for animals to bear, for when the animal stoops down, so too does the image and, accordingly, the image is born away into captivity along with the animal. In contrast, YHWH carries Israel from the cradle to the grave:

Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, even when you turn gray I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.
(Isa 46:3–4)

שָׁמְעוּ אֵלַי בַּיּוֹם וְכִלְ-שְׂאֲרֵית בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל
הַעֲמִסִּים מִנִּי-בֶטֶן הַנְּשָׂאִים מִנִּי-רֶחֶם:
וְעַד-זָקְנָה אֲנִי הוּא וְעַד-שִׁיבָה אֲנִי אֶסְבֵּל
אֲנִי עָשִׂיתִי וְאֲנִי אֶשָּׂא וְאֲנִי אֶסְבֵּל וְאֲמַלְט:

Yet images are not only incapable of providing basic material help, they also cannot declare past and future events (41:21–24; 44:7; 45:21) and steer the course of human history (41:25).²⁷ The promise of the Servant who will establish justice, liberate the captives, and turn the darkness of the blind to light (42:1–9) is followed by the statement: “I am the LORD, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols” (פָּקֹדֶיךָ; 42:8). In contrast, those who “trust in an image” will be put to shame (42:17). It is precisely this trust in an image that the pronouncement of past and future seeks to undercut, as we read for the first time in 48:5: “I declared them to you from long ago, before they came to pass I announced them to you, so that you would not say, ‘My idol did them, my carved image and my cast image commanded them.’”

In sum: Deutero-Isaiah’s rejection of cultic images is embedded in the affirmation that YHWH alone can save and in order to stake this claim, he must affirm that YHWH stands above, before and beyond creation, and that in contrast to an image that must be “made” and “borne about,” it is YHWH alone who “made” and who “bears” Israel. In what could be considered a reformulation of the insight encapsulated in Hos 8:6, Deutero-Isaiah says in 43:10b: “Before me no God was made [pass. יִצַר] and there will be none after me” (לִפְנֵי לֹא נִיָּצַר אֵל וְאַחֲרַי לֹא יִהְיֶה). The point, of course, is not that YHWH was made, but that any constructed item cannot be God: if it was made, it can be unmade. Further, in contrast to mute, insentient images, YHWH’s communicative ability transcends all else by the ability to foretell future events and to steer history so as to bring about these events. In a world where images were supposed to

²⁷ Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 40–48*, HTKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2008), 47, identifies the way that YHWH commandeers foreign powers (i.e., Cyrus) for the purpose of bringing about Israel’s salvation as one of the key factors in Deutero-Isaiah’s “Überwindung des partikulären Monotheismus.”

be the place of divine encounter and a source of power,²⁸ Deutero-Isaiah draws as strong a contrast as possible between the power and transcendence of YHWH and the feeble and mundane nature of images: “[...] if one cries out to it [sc. an image], it does not answer or save anyone from trouble” (46:7b). We may conclude that it is this interest in the question of *who* can save and *what* cannot save that drives Deutero-Isaiah’s consistent monotheism and spurs on his critique of cultic images.

At roughly the same time (late-exilic period) of Deutero-Isaiah’s activity or slightly later (post-exilic period), Deuteronom(ist)ic theologians expanded Deuteronomy and redacted it, along with certain historical books (Jos–2 Kings, the “Deuteronomistic History”). Deuteronomy’s version of the Decalogue belongs to the stock of texts incorporated at some point in this process. Deuteronomy 5:8–10 contains the prohibition of images, but the historical core of the prohibition, v. 8a,²⁹ simply reads: “You shall not make an image for yourself” (אַל תַּעֲשֶׂה לְךָ אִמָּוֶת). The term used here for “image,” אִמָּוֶת, derives from the verb לָצַק, “to hew into shape,” and the substantive is accordingly “semantically motivated,”³⁰ that is, it explains itself: אִמָּוֶת simply means “something hewn.” It does not refer to any and all items which we might call figural art, nor to mental images, but rather to hewn images and, in the context of the image discourse of the biblical traditions, an image used in a cultic setting.³¹ Because pre-exilic texts are not aware of any prohibition of images, it is unlikely that the prohibition arose before the exile.³² Further, the lack of any ANE parallels for the prohibition increases the difficulty of explaining its genesis.³³ While the roots

²⁸ Angelika Berlejung, *Die Theologie der Bilder: Herstellung und Einweihung von Kultbildern in Mesopotamien und die alttestamentliche Bilderpolemik*, OBO 162 (Fribourg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), *passim*; Friedhelm Hartenstein and Michael Moxter, *Hermeneutik des Bilderverbots: Exegetische und systematisch-theologische Annäherungen*, Forum Theologische Literaturzeitung 26 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016), 34–36, 43.

²⁹ Lux, “Das Bild Gottes,” 139, n. 27, argues for viewing 5:8a as an historical core separate from the elaborations (*Erweiterungen*) of 5:8b–10 by pointing out the asyndetic connection between 5:8a and 5:8b; the version preserved in Exodus was polished by providing a syndetic connection between Exod 20:4a and 20:4b. Cf. also Andreas Wagner, *Gottes Körper*, 25–26; Lemaire, *The Birth of Monotheism*, 63.

³⁰ Cf. Mettinger, “The Veto on Images,” 135, who explains the point by offering the example of the German word “Handschuh.”

³¹ Andreas Wagner, “Alttestamentlicher Monotheismus und seine Bindung an das Wort,” in *Gott im Wort – Gott im Bild: Bilderlosigkeit als Bedingung des Monotheismus?*, 2nd ed., ed. Wagner and Volker Hörner (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2008), 1–22, 10.

³² Uehlinger, “Bilderverbot,” 1576; cf. Hartenstein and Moxter, *Hermeneutik des Bilderverbots*, who formulates it more strictly by stating that there is no indication at all that the prohibition is pre-exilic (103) and notes that recent research is fairly united against a pre-exilic dating of the prohibition (104).

³³ Uehlinger, “Bilderverbot,” 1576.

of the prohibition could lie in an antecedent tradition such as Deut 16:21–22³⁴ or the prophets,³⁵ it seems that the catalyst for its formation were the concomitant circumstances of the exile: the loss of a local autonomous cultic site provided fertile soil for the growth of the importance of religious *texts* vis-à-vis material cultic paraphernalia.³⁶

In its current setting, however, the prohibition serves as a concretization of the first commandment (Deut 5:7, “You shall have no other gods before me”).³⁷ This is supported not only the sequence of the two prohibitions, but also by the elaborations of Deut 5:8b–10, which link the prohibition of images to YHWH’s jealousy for his people; that is, the ban serves to uphold YHWH’s privileged status. The tripartite cosmology presupposed by Deut 5:8b (heaven, earth, subterranean waters) reflects Mesopotamian mythology and the prohibition of reproducing any “form” (תְּמוּנָה) found therein serves to underscore YHWH’s privileged status. It important to note that Deut 5:8b–10 does not offer any justification for the prohibition of images aside from YHWH’s privileged status and jealousy for Israel. The argument that would explain the image prohibition more directly would be supplied by a later stage of redaction, namely Deut 4.³⁸

In Deut 4:10–14, Moses recounts to the Israelites the story of YHWH’s revelation on Sinai/Horeb. In his telling, YHWH charges Moses to assemble the people so that they might “hear [YHWH’s] words,” which subsequently occurs: “Then YHWH spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form (תְּמוּנָה); there was only a voice” (קוֹל; Deut 4:12). The ten commandments are the content of the revelation (Deut 4:13). Based on this foundational (Deut 4:13a, 14), unique theophany (cf. Deut 4:32–35), Moses explains the reason for a prohibition of images in Deut 4:15–16a: “Since you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire, take care and watch yourselves closely, so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure [...]” This is not grounded in the inability of the human being to see YHWH and live (cf. Exod 33:20), for Moses implies that merely *hearing* YHWH’s voice would normally spell one’s doom: “Has any people ever heard the voice of a god speaking out of a fire, as you

³⁴ Thus Lux, “Das Bild Gottes,” 139.

³⁵ Cf. Middlemas, *The Divine Image*, *passim*.

³⁶ Cf. Wagner, “Alttestamentlicher Monotheismus,” 14–15, 18, and Wagner, *Gottes Körper*, 30: “Wie auch immer die Entstehung des Bilderverbotes hergeleitet wird, sicher scheint zu sein, dass die Verschärfung und Formulierung als apodiktisches Gebot in exilisch-nachexilischen Texten (wie den Dekalogformulierungen) ausformuliert und bleibender Bestand der Jahwereligion wird.” Cf. also Mettinger, “The Veto on Images,” 153, who warns against monolithic explanations of the prohibition’s origin.

³⁷ Hartenstein and Moxter, *Hermeneutik des Bilderverbots*, 96.

³⁸ On Deut 4 as a later redaction, cf. Hartenstein and Moxter, *ibid.*, 98–100, and Lux, “Das Bild Gottes,” 153–54.

have heard, and lived?” (Deut 4:33). The justification for the ban on images is simply grounded in the narrative that on Sinai, YHWH chose to forego revealing any form. In other words, there is no appropriate form that could represent YHWH, for YHWH did not sanction any such form.

Summary

The initial impulse for the rejection of images was the sense that anything that can be constructed and subsequently destroyed by human hands cannot be God. This supplies the justification for iconoclasm in Deuteronomy’s legal core. This is extended in Deut 16:21–22 to prohibit the use of cultic paraphernalia which might associate such “gods” with YHWH. Later, in Deutero-Isaiah, a soteriological concern leads to the rejection of idols as “empty wind” (Isa 41:29) who cannot compare with the might, transcendence, and thus uniqueness of YHWH. The prohibition against hewn images (Deut 5:8a) is explained by its placement in the Decalogue (cf. Deut 5:7) and by later elaborations (Deut 5:8b–10) as a concretization of the prohibition of foreign Gods and it serves to underscore YHWH’s privileged status. It is subsequently explained by a later phase of redaction (Deut 4) to derive from YHWH’s epiphany on Sinai/Horeb in which YHWH spoke to the people of Israel but showed them no form.

II. The Iconic Discourse

When compared to the many texts that represent the aniconic discourse of the biblical traditions,³⁹ the scant number of texts concerning the human being as the image of God might occasion the notion that this is not a central theme of the theology of the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁰

The texts under consideration are Gen 1:26–27; 5:1, 3; 9:6. All of these texts are found in the Priestly Document (P), whose basic stock derives from the late-exilic/post-exilic period. Further, it presupposes the basic demands of Deuteronomy and was thus likely composed with a basic knowledge of

³⁹ One might add to the texts examined in the previous section the manner in which the Deuteronomistic History reads Israel’s history through an aniconic lens; e.g., the “way” or “sin of Jeroboam” in setting up the image of a bull in Dan and Bethel becomes the archetype of the idolatry of images and a means of interpreting the downfall of Israel (cf. 1 Kings 12:28; 13:34; 15:34; 16:2, 19; 21:22; 22:51–53; 2 Kings 3:3; 13:2, 6, 11; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28; 17:5–23, esp. v. 7 [“This happened because ...”] and vv. 21–23, with direct reference to Jeroboam). The “sin of Jeroboam” is undone through Josiah’s Deuteronomic Reform which restores the Law (cf. 2 Kings 23:15).

⁴⁰ Wagner, *Gottes Körper*, 167. On the contrary, Lux, following Andreas Schüle’s proposal to read the Primeval History as the “prologue” to the Torah, draws the opposite conclusion and reads the *imago dei* texts as the “summary” (*Fazit*) of the Priestly Document’s view of the relation between God, humankind, and the world (“Das Bild Gottes,” 144).

Deuteronom(ist)ic theology.⁴¹ It is therefore all the more striking that the authors of P chose to describe the human being as God's image.

In P's account of the creation, God says on the sixth day, "Let us make humankind as our image, akin to our likeness" (Gen 1:26a: נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ (בְּדְמוּתֵנוּ)).⁴² The thought is reiterated in v. 27: "So God created humankind as his image (בְּצַלְמוֹ), as the image of God (אֱלֹהִים) he created them; male and female he created them." The absence of "likeness" (דְּמוּת) from v. 27 might suggest that the qualification "akin to our likeness" (בְּדְמוּתֵנוּ) in v. 26 is a later exegetical interpolation;⁴³ as the text stands, however, one might consider the pairing in v. 26 as a merism that expresses the totality of what it means to be human.⁴⁴ A further problem for the interpretation of the relation between צֶלֶם and דְּמוּת is the circumstance that they and their governing prepositions are interchanged in Gen 5:1, 3.⁴⁵ Further, only צֶלֶם occurs in Gen 9:6. Lastly, צֶלֶם does not occur in any of the texts that prohibit images or conduct polemics against them.⁴⁶ The exception to this rule concerns a small handful of occurrences of צֶלֶם in the (pejorative) sense of פִּסְלֵל in the Deuteronom(ist)ic History (Num 33:52; 1 Sam 6:5, 11; 2 Kings 11:18). The exilic/post-exilic dating of the various layers of composition and redaction make it difficult to say with certainty, but it is possible that this use of צֶלֶם is an indication of a reaction of later Deuteronom(ist)ic theologians against P's theology.⁴⁷

The term צֶלֶם signifies a statue or figurine. No corresponding verb צַלַּם occurs in the Hebrew Bible, but a conjecture for צַלַּם supposes the meaning "to provide with sculpture" based on cognates from Jewish Aramaic and Syriac and Arabic.⁴⁸ Based on the cognate substantives in Jewish Aramaic, Imperial

⁴¹ Gertz, "Tora und Vordere Propheten," 244.

⁴² On reading the כָּ in נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ as a *beth essentiae* instead of a *beth normae*, see Bernd Janowski, "Die lebendige Statue Gottes: Zur Anthropologie der priesterlichen Urgeschichte," in *Gott und Mensch im Dialog: Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 80. Geburtstag*, BZAW 345, 2 vols., ed. Markus Witte (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), 1:183–214, 189; thus also Feldmeier and Spieckermann, *Der Gott der Lebendigen*, 265. Wagner (*Gottes Körper*, 169, 175) and Janowski, "Die lebendige Statue Gottes," 194–95, read כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ as "something like our likeness."

⁴³ Feldmeier and Spieckermann, *Der Gott der Lebendigen*, 265, n. 12.

⁴⁴ Wagner, *Gottes Körper*, 176–7.

⁴⁵ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 123, supposes that "most of [Gen] 5:1–6:8 derives from an earlier source, the *Toledot* book."

⁴⁶ Lux, "Das Bild Gottes," 149, and Hartenstein and Moxter, *Hermeneutik des Bilderverbots*, 174, have taken this to mean that the authors of P were cautious not to use terminology which might issue a direct challenge to Deuteronom(ist)ic theology. This is a tantalizing possibility, but one which in the end cannot be proven.

⁴⁷ On the various layers of the Deuteronom(ist)ic History and the dating of the overall work, cf. Gertz, "Tora und Vordere Propheten," 286, 289.

⁴⁸ *HALOT*, s.v. I. צַלַּם. The Arabic *ṣalama*, "to chop off, hew," is also supplied as a conjecture, but it seems questionable that this is intended by the hypothetical Hebrew root צַלַּם.

Aramaic, Ugaritic, and Akkadian, which mean “statue,” “figurine,” or “effigy,” it seems that in contrast to פְּסֻל, the term זָלֶצֶל concerns the *product* rather than the *material process* behind it. The primary association called to mind by זָלֶצֶל, therefore, would likely be the representative character of the זָלֶצֶל rather than its genesis; that is, it is a stand-in for a deity or ruler in the presence of others. The term דְּמוּת signifies a “likeness” or “shape” and, when applied to statues, conveys the correspondence of form.⁴⁹ The only other instance of a pairing of the terms זָלֶצֶל and דְּמוּת outside of the biblical traditions derives from a dedicatory text on an Assyrian statue dating to the ninth century B.C. that was discovered at Tell Fekheriye (modern-day Ras al-Ayn, Syria) in 1979.⁵⁰ Christoph Dohmen has argued that the impact of the Tell Fekheriye statue for the exegesis of Gen 1:26 is that as a זָלֶצֶל, the human being is created to represent God in a given sphere, and its creation as God’s דְּמוּת ensures the possession of capabilities necessary for such a task.⁵¹ In a similar vein, Andreas Wagner has argued that this similarity consists in the ability of the human to communicate and act,⁵² interpreting the notion of “form” (*Gestalt*) conveyed by דְּמוּת to be concerned with an outward shape only insofar as this shape enables particular functions, such as the hands, eyes, and mouth that enable one to move within and act upon the world. Applied to Gen 1:26, one may conclude with Bernd Janowski that the *imago dei* is the “living statue of God” in creation, God’s “deputy” (*Stellvertreter*) or “mandatary” (*Mandatar*).⁵³

On this reading, the *dominum terrae/animalium* in Gen 1:28–30 would be the specific commission for which God’s image is set apart; in other words, that for which the image is equipped. This commission, along with the common designation of the pharaoh/king as the image of God in Egypt⁵⁴ and other

The *process* of cutting or hewing would be conveyed clearly enough by Hebr. פָּסַל, and precisely this meaning is found in its Semitic cognates (*HALOT*, s.v. פָּסַל). The second conjecture for צֶלֶם, “to become dark,” based on the root טָלַם, “to press” (Jewish Aramaic, Samaritan Pentateuch, Syriac) and the Ugaritic substantive *złmt* (*HALOT*, s.v. II. צֶלֶם), would not make sense in the context of Gen 1.

⁴⁹ Wagner, *Gottes Körper*, 175.

⁵⁰ Alan Ralph Millard and Pierre Bordreuil, “A Statue from Syria with Assyrian and Aramaic Inscriptions,” *BA* 45, no. 3 (1982): 135–41, 135–36, 138, 140.

⁵¹ Christoph Dohmen, “Die Statue von Tell Fekheriye und die Gottebenbildlichkeit des Menschen: Ein Beitrag zur Bildterminologie,” chap. 3 in Dohmen, *Studien zu Bilderverbot und Bildtheologie des Alten Testaments*, SBAB 51 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2021), 20–32, 27.

⁵² Wagner, *Gottes Körper*, 179.

⁵³ Thus the title of Bernd Janowski’s widely cited essay, “Die lebendige Statue Gottes: Zur Anthropologie der priesterlichen Urgeschichte” (see above, n. 42). Others who take a similar approach are Wagner, *Gottes Körper*, 178; Lux, “Das Bild Gottes,” 154; Hartenstein and Moxter, *Hermeneutik des Bilderverbots*, 176.

⁵⁴ Jan Assmann, *Die Mosaische Unterscheidung oder der Preis des Monotheismus* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 2003), 97.

empires of the Ancient Near East,⁵⁵ has led to a broad consensus that royal ideologies of the Ancient Near East might be the background for the characterization of the human as the *imago dei* in Gen 1:26–27 and might have been spurred on by the loss of the Judean monarchy.⁵⁶ Both prerogatives of the king – representing the gods and exercising dominion over land and beasts – are now applied to the human being, indeed both to males and females.⁵⁷ Bernd Janowski drives the point home by pointing out that we are not dealing here with a *democratization* of the king – one might think of what in modern parlance is a ‘constitutional monarchy’ – but rather the *universalization* of the commission to rule and thus a “royalization” (*Royalisierung*) of the human being *per se*.⁵⁸

Concerning the final texts, a summary may suffice. Gen 5 conveys that the human being *qua* God’s image and likeness can be passed from generation to generation. When one reads this together with the postdiluvian reaffirmation of the human *qua* image in Gen 9:6, one may conclude that from the perspective of P, the status as “image” and the blessing of God’s commission (cf. Gen 1:28) continue to characterize the human race and is not fundamentally revoked despite YHWH’s realization that “every inclination of the thoughts of their [sc. humans’] hearts was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5b). This is all the more remarkable when one considers how, according to the completed book of Genesis, one original determination of creation *did* change after the flood. In Gen 1:29–30, vegetation is designated as nourishment for human and beasts; that is, humans have dominion over the animals of the earth, but they are not to eat them. In Gen 9:1–3, YHWH sanctions the human consumption of animals. The intrinsic value of the human being, however, remains intact: God states that a reckoning will be demanded of every animal and human who spills human blood, “for as *God’s image* did he make humankind” (Gen 9:6b, כִּי בְּצַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים, אֱדַמְתָּ אֶת-תְּוֵבַת הַדָּם). While the blessing of the Noahic covenant does not ensure a total return to the state of affairs described in Gen 1, it does maintain the basic theological anthropology of Gen 1: אֱדַמְתָּ, the human *qua* human has been placed on the earth as God’s representative and for this reason, each human

⁵⁵ Janowski, “Die lebendige Statue Gottes,” 190, 193.

⁵⁶ Janowski, “Die lebendige Statue Gottes,” 193; Lux, “Das Bild Gottes,” 149; Konrad Schmid and Jens Schröter, *Die Entstehung der Bibel: Von den ersten Texten zu den heiligen Schriften* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2019), 180; Gertz, “Tora und Vordere Propheten,” 247; but cf. Spieckermann’s contention that the passage does *not* evoke royal associations (Feldmeier and Spieckermann, *Der Gott der Lebendigen*, 265, n. 10).

⁵⁷ Wagner points out that P’s designation of male *and* female as the image of God is remarkable when one considers that P is otherwise strictly patrilineal in its genealogies and is generally androcentric (Wagner, *Gottes Körper*, 173).

⁵⁸ Janowski, “Die lebendige Statue Gottes,” 193; for a discussion of other interpretive possibilities for the pairing of אֱדַמְתָּ and דָּמַיתָ in Gen 1:26, see Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29–32.

being bears the same irrevocable dignity and the penalty for violating this dignity through the shedding of blood is the same for each human, regardless of biological and social distinctions.⁵⁹ When one considers that royal ideology is the possible background of the *imago dei* notion of P, an additional contour comes into focus: because the king was considered the son or image of God and also as God's lawgiver⁶⁰ through whom the gods established justice, the king was the nexus between the divine and human realm who helped to ensure cosmic stability. Kill the king, upset the cosmic order. Other members of the body politic could be dispensable, but not this one. This same urgent indispensability is applied to the human being in Gen 9:6 and any violation is said to exact the highest price.

Summary

The human as the *imago dei* is God's "living statue" in creation, God's deputy (*Stellvertreter*) in creation outfitted with the capabilities necessary to act within the world and thus enabled to carry out the commission of the *dominum terrae*. A notion that had previously been applied only to kings is now applied to all human beings. Further, creation as the image of God grounds the irrevocable dignity of the human being and sets each human being on an equal footing vis-à-vis its fellow humans.

III. Are They Connected?

Two final remarks are called for before proceeding to the next blocks of material. To begin with, it is noteworthy that the aniconic and iconic aspects of the image discourse of the Hebrew Bible do not refer to each other at all in order to justify or elaborate themselves. What Christoph Uehlinger concludes about the image prohibition might also be applied to the texts from Hosea, Deuteronomy, and Deutero-Isaiah that are critical of images: "Eine Verbindung zwischen B[ilderverbot] und Gottebenbildlichkeit des Menschen (Gen 1,26–28) zieht die HB [sc. Hebräische Bibel] nicht."⁶¹ The origin of the historical core of the image prohibition (Deut 5:8a) might be explained by an antecedent aniconic tendency in Yahwistic religion and/or as a corollary of the prohibition of serving foreign gods,⁶² but it is not grounded by any reference to the notion

⁵⁹ One might say that this represents a similar kind of democratization as that behind the *lex talionis*: while this law of retribution might strike modern readers as a cynical approval of vindictive justice, it can be read more easily as a law that sought to hinder persons of privilege and power from escaping punishment through their economic and political means.

⁶⁰ Cf. Schmid and Schröter, *Die Entstehung der Bibel*, 130–31; Assmann, *Die Mosaische Unterscheidung*, 97.

⁶¹ Uehlinger, "Bilderverbot," 1575.

⁶² Cf. Hartenstein and Moxter, *Hermeneutik des Bilderverbots*, 95, on the prohibition's dependence upon the first commandment.

that there might exist an image of God sanctioned by God. As for the development of P's *imago dei* concept, there is no indication that it developed on the basis of theological reflection upon the aniconic aspect of an earlier image discourse; this is all the more striking when one considers that P otherwise seems to be aware of certain aspects of Deuteronom(ist)ic theology and to have received them positively. As it is presented in the texts available to us, the status of the human as the rightful *imago dei* in P is simply grounded by divine fiat. It seems, then, that neither in the origin of the basic stock of the aniconic and iconic aspects nor in the later redaction of the texts in which we find them was a connection between the two ever drawn.⁶³ This means that any attempt to view the two aspects together is secondary both to the historical origins of the traditions behind the texts and also to the texts themselves.

Secondly, one must wonder why the *imago dei* concept of P does not play a larger role in the Hebrew Bible and in ancient perceptions of Jews. Scholars differ on the relative importance of the *imago dei* of P for the whole of the Hebrew Bible,⁶⁴ and compared to Jewish aniconic worship, it seems that pagan authors were either not aware of or not concerned with a specifically Jewish notion of the *imago dei*.⁶⁵ There are a few possible explanations for this: (1) the *imago dei* notion of P never gained widespread approval in the first place; (2) it fell somehow into disrepute, perhaps as a result of the Deuteronom(ist)ic History's pejorative use of the term *תְּצַו*, which could have made Gen 1:26–27 problematic; (3) the notion was so widespread that no further comment seemed necessary; (4) due to notions of an affinity between divinity and humanity – however conceived – in the cultural environs of the Second Temple period in the Palestinian homeland and in the Diaspora, there was no need to comment on the *imago dei* tradition in any effort of Second Temple Judaism to distinguish itself from its cultural surroundings. It seems impossible to provide an answer to this question on the basis of the texts discussed so far. If it is possible

⁶³ But cf. Lux, "Das Bild Gottes," who argues that Deut 4:16–18 *does* offer a later justification of the image prohibition on the basis of P's creation account. It is possible that Lux is correct, but two critical reservations speak against his argument: (1) Why is the connection not drawn explicitly in Deut 4:12, 15, where Yahwistic aniconism is provided a justification? It seems that the point of 4:16–18 is not the positive affirmation that the *human* is the rightful image of God, but rather that the use of any earthly form in Yahwistic worship would contradict the narrated history of YHWH with Israel. (2) Lux states directly that his article concerns a later phase of Deuteronom(ist)ic redaction rather than the historical core of the image prohibition (*ibid.*, 140). If this is the case, then Lux implicitly admits that P cannot have influenced the origin of the image prohibition in Deut 5:8a.

⁶⁴ See above, n. 40.

⁶⁵ As far as an awareness of Jewish aniconism is concerned, one such pagan example can be found in Frgs. 15–16 of Varro's *Antiquitates rerum divinarum* (ed. Cardauns), where Varro refers approvingly to Jewish aniconism.

to give an answer at all, then it will have to arise through the consideration of later texts.

Excursus: The Septuagint's Translation of the Previously Discussed Texts

Translation of the Septuagint began in the third century B.C. and therefore at a time when the Deuteronom(ist)ic redaction of the Torah and the historical books had been completed. Regardless of the motivation behind the respective uses of לְצַפֵּי and מְצַפֵּי in the texts just discussed and the potential reaction of later Deuteronom(ist)ic editors against P, the fact of the matter is that εἰκών is used in the Septuagint to translate both לְצַפֵּי (Isa 40:19, 20)⁶⁶ and מְצַפֵּי (Gen 1:26, 27). Any intended original distinction between לְצַפֵּי and מְצַפֵּי would therefore not have been maintained in each of the texts we have just discussed. This might help to explain how the Wisdom of Solomon (see below) could use εἰκών both in its critique of images (e.g., Wis 13:13, 16) and in the references to the human as the “image of God’s eternity” and Wisdom as the “image of God’s goodness” (2:23, 7:26, respectively) and why an author like Paul could use εἰκών to refer both to cultic images (Rom 1:23) and to Jesus Christ as the image of God (2 Cor 4:4).

Lastly, the LXX translates מְצַפֵּי/בְצַפֵּי of Gen 1:26, 27, with κατ’ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν/κατ’ εἰκόνα θεοῦ, respectively. The human being is therefore not created *as* the image of God, but rather “according to” the image of God. As we shall see in the case of Philo of Alexandria, this subtle change could lead to quite different interpretations of the *imago dei* concept.

IV. Qumran

The Dead Sea Scrolls present us with testimony from the multifaceted world of Palestinian Judaism in the Hellenistic and early Roman imperial eras, being part of the “Palestinian-Jewish matrix” that was home to much of the New Testament tradition.⁶⁷ Because large swaths of the material are fragmentary, the scope of conclusions drawn on such a basis must be limited. Nevertheless, even tentative conclusions can be helpful. For our purposes, the question of the presence of concepts such as “image” and “likeness” as well as the question of the commensurability of such concepts with the corresponding conceptions found in the writings that later entered the canon of the Hebrew Bible are most important. To that end, we begin with a basic lexical analysis.

A search for the following terms was conducted: the Hebrew מְצַפֵּי and תְּמוּנָה, Aramaic מְצַפֵּי and תְּמוּנָה, and the Greek terms εἰκών, ἄγαλμα, βρέτας, εἶδος, εἶδωλον, μίμημα, and ξόανον.⁶⁸ Of these, מְצַפֵּי occurs five times, תְּמוּנָה occurs fourteen times, מְצַפֵּי six times, תְּמוּנָה occurs four times, and εἶδωλον twice. As for the texts later included in the Hebrew Bible, all these occurrences concern

⁶⁶ Other terms used to translate לְצַפֵּי include γλοπτόν and εἶδωλον (e.g., Deut 12:3, 5:8a, respectively).

⁶⁷ Jörg Frey, “Critical Issues in the Investigation of the Scrolls and the New Testament,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, eds. Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), 517–45, 528.

⁶⁸ The basis for the search was Martin G. Abegg et al., eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Concordance*, 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

crafted or pictorial images, whether cultic or profane.⁶⁹ No extant text preserves any reference to the creation of the human being as the image of God (i.e., Gen 1:26–27; 5:1; 9:6).

The situation is slightly different as regards the Qumran texts that did not find their way into the canon of the Hebrew Bible: here, barring one exception, the terms in view always signify a “likeness” in the sense of an optic similitude or some kind of cultic image.⁷⁰ The one exception occurs in the *Words of the Luminaries* (4Q504 8[recto] I,4), a pre-Qumran document used by the Yahad,⁷¹ where the writer speaks to God: “You fashioned [Adam], our [fa]ther, in the likeness (דְּמוּת) of your glory.”⁷² Three things are noteworthy here. First, that Adam is not created as the “likeness of God,” as Gen 5:1 has it (בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים (יְהוָה) אֶת אָדָם בְּדְמוּת אֱלֹהִים עֲשָׂה אֹתוֹ (כְּצַדִּיק)), but rather the “likeness of [God’s] glory” (כְּצַדִּיק), which might be a euphemism for God or might reflect a sensibility which sought to emphasize the difference between God and humankind; the latter possibility seems more likely.⁷³ Second, although the text is too fragmentary

⁶⁹ The Hebrew דְּמוּת occurs in: 4Q72–73, 2, a quotation of Num 33:52; 4Q51 VIa–b, 14, a quotation of 1 Sam 6:5; 4Q73 3i, 1, a quotation of Ezek 23:14. Hebrew דְּמוּת occurs: in three instances as a quotation of Isa 13:4 (1QIsa^a XI,14; 4Q55 8,5; 4Q56 7,1), and once each in a quotation of Isa 40:18 (1QIsa^a XXXIII,18), Ezek 1:13, 22 (4Q74 1–4, 9 and 6ii, 4), and Dan 10:16 (4Q114 II,5). Aramaic דְּמוּת occurs four times in 4Q112, referring each time to the “statue” in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan 2:31–32, 35). The Greek εἰδωλον occurs once in both Mic 1:7 and Hab 2:18, referring in each instance to cultic images.

⁷⁰ The Hebrew דְּמוּת occurs: in the *Damascus Document* (CD VII,15,17) as a quotation of Amos 5:26; in PAM 43.677 13,2, which is too fragmentary to offer any intelligible reading. Two further conjectural occurrences (4QD^a 3iii,18 and 4QD^d 5,1) are likely quotations of Amos 5:26. Of the nine occurrences of Hebrew דְּמוּת, eight of them are found in the *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice* (4Q405 14–15i,2 [bis], 5, 7; 4Q405 20ii–22,10; 4Q405 23ii,9; 11Q17, IV,7; 11Q17 37,2); the final occurrence is the exception mentioned above. Of the two occurrences of Aramaic דְּמוּת, one is too fragmentary to make sense of (4Q243 31,2) and the second instance, in the *Genesis Apocryphon*, refers to the lovely “appearance” of Sarai’s face (1Q20 XX,2). The Aramaic דְּמוּת occurs in: 4Q209 26,4, 5 (1 Enoch 79:5 and 78:17, respectively); 4Q531 13,5 (too fragmentary; cf. Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *The Book of Giants: Texts, Translation, and Commentary*, TSAJ 63 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997], 154); 11Q18 14ii,14.

⁷¹ Esther Chazon, “Words of the Luminaries,” *The Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* 2:989–90, 989, estimates that the document was not only used, but “cherished” by the community. In conversation with Chazon’s work, Daniel K. Falk concedes that the presence of “two copies [...] spanning roughly two centuries” suggests that the document was used by the Yahad, but asserts that this is only “probable” and that nothing can be known for certain about the extent of the document’s use by that community (*Daily, Sabbath, and Festival Prayers in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, STDJ 27 [Leiden: Brill, 1998], 87–88).

⁷² Trans. DSSEL, rev. T.R. Niles.

⁷³ The late Friedrich Avemarie suggested that although this use of “glory” does “see[m] to step back from Gen 1:26,” he pointed out that “the insertion of ‘glory’ serves to indicate what is thought to be the informing principle of Adam’s *imago dei*” and that, in his estimation, the author conceived of Adam as “participating” in God’s glory (“Image of God and

to make a final decision one way or the other, it is likely that this characteristic is ascribed only to Adam rather than to all his descendants.⁷⁴ The last item of note is that in the following line (4Q504 8[recto] I,5), we read that God subsequently breathed the breath of life into Adam and gave him “understanding and knowledge” (we find a similar connection between creation and the bestowal of knowledge in the *Meditation on Creation* [4Q305 ii,2: “He gave to man knowledge”). It is possible that “understanding and knowledge” is associated here not only with the concept of the breath of life, but also with Adam’s creation in the likeness of God’s glory; because the text is fragmentary, however, it is not possible to say whether the knowledge bestowed on Adam in the *Words of the Luminaries* is an attendant circumstance of his creation “in the likeness of [God’s] glory” or because of the divine inbreathing of life.

Noteworthy for our purposes, too, is the lack of any reference to an “image of God” in those sources where we might expect to find such a reference, such as 1Q20 (*Genesis Apocryphon*), 4Q252–254^a (*Commentary on Genesis*), 4Q180–181 (*Ages of Creation*), and 4Q303–305 (*Meditation on Creation*). This is particularly striking in the creation account of the *Book of Jubilees*. Dating perhaps to 160–150 B.C.,⁷⁵ the document predates the Qumran community itself, but was nevertheless accepted by the Qumran community as an authoritative text.⁷⁶ The text is highly fragmentary, but if we may presume that the text was largely commensurate with that of the Ethiopic *Jubilees* – a decision favored by the editors of the DSSEL – then we may conclude that the

Image of Christ: Developments in Pauline and Ancient Jewish Anthropology,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Pauline Literature*, STDJ 102, ed. Jean-Sébastien Rey [Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014], 209–35, 221). Yet the idea that the phrase “likeness (Ar.: *ḥm*) of your glory” may be read in a straightforward manner as “image (Ar.: *ḥm*) of God,” which Esther Chazon also seems tacitly to endorse (“The Creation and Fall of Adam in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation*, TEG 5, eds. Judith Frishman and Lucas Van Rompay [Leuven: Peeters, 1997], 13–24, 15), goes too far in this author’s opinion.

⁷⁴ Thus Avemarie, “Image of God and Image of Christ,” 221, esp. n. 52. It is possible that this is also the position of the *Apocalypse of Moses* (cf. Jan Dochhorn, *Die Apokalypse des Mose: Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar*, TSAJ 106 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005], 265). Avemarie argued on the basis of other Qumran documents that later humans *can* participate in Adam’s glory, but that this is restricted to the elect [i.e., Qumran] community (Avemarie, “Image of God and Image of Christ,” 222–23).

⁷⁵ Cf. James C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 17–21, for his proposal of this date.

⁷⁶ VanderKam, *ibid.*, 21; cf. Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, *Qumran, Jüdische Studien 3* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 219, who points out: (1) the frags. of at least 14 scrolls of *Jubilees* found at Qumran outnumber the remains of scrolls of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers or Jeremiah; (2) *Jubilees* is cited as an authoritative writing by the *Damascus Document*; (3) the existence of *Ps.-Jubilees* attests to the perceived authority of the original. Ben Ezra subsequently concludes: “Man kann den Stellenwert des *Jubiläenbuchs* für [die Qumrange-meinde] kaum überschätzen” (*ibid.*).

Jubilees of the Qumran community lacks any reference to a divine “image,” stating instead: “[God] made mankind – male and fem[ale he made them. He made them rule over everything on earth] [...]” (4Q206 VII,2). It seems that the author of *Jubilees* was more concerned with the dominion of Adam rather than any qualification of Adam as God’s image⁷⁷ – perhaps even avoiding the latter intentionally. One could object to this by arguing that the *dominum terrae* of Gen 1:28–29 is inconceivable without the human’s creation as the *imago dei* in Gen 1:26–27 and that *Jubilees* thus presents Gen 1:26–27 in a kind of ‘shorthand’, thereby affirming the theological anthropology of Gen 1 implicitly rather than explicitly. Yet the fact that the “image” concept of Gen 1 is not completely lacking in *Jubilees* – Jub 6:8 does reproduce Gen 9:6 – simply makes it all the more curious that *Jubilees*’ succinct retelling of Gen 1:26–28 does not include any reference to an “image.” Further, the lack of Gen 5:1, 3 in *Jubilees* (cf. Jub 4) means that two of the four relevant Genesis passages concerning an “image of God” are not present in *Jubilees*, which makes the prospects of identifying such a ‘shorthand’ in 4Q206 VII,2 (Gen 1:26ff.) rather insubstantial. What conclusion can we draw, with the necessary caution, from *Jubilees*’ divergence from the Hebrew text of Genesis?

Even though it seems reasonable to characterize *Jubilees* as “rewritten scripture,”⁷⁸ we would do well to remain circumspect regarding the author’s specific motives, for we cannot determine conclusively whether the author of a rewritten text intended to replace a biblical text or simply supplement it. Nevertheless, as Molly M. Zahn points out:

“[I]n functional terms, rewritten texts often present an alternative version of events or laws that the author must in some way have regarded as the ‘true meaning’ or proper interpretation of the scriptural text – otherwise the alteration of the text lacks motivation. Insofar as the ‘true meaning’ lies not in the original text but in the text as rewritten, the rewritten text may be said to ‘replace’ the older text.”⁷⁹

If Zahn is correct – and I think she is – then we may conclude that the author of *Jubilees* did not find the statement regarding an “image of God” in Gen 1:26–27 sufficiently important enough to warrant further transmission. Again, reasons other than a principled theological decision to omit such a reference are conceivable, such as a different political situation: composed in the Maccabean period when the legitimacy of the religion of Judea was under attack, the author might well have been more concerned with composing a work that grounded the importance of the Torah (especially sabbath observance) and the

⁷⁷ Gary A. Anderson, “Adam,” *The Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* 1:7–9, 8.

⁷⁸ Stökl Ben Ezra, *Qumran*, 218–19. But cf. Molly M. Zahn, who discusses the terminological and methodological problems connected with such a characterization and suggests viewing “rewritten scripture” as a process rather than a textual category (“Rewritten Scripture,” in Lim and Collins, *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 323–36, 326).

⁷⁹ Zahn, “Rewritten Scripture,” 331.

people of Israel in the act of creation itself rather than in the theophany on Sinai/Horeb, a later event in Israel's history.⁸⁰ As one can see from 4Q216 VII,1–13, *Jubilees* wastes no time moving on from the creation of the first humans to the institution of the sabbath and the election of Israel as a “special people out of all the nations.” Yet once again: even if the omission of any reference to the “image of God” was more of an accident than a principled theological decision, the fact remains that, in terms of function, the author did not make use of it and the text of *Jubilees* in this form was maintained and passed on by the Qumran community and surely influenced its theology.

A similar absence of the term “image” is characteristic also of *Targum Neofiti*, an Aramaic translation and exposition of the Torah that arose in Galilee in the second or third century A.D. In an attempt to explain its affinities with the Cairo Genizah *targum*, scholars have advanced a hypothetical ancestor “Proto-PT” (Proto-Palestinian-Targum),⁸¹ suggesting that the material found here could derive from the first century A.D. In each of the relevant Genesis passages (Gen 1:26–27; 5:1, 3; 9:6), we find “likeness” (דְּמוּן) where we would expect to find “image” (צֶלֶם). In *Tg. Neof.* 1:26, the LORD (יְיָ) gives the commission to make humankind “in our likeness” (בְּדִמּוֹתֵנוּ), which the divine power Memra carries out in 1:27, “in his likeness,” indeed “in a likeness from before the LORD.”⁸² The same phrase, “in a likeness from before the LORD,” occurs in *Tg. Neof.* 9:6 as well. It appears that *Targum Neofiti* avoids connecting God in any way with an “image” (צֶלֶם),⁸³ perhaps because of the association with cultic images.⁸⁴

Summary

“Image” and “likeness” in the sense of a visual similitude or crafted or pictorial image are present in the Dead Sea Scrolls and one of the earliest Palestinian *targumim*, but strictly speaking, “image” (Heb. צֶלֶם/Aram. צֶלֶם) is never applied to the human being in the sense of an *imago dei*, which is rooted perhaps in an aversion to the thought that God could have an image at all, or perhaps

⁸⁰ “The whole creation story [of Jubilees] serves the establishment of the sabbath commandment” (Lutz Doering, “The Concept of the Sabbath in the Book of Jubilees,” in *Studies in the Book of Jubilees*, TSAJ 65, eds. Matthias Albani, Jörg Frey, and Armin Lange [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997], 179–205, 180).

⁸¹ Paul V.M. Flesher, “Privileged Translations of Scripture,” *The Encyclopedia of Judaism*, 4:2414–26, 2420.

⁸² וברא ממרה דיי ית בר נשא בדמותיה בדמו מן קדמי ייי ברה יתיה (ed. Macho).

⁸³ Cf. Martin McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis*, The Aramaic Bible 1A (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 55, n. 15.

⁸⁴ It seems that this practice was either not followed or perhaps even reversed in the development of *Targum Onqelos*, whose use of דְּמוּן and צֶלֶם closely resembles the Hebrew text of Gen 1:26–27 and 9:6. On the possible connection of *Tg. Onq.* to *Tg. Neof.*, cf. Flesher, “Privileged Translations of Scripture,” 2420–21.

because the human is too base to be considered such an image. At best, humankind could be considered a “likeness” of God, but not God’s image. Of course, the fragmentary nature of many of the Dead Sea Scrolls prevents us from saying that such a thought had no place whatsoever among the Yahad. Nevertheless, one may cautiously conclude, on the basis of the evidence we have, that the *topos* of the human as the *imago dei* progressively receded into the background in the Palestinian Judaism of the second century B.C. to the second/third century A.D.⁸⁵ Perhaps we may consider these sources as indicators of a wider trend in the Judaism of the time, one which we find in Philo of Alexandria and Paul of Tarsus as well; namely, refraining from making “image of God” to be a universal human predicate.

V. The Biblical Traditions: Moving Forward

It appears that the idea that the human being is the *imago dei* did not become a defining characteristic of ancient Judean religion in the same way that aniconism had become. From an internal perspective, it seems that following the fifth century B.C., the concept of an *imago dei* as applied to the human was not utilized broadly by Jewish authors who had not been influenced all-too strongly by the Hellenic tradition. If the Dead Sea Scrolls are any indication for why this is the case, then it might be that the notion was not considered crucial enough to warrant further emphasis and transmission.

From an external perspective, it does not seem to have been perceived by pagan writers as a defining characteristic of Judean religion. Various ethnographic accounts mention aniconism or aniconic monotheism, but never mention the notion that the human might be considered the *imago dei*.⁸⁶ Perhaps

⁸⁵ In addition, the distance of the Yahad from Hellenistically influenced discourses concerning an εἰκών is all the more notable when one considers that the Yahad were not hermetically sealed off from Hellenistic influences: the origin of the commentary genre *peshet*, as evinced in the Qumran *pesharim*, cannot be explained without such an influence (cf. Reinhard Gregor Kratz, “Die Pescharim von Qumran im Rahmen der Schriftauslegung des antiken Judentums,” in *Heilige Texte: Religion und Rationalität*, eds. Andreas Kablitz and Christoph Marksches [Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2013], 87–104, 101–2).

⁸⁶ For the following ethnographic reports, see René S. Bloch, *Antike Vorstellungen vom Judentum: Der Judenkurs des Tacitus im Rahmen der griechisch-römischen Ethnographie*, Historia Einzelschriften 160 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2002). Hecataeus of Abdera, *apud* Diodorus Siculus 40.3.1–8: aniconism mentioned in 40.3.4; Posidonius, *apud* Diodorus Siculus 34/35.1.1–5: no mention of aniconism, but a mention of a supposed image of Moses in the temple in §3–4; idem, *apud* Strabo 16.2.34–46: aniconism mentioned in 16.2.35; Pompeius Trogus, *apud* Marcus Junianus Justinus, *Epitome hist. Philippicarum* 36.2.1–3, 9: no mentions of either topic; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.2–13: mention of aniconic monotheism in 5.5 and the absence of a cultic image in the temple in 5.9. Tacitus does claim that Jews believe in the immortality of the souls of fallen soldiers and executed persons, but this is a far cry from the notion that the human *as human* is the *imago dei*. Varro, in his *Antiquitates rerum*

this is because the notion of some relation of affinity between divinity and humanity, however conceived, was not unknown in the pagan religion and philosophy of the Hellenistic and early Roman imperial eras and for this reason could not become a strong point of friction between Jews and Gentiles in the way that the issue of cultic images was bound to be. It could also depend on hostile views of Jewish life, belief, and practice: if a people group is considered “misanthropic,” “godless,” and “hated by the gods,”⁸⁷ then it is unlikely that there would be any willing recognition of the presence of an *imago dei* concept as applied to the human.

As we shall see, the application of the *imago dei* concept to the human is different when compared with the religious-philosophical literature of the early Roman imperial era written by Jewish authors who had been more strongly influenced by the Greek philosophical tradition. The Wisdom of Solomon, the writings of Philo of Alexandria, and those of the Apostle Paul use the term εἰκόν in a way that incorporates elements not found in the biblical traditions that we have just discussed. One of those elements, for example, is the idea that an εἰκόν bears some epistemic relevance in conveying something about its model. To be sure, the impulse of Hosea that cultic images could not be gods because they can be destroyed does convey a message about the living God of Israel. It is not the image itself, however, which teaches Hosea that the God of Israel is alive and incapable of destruction; this is an insight he already has and through which he can recognize a cultic image as something other than a divine entity. The image itself, therefore, has no positive epistemic value.

B. Plato of Athens

Plato of Athens (428/427–347 B.C.),⁸⁸ the founder of the Academy (388/387B.C.–ca. 79 B.C.),⁸⁹ does not require much introduction. His work and thought – and that of the Academy⁹⁰ – has influenced Western culture in a

divinarum, frags. 15–16 (ed. Cardauns), mentions Jewish aniconism but not the idea that the human is the *imago dei*.

⁸⁷ Cf. Hecataeus of Abdera, *apud* Diodorus Siculus 40.3.4; Posidonius, *apud* Diodorus Siculus 34/35.1–4; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.3–5.

⁸⁸ Thomas A. Szlezák, *Platon: Meisterdenker der Antike* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2021), 38, 90. Debra Nails proposes the dating 424/423–347 B.C. (“The Life of Plato of Athens,” in *A Companion to Plato*, 2nd ed., ed. Hugh H. Benson [Malden: Blackwell, 2008], 1–12, 1).

⁸⁹ Szlezák, *Platon*, 62. Nails, “The Life of Plato of Athens,” 6–7, notes that one could characterize the Academy as the “progenitor” of the modern university.

⁹⁰ Nails, “The Life of Plato of Athens,” 11, points out that the literary production of the Academy – including a number of Plato’s writings – was likely similar to other ancient schools and thus the result of “collaborative writing projects,” even if this was restricted in most instances to editing and stylistic polishing.

recognizable and lasting way.⁹¹ Yet why should he play a role in *this* study? The following reasons speak in favor of his inclusion:

1. There is arguably no other ancient philosopher who offered more reflection of the nature of images. These reflections are scattered across his corpus and concern the philosophy of language, poetry, the visual arts, rhetoric, cosmology, and theology.

2. As described in the introduction (see above), the study of his writings assumed new importance in the early Roman imperial period. This does not mean that the Platonizing authors of this era merely offer us ‘Plato reloaded’; on the contrary, other influences were operative which ensured that the ‘Platonism’ of the early empire is not simply the ‘Platonism’ of fourth century Athens. Nevertheless, one should be aware of the possibilities of Plato’s influence on later figures. In the context of this study, this means that an awareness of Plato’s image discourse is critical for estimating the image discourse of the early imperial era.

3. The writings of the New Testament were composed in cultural environs influenced to some extent by these developments and there is therefore no reason to suspect that the New Testament authors were hermetically sealed off from the developments of philosophy during the early imperial era and thus, indirectly, from the Platonic tradition. The importance of a consideration of Plato’s image discourse for the study of the “image of the invisible God” in Colossians in its historical context is therefore plain to see.⁹²

To convey the notion of an “image” of “likeness,” Plato uses terms such as *ἀγαλμα*, *εἶδωλον*, *εἰκὼν*, *μίμημα*, *ὁμοίότης*, *ὁμοίωμα*, and *φάντασμα*, and they

⁹¹ Thomas A. Szlezák, “Platon [1],” *DNP* 9:1095–1109, 1107, explains Whitehead’s famous dictum that all European philosophy is a “series of footnotes to Plato” as an indication of the difficulty of capturing the extent of Plato’s influence: “Sein Einfluß ist in allen späteren philos[ophischen] Ansätzen zu spüren und reicht zugleich weit über die Philos[ophie] hinaus in das polit[ische] und rel[igiöse] Denken, in die Theologie, in die utopische Lit[eratur] und zahllose weitere Bereiche. Kein anderer einzelner Denker hat die europäische Identität so nachhaltig geprägt wie P[laton].” David Ebrey and Richard Kraut go so far as to call him the “head” of the Western philosophical tradition and the inventor of philosophy as a distinct discipline (“Introduction to the Study of Plato,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, 2nd ed., eds. David Ebrey and Richard Kraut [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992], 1–39, 1).

⁹² A similar conclusion is drawn by Christoph Poetsch at the end of his study of Plato’s image-philosophy concerning its significance for the development of early Christian thought: “Die berühmte neutestamentliche Aussage beispielsweise, dass Christus εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου (Col 1,15) sei, erhält wohl erst vor dem Hintergrund des platonischen Bildbegriffs ihr volles systematisches Gewicht” (*Platons Philosophie des Bildes: Systematische Untersuchungen zur platonischen Metaphysik* [Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2019], 347). While Poetsch is correct to note the importance of a consideration of Plato for the exegesis of Col 1:15, it is also crucial to point that, as we shall see, the image concept of Col is not simply coextensive with Plato’s concept.

may be positively, neutrally, or negatively connotated.⁹³ In the *Phaedrus*, for example, the term ὁμοιότης is used to point out how orators can mislead an audience by offering a “likeness” of the truth rather than the truth itself (261f–262c).⁹⁴ Later in the same dialogue, the term ὁμοίωμα is used to denote the earthly “likenesses” of the supra-heavenly verities⁹⁵ formerly beheld by the soul in its ascent to the abode of true existence, namely the true likenesses that aid one in recollecting those verities (250d). To take another example, the term εἶδωλον in Socrates’ description of his “midwifery” in the *Theaetetus* is consistently negative, representing a newborn child who ought to be exposed to the elements.⁹⁶ Yet when Socrates compares the mind to a wax block, εἶδωλον is used to denote the “seal” impressed upon the wax (i.e., mind) by sensory perception.⁹⁷ Here, the εἶδωλον is neutral, while the problematic element within the analogy is the quality of the wax, namely the soul.⁹⁸ This versatility should not surprise us, for it was already recognized in antiquity that Plato’s use of terms was varied and ambiguous.⁹⁹

Not only does the varied valuation of the terms denoting an image demonstrate the ambivalence of images for Plato, but his own use of images does as well. For someone who could criticize images, myths, and poetry so harshly, Plato was a philosopher who could wax poetic quite skillfully. Some of the most memorable portions of his writings are images: the primal spherical human in the *Symposium*, the art of dialectic as midwifery and the soul/mind as a wax block in the *Theaetetus*, or the soul as a chariot in the *Phaedrus*. The Cave

⁹³ The occurrences of the relevant substantives in the Corpus Platonicum are as follows: ἄγαλμα (24), εἶδωλον (60), εἰκόν (107), μίμημα (54), ὁμοιότης (69), ὁμοίωμα (7), φάτασμα (31).

⁹⁴ A similar critique is made of sophists when Socrates says that a ὁμοιότης “is the most slippery kind of thing” (*Soph.* 231a: ὀλισθηρότατον γὰρ τὸ γένος), for it may lead one to mistake a sophist for a philosopher.

⁹⁵ Plato refers to the locus of the ideas as ὁ ὑπερουράνιος τόπος (*Phaedr.* 247c) and to the realities themselves as τὰ ἔξω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (*Phaedr.* 247b).

⁹⁶ *Theaet.* 149a ff. On exposure, see 151c.

⁹⁷ *Theaet.* 191d ff.

⁹⁸ Cf. further *Soph.* 235b–236c, where the Elean Stranger delineates the “image-making art” (εἰδωλοποιική τέχνη), which has two subsets: the “likeness-making art” (εἰκαστική τέχνη) and the “fantastic art” (φανταστική τέχνη). The denotation of the genus by εἰδωλοποιικός and the subsequent division into a positive and negative species (εἰκαστικός and φανταστικός, respectively), suggests that εἰδωλοποιικός is neutrally valued.

⁹⁹ Cf. the assertion of Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives* 3.63: “He [sc. Plato] used a variety of terms so that his work might not be understood easily by the unlearned.” He goes on to share that Plato might use the same term with different meanings or might use a multiplicity of terms to refer to the same thing: “Again, he often uses different terms to express the same thing. For instance, he calls the idea form (εἶδος), genus (γένος), model (παράδειγμα), principle (ἀρχή), and cause (αἴτιον). And he also uses opposite expressions for the same thing. At any rate, he calls that which is sensible both existent and non-existent; existent on account of its genesis, non-existent on account of its continuous alteration” (3.64).

of the *Republic*, which is perhaps his most memorable image, resides in a work that extensively criticizes poets and their use of imagery.¹⁰⁰ Not only is the cave referred to as an εἰκόν (Resp. 6.515a), but so too are the analogies of the sun (Resp. 6.509a) and the ship of state (Resp. 6.487e).¹⁰¹ In the latter instance, Socrates even says that his interlocutor's inquiry "necessitates" an answer in the form of a spoken image, which surprises his interlocutor.¹⁰²

That surprise is not unfounded: when one considers the skepticism with which Plato faces phenomenal reality, it is somewhat surprising that he ends the *Timaeus* dialogue by praising the created universe, which is "greatest and best, most fair and most perfect," as "an image of the Intelligible, a perceptible god."¹⁰³

The foregoing point is even more surprising when one realizes that elsewhere, Plato seems to assume that all images are matters of falsehood and deceit. In the *Sophist*, a false word or opinion (λόγος ψευδός ἢ δόξα) can be presented in multiple forms, "whether likenesses or images or imitations or apparitions" (241e), and "if deceit exists, then all things must of necessity be replete with likenesses and images and mere appearance" (260c).¹⁰⁴

Why are images so problematic for Plato? And how does he then turn around and characterize the cosmos so positively as an image? We might begin by asking what an image *is*. For that, we turn to a consideration of four dialogues:

¹⁰⁰ If one abstains from the claim that Plato entangles himself in a performative self-contradiction and instead chooses a more constructive interpretation, we might say that the 'master stroke' of the image of the cave is twofold. First, Plato uses an image to critique those illusory images which prevent us from glimpsing true reality. Secondly, he has Socrates put the allegory to good use didactically: the way he tells the story leads Glaucon through the same process as the man who emerges from the cave (cf. Grace Ledbetter, "The Power of Plato's Cave," in *Plato and the Power of Images*, MNS 405, eds. Pierre Destrée and Radcliffe G. Edmonds III [Leiden: Brill, 2017], 121–37).

¹⁰¹ As Nicholas D. Smith has recently put it, "Plato's *Republic* is a book of images" (*Summation Knowledge in Plato's Republic* [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2019], 10).

¹⁰² Resp. 6.487e: "You are asking," I [sc. Socrates] said 'a question that must be answered through a spoken image (ἑρώτημα δεόμενον ἀποκρίσεως δι' εἰκόνας λεγομένης).' 'You?' he [sc. Adeimantus] said. 'I didn't think you were accustomed to speaking through images (δι' εἰκόνων λέγειν).'"

¹⁰³ *Tim.* 92c, εἰκόν τοῦ νοητοῦ θεοῦ αἰσθητός. It is right that we should not automatically assume that whatever Plato's *dramatis personae* say is exactly what Plato himself thought. Nevertheless, Richard Kraut is correct to point out that we should not abandon that idea altogether, for Plato was an author who sought to reach out to an audience through his literary activity in order to guide them this or that way in their thinking. See the section "Can we know Plato's mind?" in Richard Kraut, "Plato," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, article published March 20, 2004; last modified February 12, 2022; last accessed May 12, 2023: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato/>.

¹⁰⁴ *Soph.* 241e, εἴτε εἰδώλων εἴτε εἰκόνων εἴτε μιμημάτων εἴτε φαντασμάτων, and 260c: Καὶ μὴν ἀπάτης οὐσης εἰδώλων τε καὶ εἰκόνων ἤδη καὶ φαντασίας πάντα ἀνάγκη μεστὰ εἶναι.

the *Cratylus*, the *Theaetetus*, the *Sophist*, and the *Republic*. Along the way, we will see that the term εἰκὼν plays a significant and often positive role in Plato's ruminations on the topic.¹⁰⁵

I. What is an Image?

An image or likeness is the product of any mimetic art (μιμητική τέχνη) wherein a thing “has been made to resemble the true” object,¹⁰⁶ and is therefore something which “is other, yet similar.”¹⁰⁷ This applies not only to the handiwork of artisans, but also to the spoken and written word and to mental conceptions as well.¹⁰⁸ To drive the point home, Socrates asks the titular character of the *Cratylus* dialogue:

Would there then be two things, such as Cratylus and the image of Cratylus, if one of the gods not only copied your color and form as painters do, but also made all the inner parts just like yours, with the same softness and warmth, and placed into them movement and a soul and thought just like that which is within you and, in a word, placed next to you everything just as you have it, albeit an alternate? Would there then be Cratylus and the image of Cratylus, or two Cratyluses?
(*Crat.* 432b–c)

ἄρ' ἂν δύο πράγματα εἴη τοιάδε, οἷον Κρατύλος καὶ Κρατύλου εἰκὼν, εἴ τις θεῶν μὴ μόνον τὸ σὸν χρῶμα καὶ σχῆμα ἀπεικάσειεν ὥσπερ οἱ ζωγράφοι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ἐντὸς πάντα τοιαῦτα ποιήσειεν οἷα περ τὰ σά, καὶ μαλακότητος καὶ θερμότητος τὰς αὐτὰς ἀποδοίη, καὶ κίνησιν καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ φρόνησιν οἷα περ ἢ παρὰ σοὶ ἐνθεῖη αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἐνὶ λόγῳ πάντα ἅπερ σὺ ἔχεις, τοιαῦτα ἕτερα καταστήσειεν πλησίον σου; πότερον Κρατύλος ἂν καὶ εἰκὼν Κρατύλου τότε εἴη τὸ τοιοῦτον, ἢ δύο Κρατύλοι;

Cratylus replies that there would indeed be two Cratyluses. *An image is therefore a likeness of its model, not a duplicate.* There must of course be some overlap of characteristics between an image and its pattern, or there would be no likeness of which to speak. Yet there will always be a remainder of difference. One might ask: does this difference, being unlike the ‘true’ pattern, constitute falsehood? For, as the Elean Stranger puts it in the *Sophist*, falsehood is

¹⁰⁵ Thus also the judgement of Poetsch, *Platons Philosophie des Bildes*, 43: “Weitgehend positive bis neutrale Konnotation hat der Ausdruck εἰκὼν, der unter allen Ausdrücken für den Bildbegriff als der positivste zu gelten hat. Bisweilen ist εἰκὼν dort der präferierte Ausdruck, wo mit dem Bild zwar eine untergeordnete Seinsebene angesprochen wird, zugleich aber die bestmögliche Erscheinung in dieser benannt werden soll.”

¹⁰⁶ *Soph.* 240a, spoken by Theaetetus: “What, indeed, O stranger, do we consider a likeness (εἶδωλον), if not a thing made to resemble the true one, although it is different (τὸ πρὸς τἀληθινὸν ἀφομοιωμένον ἕτερον τοιοῦτον)?”

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Soph.* 236a, spoken by the Stranger: “Then may we not rightly call that which is other, yet similar, an image?” (Τὸ μὲν ἄρα ἕτερον οὐ δίκαιον, εἰκὸς γε ὄν, εἰκόνα καλεῖν;)

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *Phil.* 39c, where Socrates refers to the “painter” in our soul who, after we have taken in sensory data, paints “images” (εἰκόνες) of what we have perceived so that we may retain the memory.

nothing else than conveying that “what exists, is not, or that which does not exist, is” (*Soph.* 241a). For the Stranger, this mixture of truth and falsehood in an image makes the existence of images directly connected to the existence of deceit: “If deceit exists, then all things must of necessity be replete with likenesses and images (εἰκόν) and mere appearance” (*Soph.* 260c).

If an image is a likeness rather than a duplicate and can therefore run the risk of being a false image, then we must ask what kind and degree of likeness is necessary for an image to be considered true and authentic. This is, of course, to assume that some correspondence is necessary at all. This is the very question under discussion in the *Cratylus*: is there an inherent correctness in names (correspondence of sign to thing signified) or are names a matter of mere convention (any correspondence being a matter of coincidence)? The relevance to the discussion of images becomes clear when Socrates argues in favor of a natural correspondence of a name to its object. Creating a name “imitates the nature of things by means of letters and syllables” and produces “an image (εἰκόν) – that is to say, [a] name.”¹⁰⁹ Therefore “a name is an imitation (μίμημα), just as a picture is.”¹¹⁰ In the case of paintings, we can easily detect improper assignments of likeness: no one would seriously claim that a painting of an elephant intends to depict an eagle. In that case, we would aptly deny any correspondence of the sign to the thing signified. While it may be harder to decipher the correspondence of a name to its object, it can be done.¹¹¹ With names, as with pictures, those assignments are proper that attribute to each thing that which belongs to it (τὸ προσήκον) and is like it (τὸ ὅμοιον).¹¹² Take, for example, the name of Zeus:

And it appears a name has been posited in the most fitting manner for [Tantalus’] father, who is said to be Zeus; yet it is not easy to grasp why. For a name such as that of Zeus is simply like a sentence. Dividing it in two, some of us make use of this part, while others make use of the other one: some call him “Zēna,” whereas the others call him “Dia.” But if the two names are combined into one, they may reveal the nature of the god, which indeed is fitting of such a name and the reason why it is crafted. For no one else is for us and everything else the source

φαίνεται δὲ καὶ τῷ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ λεγομένῳ τῷ Διὶ παγκάλως τὸ ὄνομα κείσθαι· ἔστι δὲ οὐ ῥάδιον κατανοῆσαι. ἀτεχνῶς γὰρ ἔστιν οἷον λόγος τὸ τοῦ Διὸς ὄνομα, διελόντες δὲ αὐτὸ διχῆ οἱ μὲν τῷ ἐτέρῳ μέρει, οἱ δὲ τῷ ἐτέρῳ χρώμεθα – οἱ μὲν γὰρ “Ζῆνα,” οἱ δὲ “Δία” καλοῦσιν – συντιθέμενα δ’ εἰς ἓν δηλοῖ τὴν φύσιν τοῦ θεοῦ, ὃ δὴ προσήκειν φασὲν ὀνόματι οἷον τε εἶναι ἀπεργάζεσθαι. οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἡμῖν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις πᾶσιν ὅστις ἔστιν αἴτιος μᾶλλον τοῦ ζῆν ἢ ὁ ἄρχων τε καὶ βασιλεὺς τῶν πάντων. συμβαίνει οὖν ὁρθῶς ὀνομάζεσθαι οὗτος ὁ

¹⁰⁹ *Crat.* 431d (Fowler, LCL); see also 423b.

¹¹⁰ *Crat.* 430e.

¹¹¹ On the difference between correctly classifying paintings on the one hand and “naming” realities on the other, and how the analogy of the former cannot be applied in *toto* to the latter, see Marion Hill, *Das “zwitterhafte” Wesen des Wortes: Eine Interpretation von Platons Dialog “Kratylos,”* Phainomena 12 (Tübingen: Attempto, 2001), 64–66.

¹¹² *Crat.* 430c.

of life in a greater degree than the ruler and king of all things.¹¹³ It therefore turns out that this god is rightly named, *through whom* all living beings have life; for though it is one name, it can be divided in two, as “*Dii*” and “*Zēni*.”

(*Crat.* 395e–396b)¹¹⁴

θεὸς εἶναι, δι’ ὃν ζῆν ἀει πᾶσι τοῖς ζῶσιν
ὑπάρχει· διείληπται δὲ δίχα, ὥσπερ λέγω,
ἐν ὃν τὸ ὄνομα, τῷ “Διὶ” καὶ τῷ “Ζηνί.”

We can see through this example that a name – or image – must reveal something about the nature of the object which it names. As Socrates puts it elsewhere, the name must “embody [that object’s] form (τὸ εἶδος) in [its] letters and syllables,”¹¹⁵ or in other words, name its essence (οὐσία).¹¹⁶ In addition, it serves a didactic purpose, for it is an instrument that we use “to teach one another something, and separate things according to their natures.”¹¹⁷ The same applies to images conveyed through other mediums.

Precisely because a likeness is not a duplicate, we should not expect that all the attributes of a pattern are to be discovered in its image. Socrates applies this thought to names as well; just as a god reproducing Cratylus with all of his qualities would make a duplicate rather than an image of Cratylus, a name which would reproduce the effects of the thing named when spoken would produce a duplicate.¹¹⁸ An image itself cannot be the thing it intends to depict, and thus the absence of particular attributes in an image does not nullify its status as an image but rather confirms it.¹¹⁹ A name (or image) is legitimate so long as the “intrinsic quality” (τύπος) of the thing named is present (*Crat.* 432e). Socrates, for the moment, seems more at ease than the Stranger concerning the dissimilarity between an image and its pattern. The full scope of Socrates’ comments on the correspondence of names to their objects is recognizable when he extrapolates the argument to embrace increasingly larger units of speech:

Therefore, take courage, my good man, and let one name be well disposed, another one not so, and do not force it to have all the letters so that it be entirely like the thing whose

Θαρρῶν τοίνυν, ὦ γενναῖε, ἕα καὶ ὄνομα
τὸ μὲν εὖ κεῖσθαι, τὸ δὲ μὴ, καὶ μὴ
ἀνάγκασζε πάντ’ ἔχειν τὰ γράμματα, ἵνα
κομιδῇ ἢ τοιοῦτον οἶόνπερ οὗ ὄνομά ἐστιν,

¹¹³ Following the trans. of Peter Staudacher, *Platon: Kratylus. Übersetzung und Kommentar*, Platon: Werke 2/1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021).

¹¹⁴ One also finds this etymology in the Stoics (*apud* Diogenes Laertius, 7.147) and Ps.-Aristotle (*De Mundo* 401a).

¹¹⁵ *Crat.* 390e.

¹¹⁶ *Crat.* 423e.

¹¹⁷ *Crat.* 388b (Fowler, LCL): Ἄρ’ οὐ διδάσκομέν τι ἀλλήλους καὶ τὰ πράγματα διακρίνομεν ἢ ἔχει; He subsequently states that an ὄνομα is an ὄργανον καὶ διακριτικὸν τῆς οὐσίας (388b–c). See also *Crat.* 428e, where the act of naming is called an art (τέχνη) given with a view to instruction.

¹¹⁸ *Crat.* 432d.

¹¹⁹ *Crat.* 432d.

name it is, but rather allow even an improper letter to be assigned to it. But if a letter, then also a name in a sentence; and if a name, then also allow an improper sentence in a discourse to be assigned to the subject matter at hand, and the matter will nevertheless be named and expressed, so long as the intrinsic quality¹²⁰ of the matter that is described by the discourse is in it, as it is with the names of letters, if you remember what I and Hermogenes previously said. (*Crat.* 432d–433a)

ἀλλ' ἕα καὶ τὸ μὴ προσήκον γράμμα ἐπιφέρειν. εἰ δὲ γράμμα, καὶ ὄνομα ἐν λόγῳ· εἰ δὲ ὄνομα, καὶ λόγον ἐν λόγῳ μὴ προσήκοντα τοῖς πράγμασιν ἐπιφέρεισθαι, καὶ μὴδὲν ἦττον ὀνομάζεσθαι τὸ πρᾶγμα καὶ λέγεσθαι, ἕως ἂν ὁ τύπος ἐνῆ τοῦ πράγματος περὶ οὗ ἂν ὁ λόγος ἦ, ὥσπερ ἐν τοῖς τῶν στοιχείων ὀνόμασιν, εἰ μέμνησαι ἃ νῦνδὴ ἐγὼ καὶ Ἑρμογένης ἐλέγομεν.

It becomes clear that we are not dealing only with names; we are dealing with a phenomenon of signification that applies to *all* human discourse. Nouns and verbs and their combination into communicative acts of varying lengths may be “true” or “false” depending on whether they elucidate the basic nature of the thing they intend to signify. “[T]he interweaving of names is the essence of reasoning.”¹²¹ Therefore, the combination of nouns into a sentence, and sentences into a paragraph, and paragraphs into a discourse may be viewed in this light. In our discourse, we may lose sight of this or that attribute of the object of discussion, but if we convey the essence of the object, then our signification will be authentic.

We know, however, by way of the example of Zeus’ name that names are constituent entities. In the case of Zeus, we saw that two names inhered in one, and the combination of two correct names made the resultant unity to be correct. Yet even single names are themselves constituent entities, for they are composed of syllables, which are in turn composed of letters. This raises the question whether the constituent parts of a name – or image – must bear some correct relation to its pattern: it is hard to conceive that a painter, for example, would be able to produce a realistic mountain landscape without first having pigments of blue, green, and gray. In the same way, the most basic elements of a name, namely letters, must express something about the nature of the reality they intend to depict. The combination of letters of a certain character must be correct in order to adequately portray the essence of an object. Yet how do we know if a letter truly represents reality? Who decided to give this or that meaning to a letter?

It is here that a decisive turn takes place in the *Cratylus*. Socrates admits that convention (συνθήκη) is needed when deciding upon names.¹²² Whoever first gave names did so in view of a particular understanding of the nature of

¹²⁰ Following Fowler’s translation of τύπος in the LCL edition. Alternatively, Staudacher chooses “Grundzüge der Sache.”

¹²¹ *Theaet.* 202b: [...] ὀνομάτων γὰρ συμπλοκὴν εἶναι λόγου οὐσίαν.

¹²² *Crat.* 435c.

reality, and the same goes for letters. Yet what if that name-giver was mistaken in his conception of reality and subsequently passed it on to us? Could we help being deceived?¹²³ The foregoing considerations serve to highlight the problematic nature of images: we can easily imagine what an image is and what it ought to do, but this does not tell us how to judge the accuracy of any given image definitively.

The problem is sharpened by the simple observation that names are often in conflict with one another. When Socrates points out that the same names could be interpreted against the backdrop of a Parmenidean or a Heraclitean model of nature, he admits that both interpretations appear equally plausible. Which alternative is correct?

Since the names are at variance with one another and some claim that they themselves are the ones akin to the truth, but the others claim it of themselves – how should we decide, or on what should it depend? Surely not on the basis of names other than these ones, for there are none. On the contrary, it is clear that other things besides names are to be sought, which can show us, without the use of names, which of these names are the true ones, in that they display clearly what the truth of these matters is.
(*Crat.* 438d)

Ὀνομάτων οὖν στασιασάντων, καὶ τῶν μὲν φασκόντων ἑαυτὰ εἶναι τὰ ὅμοια τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, τῶν δ' ἑαυτὰ, τίνι ἔτι διακρινουμένων, ἢ ἐπὶ τί ἐλθόντες; οὐ γάρ που ἐπὶ ὀνόματά γε ἕτερα ἄλλα τούτων· οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν, ἀλλὰ δῆλον ὅτι ἄλλ' ἄτα ζητητέα πλὴν ὀνομάτων, ἃ ἡμῖν ἐμφανιεῖ ἄνευ ὀνομάτων ὁπότερα τούτων ἐστὶ τᾶληθῆ, δεῖξαντα δῆλον ὅτι τὴν ἀλήθειαν τῶν ὄντων.

We should not assume that it is different in the case of other images, such as paintings and sculptures. The Stranger of the *Sophist* points out that artists often do not portray an object with the genuine proportions, but rather with the proportions which seem to them to be beautiful.¹²⁴ In this case as well, the imitation is executed according to an understanding of what truly *is* beautiful; is the artist's vision of the beautiful, however, to be trusted?

What all of this should make clear is that the qualitative correspondence of an image to its pattern cannot be deduced based on other images of that same pattern. Moreover, we cannot evaluate an isolated image without accurate knowledge of its pattern. As for the Stranger, so too for Socrates: the mixture of truth and falsehood in an image can be misleading, and only with knowledge of the pattern can we deduce which aspects of the image make a faithful representation.

¹²³ *Crat.* 436b.

¹²⁴ *Soph.* 236a.

If, therefore, it is the case that things can be learned first through names, but also through the things themselves, which of the two ways of ascertainment would be more elegant and wiser? To learn from the image both the image itself and whether it is fashioned well and subsequently the truth of which it is an image, or to learn from the truth both the truth itself and whether its image has been fashioned in a fitting manner? (*Crat.* 439a–b)

Εἰ οὖν ἔστι μὲν ὅτι μάλιστα δι' ὀνομάτων τὰ πράγματα μανθάνειν, ἔστι δὲ καὶ δι' αὐτῶν, ποτέρα ἂν εἶη καλλίων καὶ σαφεστέρα ἢ μάθησις; ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνοσ μανθάνειν αὐτὴν τε αὐτὴν εἰ καλῶς εἴκασται, καὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἧς ἦν εἰκόν, ἢ ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας αὐτὴν τε αὐτὴν καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτῆς εἰ πρεπόντως εἰργασται;

We cannot explain an image by reference to itself, nor by reference to a whole array of images that are supposed to portray the same object. Images may be intended to portray reality to us, but this cannot prove to us what reality truly is. For that, we need some other epistemic avenue.

II. The Nature of Reality: The Sun, the Line, and the Mathematical Cosmos

At bottom, the nature of reality is the issue, for the question as to the nature of reality (φύσις τοῦ πάντος) presents itself in all the dialogues under discussion. In one form or another, the conflict between the Parmenidean and Heraclitean viewpoints comes to expression in the *Cratylus*, the *Theaetetus*, and the *Sophist*.¹²⁵ Is the universe “one and motionless,” as Parmenides claims, or is it the case that “nothing exists as invariably one, itself by itself, but everything is always becoming in relation to something [else]”?¹²⁶ As Theodorus realizes in the *Theaetetus*, this poses a problem for predication:

How can it be possible, Socrates, [to] give a name to anything [...] if while we are speaking it always evades us, being, as it is, in flux?

Καὶ τίς μηχανή, ὦ Σώκρατες; ἢ ἄλλο γέ τι τῶν τοιούτων, εἴπερ αἰεὶ λέγοντος ὑπεξέρχεται ἅτε δὴ ῥέον;

(*Theaet.* 182d [Fowler, LCL])

Yet the problem goes even deeper: how can we even say that a name “is,” if nothing remains fixed in one place and has no independent reality? If everything is constantly in motion, then the predication of a fixed identity via the term “is” would be nonsensical. We would have to forego all such terms and instead use language that reflects the real state of affairs, saying “becoming such” or “suchlike.”¹²⁷

It is a matter of logical priority: how can we say that an image “is” or “is not” accurate if the term “is” itself is questionable? As Socrates puts it: “For what sort of person could happen upon ‘truth’ if he cannot even happen upon

¹²⁵ *Theaet.* 152d–e, 157a–b, 182d, 183a; *Crat.* 440c, 241d–e; *Soph.* 236 ff.

¹²⁶ *Theaet.* 183e, 157a–b.

¹²⁷ *Theaet.* 157b, 152d–e.

‘being’?’¹²⁸ Because the question of being is logically prior to the question of the truth of a particular statement, the question of the nature of reality is logically prior to the truth of a name or an image. If we cannot say that a name “is,” then we cannot say that the name “is” an image of something. How can we break out of the hermeneutical circle and come to know the nature of reality truly? It is clear that whatever we learn from mimetic signs cannot be definitive, and so we must learn the nature of reality through unmediated contact with that reality, rather than through any phenomenal representation of it.

According to Socrates, the soul bears an organ by which it discerns being and not-being, as well as other attributes such as likeness and dissimilarity.¹²⁹ Knowledge is not found in perception, but through a function of the soul by which it holds discourse with itself, reflecting upon its perceptions and sorting them out according to categories such as likeness and dissimilarity.¹³⁰ This is nothing else than the process of reasoning (συλλογισμός).¹³¹ This does not need to mean a cold and robotic rationalism; indeed, Plato can portray attainment of true knowledge as a kind of mystical vision of the soul, such as Diotima describes it to Socrates in the *Symposium*.¹³² It is clear, however, that true knowledge of reality cannot be gained from phenomenal reality alone, and thus it cannot be gleaned directly from images. *Vis-à-vis* those who contend otherwise, Socrates states of true philosophers:

For this very reason, those who stand at variance with them quite prudently defend themselves through means originating from the invisible realm, contending vehemently that true reality consists of certain noetic and incorporeal forms.
(*Soph.* 246b)

Τοιγαροῦν οἱ πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἀμφισβητοῦντες μάλα εὐλαβῶς ἄνωθεν ἐξ ἀοράτου ποθὲν ἀμύνονται, νοητὰ ἅττα καὶ ἀσώματα εἶδη βιαζόμενοι τὴν ἀληθινὴν οὐσίαν εἶναι.

Why does Plato need to build the ability to gain knowledge of the noetic realities into the basic structure of his anthropology? Because he knows that any divine revelation, such as that communicated by the Muses, transpires through a figural medium: human language. (Perhaps he took to heart the opening of Hesiod’s *Theogony*, where the Muses mention they can speak both truthfully and falsely.)¹³³ This is why he rejects the appeal to the gods when it comes to discerning the correctness of names.¹³⁴

¹²⁸ *Theaet.* 186c: Οἷόν τε οὖν ἀληθείας τυχεῖν, ᾧ μηδὲ οὐσίας;

¹²⁹ *Theaet.* 185c–d.

¹³⁰ *Theaet.* 187a.

¹³¹ *Theaet.* 186d. See also *Crat.* 390c–d, where it is suggested that without the art of dialectic, we cannot arrive at the correctness of a name.

¹³² *Symp.* 210e–212a.

¹³³ Hesiod, *Theog.* 26–28.

¹³⁴ *Crat.* 425d–426b.

Yet the soul cannot attain knowledge through acting independently. In addition to its ability to reason, it must experience the idea of the Good. In a memorable “image” (εἰκόν), Socrates compares the idea of the Good to the sun.¹³⁵ In the same way that the human eye is unable to perceive any physical object until the light of the sun illumines both the eye and casts light on the object in view, and in the same way that the sun enables the growth of worldly life, so too does the idea of the Good function as it concerns knowledge and truth:

Accordingly, you must say that this is what both imbues the objects known with truth and gives to the knower the power to know; namely, the idea of the Good. [...]

And, therefore, one might say that the objects known do not only possess the capacity to be known thanks to the Good, but the good also bestows upon them being and existence; the Good, however, is not a particular existence, but rather stands beyond existence, excelling it by virtue of its seniority and power.

(*Resp.* 6.508d–e; 509b)¹³⁶

Τοῦτο τοίνυν τὸ τὴν ἀλήθειαν παρέχον τοῖς γινώσκομένοις καὶ τῷ γινώσκοντι τὴν δύναμιν ἀποδιδόν τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέαν φάθι εἶναι. [...]

Καὶ τοῖς γινώσκομένοις τοίνυν μὴ μόνον τὸ γινώσκεισθαι φάναι ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ παρεῖναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ εἶναι τε καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑπ’ ἐκείνου αὐτοῖς προσεῖναι, οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ’ ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρᾶξεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος.

This “image” is put to great dramatic effect in the “image” of the cave,¹³⁷ which expresses the desire of the philosopher to transcend the images presented to us in the visible realm in order to glimpse the light of reality as it truly is. As long as the human being is chained to the bank in the cave, nothing can be seen but the shadows (σκιαί) of the props (σκεύη) carried by the show-masters.¹³⁸ But when someone is freed and forced into the light of the sun outside of the cave, knowledge of reality becomes possible. In the light of the sun, it becomes possible to see not only shadows and reflections in one’s world, but the realities

¹³⁵ Socrates refers to the comparison with the sun as an εἰκόν in *Resp.* 6.509a.

¹³⁶ I take οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ to mean “is not a particular existence” or, in other words, “not an entity.” The following clause – the Good stands beyond all existence – serves as an explanation of an earlier clause, namely how the Good grants not only the capacity of an object to be known, but also its very existence; if the Good itself were constrained to be one particular entity, how could it have the status and ability to bestow being and existence upon other things? Cf. the trans. of Vegetti (“pur non essendo il buono un’essenza, bensì ancora al di là dell’essenza superandola per dignità e potenza”) and Chambry (“quoique le bien ne soit point essence, mais quelque chose qui dépasse de loin l’essence en majesté et en puissance”).

¹³⁷ In *Resp.* 6.517b, Socrates refers to the cave as an εἰκόν, just as Glaucon had done in 6.515a.

¹³⁸ That this stands for the segment of the line representing the visible realm might be inferred from the fact that this realm is home to natural “images” such as shadows and the “whole class of things produced by art” (τὸ σκευαστὸν [...] γένος; cf. *Resp.* 6.509d–510a).

casting those shadows. Subsequently, it becomes possible to see the sun and contemplate its nature, knowing that it “governs everything in the visible realm, and is, in some way, the cause of all those things that they beheld” (*Resp.* 7.516b–c). As Socrates explains it in deciphering the “image” for Glaucon in *Resp.* 7.517b–c, the idea of the Good “gives birth to light and to the principle of light (τὸν τοῦτου [sc. φωτός] κύριον) in the visible world, [and] in the world of the intelligible is itself the principle (αὐτὴ κυρία) that furnishes truth and understanding [...]”¹³⁹

The visible and intelligible realms to which Socrates here refers derive from another image, namely that of the segmented line, which he presents between the images of the sun and the cave in *Resp.* 6.509d–511e. What is important for our purposes is the way in which “images” are spoken of here. This line is divided at first into two unequal parts that represent the visible and noetic realms.¹⁴⁰ Unsurprisingly, both subsections of the line of the visible realm are populated by images: first, the natural “images” such as shadows and reflections in water, and secondly, the class of items produced by art (τὸ σκευαστὸν [...] γένος).¹⁴¹ Yet when Socrates divides the intelligible realm into two parts, he describes how in the first subsection, the “soul is forced” to use the hypotheses of “geometry and its related arts” (*Resp.* 6.511a–b) and makes images of them in order to see what otherwise cannot be seen. As Socrates points out, the geometer may draw a rectangle in the course of argument, but what he or she is truly using is not the “image” of a rectangle in the sand, but the concept “rectangle” itself. “These same things which they model and draw – and the resulting objects cast their own shadows and images in water – they use, moreover, as images, seeking to see that which one cannot see unless it is seen by the mind” (*Resp.* 6.510e–511a).¹⁴² This cannot procure knowledge of the idea

¹³⁹ Arguing that the idea of the Good has a causative power, Franco Ferrari writes: “In altri termini, l’idea del bene non è, o non è solo, causa formale, ma anche, e probabilmente soprattutto, causa efficiente delle idee e del loro essere” (“L’idea del bene: Collocazione ontologica e funzione causale,” in *Platone: La repubblica, Vol. V, Libri VI–VII*, ed. Mario Vegetti [Naples: Bibliopolis, 2003], 287–325, 323). Further: “Dal punto di vista strettamente metafisico, la superiorità del bene nei confronti delle altre idee risulta circoscritta alla sua potenza (509b9), cioè appunto al suo essere causa. Dal punto di vista epistemologico, il bene attiva l’intenzionalità cognitiva dell’anima, e fornisce al soggetto conoscente la capacità (*dynamis*) di conoscere (508e2)” (*ibid.*, 324).

¹⁴⁰ *Resp.* 6.509d. I use the term “realm” here because Socrates refers to both divisions – ὁρατόν and νοητόν – as a τόπος.

¹⁴¹ *Resp.* 6.509d–510a.

¹⁴² [...] αὐτὰ μὲν ταῦτα ἃ πλάττουσι τε καὶ γράφουσιν, ὧν καὶ σκιαὶ καὶ ἐν ὕδασι εἰκόνες εἰσίν, τούτοις μὲν ὡς εἰκόσιν αὐτὸν χρώμενοι, ζητοῦντές τε αὐτὰ ἐκεῖνα ἰδεῖν ἃ οὐκ ἂν ἄλλως ἴδοι τις ἢ τῆ διανοίᾳ. The point is that the modeled objects themselves produce images – like the props of the Cave allegory – but are themselves used as images to infer their causes, namely the ideas, which can be seen only by the mind. Much the same reading of the clause ὧν καὶ σκιαὶ καὶ ἐν ὕδασι εἰκόνες εἰσίν is found in the translations of Vegetti (“le quali

of the Good; that is the province of the other subsection of this line, “which reason grasps by the power of dialectic” and “does not use any sense perception at all, but rather uses forms themselves to proceed through them and towards them, and finishes at the forms” (*Resp.* 6. 511b–c).¹⁴³ Nevertheless, we see here that Plato can describe at least a segment of the intelligible realm as something that can be known and worked with on the basis of physical models that correspond to the forms underlying them. If the mathematical structure of the underlying form is sufficiently present in the drawing used by the geometer, then the use of such an image in the geometer’s inquiry is legitimate. This is a critical clue in figuring out why Plato, who otherwise can be so skeptical regarding images in the visible realm, can nevertheless call the entire created cosmos an “image of the Intelligible” at the end of the *Timaeus*.

As the titular character in the *Timaeus* states near the beginning of his presentation:

If, in fact, this cosmos is fair and its craftsman good, it is evident that the craftsman beheld an eternal model; but if this statement does not seem right to someone, then the craftsmen beheld one subject to chance. Now, it is clear to everyone that he beheld the eternal one. We have on the one hand the fairest of all generated things and, on the other, the best of all possible causes. Indeed, coming in this way into existence, it has been crafted in accordance with a model that is comprehended by reason and insight and is self-identical. But if these things are so, then it is necessarily the case that this cosmos is an image of something. (*Tim.* 29a–b)

εἰ μὲν δὴ καλὸς ἐστὶν ὁδε ὁ κόσμος ὃ τε δημιουργὸς ἀγαθός, δῆλον ὡς πρὸς τὸ αἰδῖον ἐβλεπεν· εἰ δὲ ὁ μὴδ’ εἰπεῖν τινὶ θέμις, πρὸς τὸ γεγονός. παντὶ δὴ σαφές ὅτι πρὸς τὸ αἰδῖον· ὁ μὲν γὰρ κάλλιστος τῶν γεγονότων, ὁ δ’ ἄριστος τῶν αἰτίων. οὕτω δὴ γεγενημένος πρὸς τὸ λόγῳ καὶ φρονήσει περιληπτὸν καὶ κατὰ ταῦτα ἔχον δεδημιούργηται. τούτων δὲ ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῷ πᾶσα ἀνάγκη τόνδε τὸν κόσμον εἰκόνα τινὸς εἶναι.

Accordingly, all things in the universe are copies (μιμήματα) that have been stamped (τυπωθέντα) according to a pattern.¹⁴⁴ This explains of course that some model (παράδειγμα) underlies the image; what it does not explain, however, is how such an image could be reliable. And that is precisely where the geometric and arithmetical structures which already appeared in the aforementioned image of the segmented line play a role. Already in the basic constitution of the cosmos consisting of fire and water, the Demiurge binds these two elements together using mathematical proportion (*Tim.* 31c, ἀναλογία). The

producono ombre o immagini riflesse nell’acqua”) and Chambry (“qui portent des ombres et produisent des images dans l’eau”).

¹⁴³ αἰσθητῶ παντάπασιν οὐδενὶ προσχρώμενος, ἀλλ’ εἶδῃσιν αὐτοῖς δι’ αὐτῶν εἰς αὐτὰ, καὶ τελευτᾷ εἰς εἶδη.

¹⁴⁴ See *Tim.* 50c ff.; cf. Szlezák, *Platon*, 453: “Es ist die Natur des Intelligiblen, sich im Wahrnehmbaren abzubilden.”

World Soul is constructed on the basis of harmonic intervals (*Tim.* 35b–36b). Time itself is an “image” of eternity that “moves according to number” (*Tim.* 37d, κατ’ ἀριθμὸν ἰοῦσαν [...] εἰκόνα). The courses of the celestial bodies move harmoniously, and it is on the basis of their observation that one might begin to do philosophy (cf. *Tim.* 47a–c). The physical cosmos is constructed of geometric shapes (*Tim.* 53d–55a). In brief: some segment of the intelligible realm – mathematical structure, which is constant and reliable – is built into the structure of the cosmos itself.¹⁴⁵ This is one of the reasons that Plato can write at the end of the *Timaeus* that the cosmos:

came to be as an image of the Intelligible, a perceptible god, greatest and best, most fair and most perfect, one unique heaven. εἰκὼν τοῦ νοητοῦ θεοῦ αἰσθητός, μέγιστος καὶ ἄριστος κάλλιστός τε καὶ τελεώτατος γέγονεν εἷς οὐρανὸς ὅδε μονογενῆς ὄν.
(*Tim.* 92c)¹⁴⁶

In the same way that geometers use figures and reason on this basis – even though what they have in mind are not the figured images but the geometrical shapes themselves – in order to “see that which one cannot see unless it is seen

¹⁴⁵ Barring the reference to the image of the line from the *Republic*, this is the argument advanced by Luc Brisson and Arnaud Macé, “Le monde et les corps,” in *Lire Platon*, eds. Luc Brisson and Francesco Fronterotta (Paris: PUF, 2006), 109–22. They also present the *Timaeus* as the solution to the critique which Plato had made of the “investigation into nature” (περὶ φύσεως ἱστορίαν) of his philosophical predecessors in the *Theaetetus*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Laws*; namely, that the order of the cosmos cannot be explained only by the interaction of bodies. They note that mathematical structure not only played a role in the construction of the cosmos, but also underlies all dissolution and reconstitution in the cosmos, thereby making it into an object of knowledge and discourse: “Tout cela explique que le changement qui affecte le monde sensible n’est pas purement erratique [...] Au cours de ces changements, il y a quelque chose qui ne change pas, et ce sont les ‘formules’ mathématiques. Ainsi, l’ordre mathématique est le mode de présence de l’intelligible dans le sensible, par lequel celui-ci, par la ressemblance à son modèle, en vient à pouvoir être objet de connaissance et de discours” (121).

¹⁴⁶ Of course, one asks oneself whether the reader ought to understand ζῶον or θεοῦ after τοῦ νοητοῦ. For a discussion of the issue, including some remarks on prior approaches, see Filip Karfik, *Die Beseelung des Kosmos: Untersuchungen zur Kosmologie, Seelenlehre und Theologie in Platons Phaidon und Timaios*, Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 199 (Munich/Leipzig: Saur, 2004), 127–38. His conclusion is that both options must be left on the table: “Wir können weder die eine noch die andere Seite dieser Alternative ausschließen. Jedenfalls aber müssen wir damit rechnen, daß das intelligible Lebewesen und seine Teile Gott und Götter heißen können. In welchem Sinne allerdings, ob sensu proprio und mit allen Konsequenzen, die sich aus der Gleichsetzung des Demiurgen mit dem intelligiblen Modell ergeben, oder metaphorisch und sozusagen nur des theogonischen Arrangements wegen, darüber können wir die letzte Klarheit nicht gewinnen” (138). Karfik goes on to note that the lack of a definitive answer does not rest on faulty exegesis – innumerable interpreters have tried their hand at the problem – but rather in the subject matter itself: perhaps Plato intentionally left the issue convoluted, for whatever reason (145).

by the mind,” so too can worldly phenomena be deciphered and understood as “images” of the intelligible realm. This still requires the illumination of the idea of the Good as described in the images of the sun and the cave, for “[...] the idea of the Good is the most important thing to learn, as you have often heard, by which both ‘just’ and other such predications [lit. “usages”] become useful and beneficial” (*Resp.* 6.505a).¹⁴⁷ Further, such illumination might require a mystic vision (cf. *Symp.* 211e). Yet we can now see how and why Plato can speak positively of images: if the light of the idea of the Good illumines the eyes of the soul and the object of its contemplation, then the soul will be able to recognize not only the truth of reality, but also of the images which portray that reality. As long as the images are informed by and directed towards that reality, then they can function as instruments which “summon understanding.”¹⁴⁸

III. Public Discourse, Ethics, Politics

As we have seen, the metaphysical question of the nature of reality underlies Plato’s considerations of the nature, function, and epistemic value of images. Yet if one pays attention, it will be clear that this is not a merely academic enterprise. We might contemplate the world of the ideas, but we do not live there. In the *Cratylus*, the *Theaetetus*, and the *Sophist*, the desire for truthful speech in public life drives the discussion forward, and the driving question of the *Republic* is the inquiry into the nature of the justice and, by extension, the establishment of a just state.¹⁴⁹

If Protagoras and the sophists are correct in saying that perception is knowledge, then the truth of all statements is equivalent – and, by extension, every image. There would then be no need for public discourse, for it would be sufficient for every soul to hold counsel with itself. Yet we do have public discourse, and the disagreement of our perceptions and subsequent knowledge-

¹⁴⁷ [...] ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα μέγιστον μάθημα, πολλαίς ἀκήκοας, ἧ καὶ δίκαια καὶ τᾶλλα προσχρησάμενα χρήσιμα καὶ ὠφέλιμα γίνονται.

¹⁴⁸ Smith, *Summoning Knowledge*, 12, notes the seeming self-contradiction in the critique and the use of images in the *Republic*, but he proceeds to argue that Plato uses images to provoke or “summon” knowledge in the reader (cf. Plato, *Resp.* 7.524d: τὰ [...] παρακλητικὰ τῆς διανοίας).

¹⁴⁹ Cf. what Czesław Porębski remarked concerning the *Republic*: “[T]he starting point of Plato’s considerations are problems of ethics. The initial question of the *Republic* is: how to define the just man. All the ensuing questions are, in a sense, auxiliary ones” (“Plato between Ethics and Politics,” in *New Images of Plato: Dialogues on the Idea of the Good*, eds. Giovanni Reale and Samuel Scolnicov [Sankt Augustin: Academia, 2002], 283–93, 283). Gerasimos Santas makes much the same point: “Plato [...] proceeds from ethics to epistemology and from epistemology to ethics” (“Plato’s Idea of the Good,” in Reale and Scolnicov, *New Images of Plato*, 359–78, 361).

claims necessitates the ability to distinguish between true and false, better and worse.¹⁵⁰ For Plato, ‘alternative facts’ will simply not do.

This underlies the Stranger’s critique of the sophist and his extreme uneasiness regarding images. The sophist is a conjurer (θαυματοποιός), a mere imitator of realities (μιμητής ὄν τῶν ὄντων) who leads young men astray:¹⁵¹

And what now? Do we not therefore expect that there is another art concerning words, by which it happens that someone is able to beguile the young, while they are yet standing far off from matters of the truth, through the very words entering their ears, words that display to them spoken images of all things, so that whatever is said appears to be true and that the one saying it appears to be the wisest of all men?

(*Soph.* 234c)

Τί δὲ δὴ; περὶ τοὺς λόγους ἄρ’ οὐ προσδοκῶμεν εἶναι τινα ἄλλην τέχνην, ἣ δυνατόν αὐτὸν τυγχάνει τοὺς νέους καὶ ἔτι πόρρω τῶν πραγμάτων τῆς ἀληθείας ἀφεστῶτας διὰ τῶν ὄντων τοῖς λόγοις γοητεύειν, δεικνύοντας εἰδῶλα λεγόμενα περὶ πάντων, ὥστε ποιεῖν ἀληθῆ δοκεῖν λέγεσθαι καὶ τὸν λέγοντα δὴ σοφώτατον πάντων ἅπαντ’ εἶναι;

As Socrates discusses the Protagorean view of reality in the *Theaetetus*, he is able to point to the proverbial crack in the foundation by applying this sophistic view to politics. A sophist would say that abstract concepts (just, pious, holy, etc.) are to each individual as it seems to him or her. Because a state is a composite person, the same rule applies: what is just, pious, or holy is to each state as it appears to the state. So far, so good for Protagoras. The problem arises in the practical application; that is, when a state makes laws. No one, Protagoras included, would claim that all laws are equally good, or that a state could never act unjustly through its laws. When it comes to practice, we certainly seem to believe that we can assign differing value judgements to particular laws, even to the point of condemning a state for the laws it passes and enforces.¹⁵² The example of a state making laws evinces the sharp dissonance between theory and praxis for the view that knowledge, and thus truth, is simply a matter of perception. For Plato, the purpose of the inquiry into the nature of images is directly connected to the desire to improve political life.

IV. Summary

For Plato, an image (εἰκὼν/εἰδῶλον) is a likeness, not a duplicate, of some model and “is other, but similar” to it. In order to be considered an authentic image, it must bear a qualitative correspondence to its model, bearing its

¹⁵⁰ Such is the problem concerning differing concepts of “justice” in the public square in *Phaedr.* 263a.

¹⁵¹ Cf. *Phaedr.* 261f–262c for a critique of how orators mislead an audience.

¹⁵² To apply this to today’s world, we might say that if Protagoras’ theory is correct, there is no basis for international law. The Nuremberg Trials would have to be considered a mis-carriage of justice, and the Geneva Convention would be an exercise in futility.

“intrinsic quality” (τύπος). Further, images can teach us something about the nature of reality insofar as images are used to convey the essence of whatever they represent; *images therefore have an epistemic and didactic value*. This is the promise and curse of images, for they can either be employed to “bewitch” others and lead them astray – as in the case of the εἰδῶλα λεγόμενα of the sophist – or they can be used to “summon understanding” and lead people out of the cave of their ignorance. In order to know, however, whether the image truly corresponds to its model and whether the essence portrayed by it aligns with true reality, we need some epistemic avenue by which we come to know the realities standing behind the images and we may thus, on that basis, evaluate the appropriateness of images.¹⁵³ The soul plays a role in obtaining knowledge of reality, but it cannot achieve this alone, for it must be illumined by the light of the idea of the Good and the objects of its knowledge must be illumined as well so that they are infused with truth and reality. Insofar as the Demiurge, whose good will is the foundation of the creation of the cosmos (cf. *Tim.* 41a–b), built mathematical structure and thus a portion of the intelligible realm into the very structure of the cosmos, Plato can consider the cosmos an “image of the Intelligible, a perceptible god.”

We may note in conclusion that Plato never uses εικόν θεοῦ as a human predicate. This would not have been inconceivable, for some of his contemporaries made such statements. The Pythagorean Diodorus of Aspendus (fourth cent. B.C.), a forerunner of the Cynics,¹⁵⁴ is supposed to have relayed that “some people consider that the human being was formed according to the image of God on account of the invisible quality of the soul.”¹⁵⁵ Diogenes of Sinope (404–323 B.C.) is supposed to have said that “good men are images of the gods.”¹⁵⁶ It is not necessary here to answer the question *why* Plato did not take this path; it suffices to point out that in this regard, there is no convergence of Plato’s corpus with the iconic image discourse of the Hebrew Bible discussed in the previous section. As we turn our attention to the writings of the early Roman imperial era, we begin with a piece that does combine the biblical and Hellenic traditions as far as the *imago dei* is concerned: the Wisdom of Solomon.

¹⁵³ Michael Erler, *Platon*, vol. 2.2 of *Die Philosophie der Antike*, Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie (Basel: Schwabe, 2007), 356, captures nicely both aspects of the epistemic value of images: “Das Verhältnis Urbild-Abbild wird nicht nur durch Kausalität bestimmt (ohne Gegenstand kein Schatten), sondern das Abbild hat Verweischarakter und ist damit erkenntnisrelevant. Ein Abbild ist als solches nicht ohne Kenntnis dessen zu erkennen, was es abbildet [...]”

¹⁵⁴ Christoph Riedweg, “Diodorus [3],” *DNP* 3:587.

¹⁵⁵ *FPG* II, frg 1, p. 112: Τινὲς κατ’ εἰκόνα θεοῦ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐνόμισαν κατὰ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀόρατον (πεπλάσθαι) (*apud* Theodoret of Cyrus [A.D. fourth/fifth cent.], *Quaest. in Genesis*, p. 19, tom. 1, ed. Sirmond).

¹⁵⁶ *Apud* Diogenes Laertius 6.51: τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς ἄνδρας [ἔλεγε] θεῶν εἰκόνας εἶναι [...].

C. The Wisdom of Solomon

The Wisdom of Solomon is a Hellenistic-Jewish writing of the early Roman imperial era that incorporates Greco-Roman philosophical traditions in the process of exhorting political rulers, praising God's Wisdom, and presenting an account of Israel's history from Adam to Moses which foregrounds the working of God's Wisdom (σοφία), Spirit (πνεῦμα), or Word (λόγος). The consensus concerning the date of composition tends heavily toward a range from the end of the first century B.C. to the middle of the first century A.D. and names Alexandria as the most likely place of origin.¹⁵⁷ The chronological proximity to the composition of the New Testament writings and the "unambiguously Jewish" conceptual framework¹⁵⁸ into which Greco-Roman traditions are incorporated – Gregory E. Sterling speaks of a "dialectical appropriation"¹⁵⁹ – make it a prime candidate for comparison with Colossians.¹⁶⁰ As far as its

¹⁵⁷ On the date, see Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, "Einführung in die Schrift," in *Sapientia Salomonis (Weisheit Salomos)*, SAPERE 27, ed. Niebuhr (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 3–37, 30–32; Markus Witte, "Die Weisheit Salomos," in Gertz, *Grundinformation Altes Testament*, 540–50, 547; Jason M. Zurawski, "The Wisdom of Solomon," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Apocrypha*, ed. Gerbern S. Oegema (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2021), 335–60, 338–40. Attempts to date Wis to the second cent. B.C. have found little acceptance due to faulty reconstructions of religious history. Alexandria is often named as the place of composition thanks to the philosophical *termini* and *topoi* which evince an affinity with Philo of Alexandria and of both Philo and Wis with Middle Platonism (cf. Luca Mazzinghi, *Libro della Sapienza: Introduzione, Traduzione, Commento*, AnBib 13 [Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2020], 29–30, for further reasons regarding the city itself and the Jewish presence within it). Nevertheless, as K.W. Niebuhr points out, conceptual affinity does not automatically provide insight as to the *place* of origin; Wis could also derive from Syrian Antioch (Niebuhr, "Einführung in die Schrift," 32–33). On the rejection of a Hebrew *Vorlage* for Wis, cf. Niebuhr, "Einführung in die Schrift," 33–34; Witte, "Die Weisheit Salomos," 547.

¹⁵⁸ Gregory E. Sterling, "The Love of Wisdom: Middle Platonism and Stoicism in the Wisdom of Solomon," in *From Stoicism to Platonism: The Development of Philosophy, 100 BCE–100 CE*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2017), 198–213, 211: "The basic framework of thought is unambiguously Jewish. If we were to describe the author in terms of a school, it would be the school of Moses in much the same way that Philo could speak of the philosophy of Moses or the ancestral philosophy."

¹⁵⁹ Sterling, "The Love of Wisdom," 213.

¹⁶⁰ Niebuhr, "Einführung in die Schrift," 10: "Der theologisch unbefangene und philologisch geschulte Leser wird unsere Schrift also, ebenso wie die Schriften des Neuen Testaments, zunächst einmal in die biblisch-jüdisch gefärbte religiöse Literatur der hellenistisch-römischen Zeit einordnen." On the undertaking of comparing Wis with Paul, see Chrysostome Larcher, *Études sur le livre de la Sagesse*, ÉBib (Paris: Gabalda, 1969), 14–20; see also Folker Blischke, "Die Sapientia Salomonis und Paulus," in Niebuhr, *Sapientia Salomonis (Weisheit Salomos)*, 273–91, 291. Blischke concludes at the end of his study: "Wie der Vergleich von theologischen Vorstellungen und Argumentationsformen zwischen Paulus und der *Sapientia* zeigt, ist eine Kenntnis der Weisheit Salomos für den Apostel gut vorstellbar. [...] Ob ihm die *Sapientia* bei der Abfassung seiner Briefe direkt vorlag oder ob er sie

contribution to an image discourse is concerned, we find two positive statements regarding an image of a divine quality in the first major section (1:1–9:18) and a critique of images in various places in the second major section (10:1–19:22) that is largely commensurate with the aniconic polemic of the prophets of the Hebrew Bible.¹⁶¹ It is the first major section which will command our attention here.

I. Images of God's Eternity and Goodness

To begin with, we read in Wis 2:23 that the human was created “as an image of God’s own eternity” and in Wis 7:26, we read that Wisdom is an “image of God’s goodness.” It is often pointed out in scholarly literature that the “Wisdom” portrayed here (cf. also 7:22; 9:1b–2) is similar to Philo’s Logos/Image of God and to the “image of the invisible God” in Col 1:15. The comparison as it is commonly formulated omits, however, one key difference: Wisdom is an image of a particular quality of God, but not simply God’s image.¹⁶² In the Wisdom of Solomon, there is no image of God *per se*, but only images of particular qualities. To justify this claim, we need to examine closely the relevant texts.

In Wis 1:1–8:16, we find two distinct exhortations to rulers (1:1–15; 6:1–11) followed in the first instance by a declamation about the righteous and the godless (1:16–5:23) and in the second instance by a praise of Wisdom (6:12–8:16). The two positive statements regarding an image of a divine quality are located in the first and second subsections, respectively, and ought to be interpreted in each instance in the immediate context.

The first exhortation (1:1–15) names themes that will be fundamental for the declamation in 1:16–5:23 and the praise of Wisdom in 6:22–8:16. The rulers are told to “love righteousness” (1:1, ἀγαπήσατε δικαιοσύνην) and also that “crooked thoughts separate [one] from God” (1:3). This primacy of δικαιοσύνη grounded in its connection with God and its ability to connect one *to* God demonstrates that righteousness is “more than any given virtue,”¹⁶³ and one may conclude that Ps.-Solomon subsumes the cardinal virtues (cf. Wis 8:7)

aus seiner jüdischen Ausbildung kannte, gehört in den Bereich der Hypothesen” (291). Mazzinghi, *Libro della Sapienza*, 50, suggests that the most natural explanation for the similarities between Wis and Paul is that Paul had actual knowledge of the work.

¹⁶¹ Witte, “Die Weisheit Salomos,” 544. For the detailed outline that is employed here, albeit with a moderate revision for Wis 6, see Niebuhr, “Einführung in die Schrift,” 19–21.

¹⁶² E.g., Jacob Jervell, *Imago Dei: Gen. 1,26f. im Spätjudentum, in der Gnosis und in den paulinischen Briefen*, FRLANT 76 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), 50, who treats Wis 7:26 as though the text reads εἰκὼν θεοῦ rather than εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ.

¹⁶³ Mareike Blischke, “Zur Theologie der Sapientia Salomonis,” in *Sapientia Salomonis (Weisheit Salomos)*, 155–73, 159: “Bereits hier wird deutlich, dass Gerechtigkeit mehr ist als irgendeine Tugend und auch mehr als eine Lebenseinstellung. Mit der Liebe zur Gerechtigkeit setzt sich der Mensch in ein Verhältnis zu Gott.”

under it.¹⁶⁴ In a passage that is crucial for understanding the declamation and the praise of Wisdom, we read:

<p>Do not strive after death in the error of your life, nor cause devastation by the works of your hands; for God did not create death nor takes he delight in the destruction of the living. For it is for <i>being</i> that he created all things, and the generations of the cosmos incline towards salvation¹⁶⁵ and there is no destructive poison in them nor is the palace of Hades on earth. For righteousness is immortal. (Wis 1:12–15)</p>	<p>μη ζηλοῦτε θάνατον ἐν πλάνῃ ζωῆς ὑμῶν μηδὲ ἐπιπαῖσθε ὀλέθρον ἐν ἔργοις χειρῶν ὑμῶν· ὅτι ὁ θεὸς θάνατον οὐκ ἐποίησεν οὐδὲ τέρπεται ἐπ’ ἀπωλεία ζώντων. ἔκτισεν γὰρ εἰς τὸ εἶναι τὰ πάντα, καὶ σωτήριοι αἱ γενέσεις τοῦ κόσμου, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν αὐταῖς φάρμακον ὀλέθρου οὔτε ἄδου βασιλειον ἐπὶ γῆς. δικαιοσύνη γὰρ ἀθάνατός ἐστιν.</p>
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The speaker uses the antithesis of life and death to affirm that God’s purpose for creation is *existence* rather than *destruction* and that the forces of death and dissolution have no rightful place on the earth.¹⁶⁶ Later references to envy (φθόνος) in 2:24 and 6:23 strongly suggest that the author’s understanding of the antithesis between life and death is reminiscent of the Platonic distinction between the goodness of the Demiurge – the reason for creation – and envy, which is “banished from the divine choir.”¹⁶⁷ Further, the “righteousness” which the rulers are supposed to seek (cf. 1:1) is “immortal” and stands opposed to the death (θάνατος) and devastation (ὀλεθρος) that are caused through one’s own conduct (Wis 1:12).

Immediately in 1:16, the speaker pivots to a rebuke of the godless who “summon death” through their thoughts and way of life. As described in 2:1–9, this ‘invitation of death’ entails the lament of the godless over the transitory

¹⁶⁴ In that the labors of Wisdom are the cardinal virtues and Wisdom leads to righteousness (similarly Mazzinghi, *Libro della Sapienza*, 347). Excepting the intermediate role of Wisdom here, the subsumption of the virtues under righteousness evinces a structural similarity to Plato’s conception of the relation of the cardinal virtues to the idea of the Good in the *Republic*. In discussing the “long way round” (*Resp.* 6.504b–d) of educating the guardians so that they might have the fullest vision of the virtues (i.e., they need the vision of the idea of the Good rather than a conception of any given virtue disconnected from the Good), Socrates implies that cognizance of a given virtue is merely a “sketch” (ὕπογραφή) in the absence of the Good (*Resp.* 6.504d).

¹⁶⁵ Roughly following the translation of Heinz-Günther Nesselrath: “und auf Heil hin angelegt [...]” (in Niebuhr, *Sapientia Salomonis (Weisheit Salomos)*, 43).

¹⁶⁶ Cf. M. Blischke, “Zur Theologie der Sapientia Salomonis,” 165: “Für das Gottesbild der *Sapientia Salomonis* ist entscheidend, dass die heilbringende Schöpfung des guten Gottes und die Sphäre des Todes voneinander vollkommen unterschieden sind.”

¹⁶⁷ *Phaedr.* 247a: φθόνος γὰρ ἔξω θείου χοροῦ ἴσταται; cf. *Tim.* 29e–30a on the distinction between the demiurge’s goodness and envy.

and seemingly meaningless character of human existence (vv. 1–5), from which they draw the conclusion that they should “enjoy” and “make use of creation” in a devotion to revelry (vv. 6–9) and living for ephemeral pleasures: “Let us take our fill of costly wine and perfumes, and let no flower of spring pass us by. Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they wither” (vv. 7–8a). Without any transition or explanation, the author concludes that this leads the godless to willfully oppress the “poor righteous man,” the widow, and the elderly, for the godless accept the following principle:

“But let our strength be our law of righteousness,
for what is weak is proven to be useless.”

ἔστω δὲ ἡμῶν ἡ ἰσχὺς νόμος τῆς
δικαιοσύνης,
τὸ γὰρ ἀσθενὲς ἄχρηστον ἐλέγχεται.
(Wis 2:11)

The notion that ‘might is right’ is a sophistic *topos* which one finds in Plato (*Gorg.* 483d; *Resp.* 1.343b–c).¹⁶⁸ In the *Republic*, the consideration of the nature of *justice*¹⁶⁹ – and how the just man is more likely to suffer than the unjust (cf. *Resp.* 1.343d) – is connected to the question of how to convince the promising youths of the *polis* to choose the path of justice rather than injustice (cf. *Resp.* 2.365a–b); in a similar way, Ps.-Solomon seeks to persuade his audience to pursue the righteousness of God rather than the “righteousness” of the ungodly. It is precisely in this context of sharply denouncing this “error” and “blindness” that he refers to the human being as the image of God’s own eternity:

¹⁶⁸ Reinhard Weber as well notes the similarity with the remarks of Callicles in the *Gorgias*: “Dem Kallikleischen νόμος τῆς φύσεως entspricht in Sap 2,11 der durch ἰσχὺς bestimmte νόμος τῆς δικαιοσύνης auf das Genaueste” (*Das Gesetz im hellenistischen Judentum: Studien zum Verhältnis und zur Funktion der Thora von Demetrios bis Pseudo-Phokylides*, ARGU 10 [Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2000], 184). In his interpretation of Wis 2:11b (τὸ γὰρ ἀσθενὲς ἄχρηστον ἐλέγχεται), Mazzinghi, *Libro della Sapienza*, 121, states that Ps.-Solomon rightly realizes that utter contempt for the weak is the immediate consequence of the notion ‘might is right’: “Di fronte alla forza, ‘ciò che è debole si manifesta inutile’; il primato della forza porta con sé, come immediata conseguenza, il disprezzo assoluto della debolezza e quindi della persona stessa del povero, sentito appunto come inutile oggetto da eliminare.”

¹⁶⁹ Here, too, we see a structural similarity with the Platonic relation between the Good and the virtues. As Socrates says in *Resp.* 6.505a, “[...] the idea of the Good is the most important thing to learn, as you have often heard, by which ‘just’ and other such predications become useful and beneficial.” It is the absence of the Good that leads to competing – and deficient – views of justice. In the same way, according to Ps.-Solomon, those who turn away from God’s righteousness (Wis 1:1) choose something else to inform their conception of justice; in this case, it is their own strength (Wis 2:11).

<p>They reasoned these things and they were led astray; for their wickedness blinded them, and they did not know the mysteries of God nor did they have hope of the reward of piety nor did they discern the honor of blameless souls. For God created the human for incorruption and made it the image of his own eternity;¹⁷⁰ but death entered into the cosmos through the envy of the devil, and those who are of his lot get a taste of it.¹⁷¹ (Wis 2:21–24)</p>	<p>Ταῦτα ἐλογίσαντο, καὶ ἐπλανήθησαν· ἀπετύφλωσεν γὰρ αὐτοὺς ἡ κακία αὐτῶν, καὶ οὐκ ἔγνωσαν μυστήρια θεοῦ οὐδὲ μισθὸν ἠλπίσαν ὀσιότητος οὐδὲ ἔκριναν γέρας ψυχῶν ἀμώμων. ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἔκτισεν τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐπ’ ἀφθαρσία καὶ εἰκόνα τῆς ἰδίας ἀιδιότητος ἐποίησεν αὐτόν· φθόνῳ δὲ διαβόλου θάνατος εἰσηλθεν εἰς τὸν κόσμον, πειράζουσιν δὲ αὐτὸν οἱ τῆς ἐκείνου μερίδος ὄντες.</p>
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Yet if the human is an image of God’s eternity, then wherein exactly does this eternity consist? In brief, it consists in the incorruptibility (ἀφθαρσία) and immortality (ἀθανασία) granted by righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) and its attendant virtue (ἀρετή). For the “souls of the righteous are in the hands of God” (Wis 3:1a) and even though it appears to the wicked that the righteous have slid into oblivion, they are “at peace” (Wis 3:2–4). The idea that the righteous are those who have been tried and tested by God (Wis 3:5–6) suggests that being an image of God’s eternity is not a given but is rather attained through choosing life and thus aligning oneself with the will of the Creator (cf. Wis 1:12–15) and refusing to “summon death” by the “works of one’s hands” (Wis 1:12, 16). In other words, it comes about by refusing to resign oneself to ephemeral pleasures and the oppression of the weak and the righteous (cf. Wis 2:1–20) and instead choosing to live virtuously, as the following passages demonstrate. For “the one who despises wisdom and instruction is miserable” (Wis 3:11a)¹⁷² and his manner of life will not profit him, for “his offspring is accursed” (Wis 3:11–13) and even if he lives long, he will not amount to anything (Wis 3:17). In contrast, those who have no promise of offspring (barren women, eunuchs) but have done good deeds will be rewarded by God (3:13b–15), and thus it is better to be virtuous and childless than to be wicked with offspring, as is stated programmatically in the following chapter:

¹⁷⁰ On maintaining the reading ἀιδιότητος rather than ιδιότητος, see Niebuhr, *Sapientia Salomonis (Weisheit Salomos)*, 140, n. 40.

¹⁷¹ Following the translation of Nesselrath in Niebuhr, *Sapientia Salomonis (Weisheit Salomos)*, 47.

¹⁷² This statement is perhaps an adaption of a *topos* found in Stoic philosophy: that virtue suffices to attain eudaimonia and that every foolish man is mad (Cicero, *Paradoxa Stoicorum* 2 and 4).

Childlessness with virtue is better; for there is immortality in the remembrance of virtue, because it is known both by God and by mortals. They imitate it when it is present and yearn for it when it is absent; and bearing a crown, it marches on in eter- nity, victorious in the contest for undefiled prizes. (Wis 4:1–2)	κρείσσων ἀτεκνία μετὰ ἀρετῆς· ἀθανασία γάρ ἐστιν ἐν μνήμῃ αὐτῆς, ὅτι καὶ παρὰ θεῶν γινώσκεται καὶ παρὰ ἀνθρώποις. παροῦσάν τε μιμοῦνται αὐτήν καὶ ποθοῦσιν ἀπελθοῦσαν· καὶ ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι στεφανηφοροῦσα πομπεύει τὸν τῶν ἀμιάντων ἄθλων ἀγῶνα νικήσασα.
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In contrast, the ungodly will wither away despite their many offspring and though seeming strong, they will be uprooted (Wis 4:3–6).

For the righteous, though he die early, will be at rest; for an honorable age is not the one which is long-lived, nor is it measured by the number of years; instead, prudence is ‘gray hair’ for human- kind and an unblemished life is ‘old age.’ (Wis 4:7–9)	Δίκαιος δὲ ἐὰν φθάσῃ τελευτήσῃ, ἐν ἀναπαύσει ἔσται· γῆρας γὰρ τίμιον οὐ τὸ πολυχρόνιον οὐδὲ ἀριθμῶ ἐτῶν μεμέτρηται, πολιὰ δὲ ἔστιν φρόνησις ἀνθρώποις καὶ ἡλικία γήρωσ βίος ἀκηλίδωτος.
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Accordingly, the righteous can “fulfill many years” by having been “perfected in a short span of time” (Wis 4:13) and thus “quickly perfected youth” will condemn the “abundant years” of the unjust (Wis 4:16b). In contrast to the immortality in the remembrance of virtue, the memory of the unrighteous will perish (Wis 4:19).

At the final judgment, the unrighteous will see the reward of the righteous and realize that they were wrong all along (cf. Wis 5:6) and that in contrast to the works of the righteous which they condemned (5:1c), their own works have profited them nothing (Wis 5:7–8). Following a series of metaphors that illustrate the transitory nature of the deeds and pleasures that filled the lives of the unrighteous, the ungodly conclude:

“So we also, as soon as we were born, ceased to be, and we had not even a semblance of virtue to display, but were consumed in our wickedness.” (Wis 5:13, NRSV, rev.)	οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς γεννηθέντες ἐξελίπομεν καὶ ἀρετῆς μὲν σημεῖον οὐδὲν ἔσχομεν δεῖξαι, ἐν δὲ τῇ κακίᾳ ἡμῶν κατεδαπανήθημεν.
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Virtue, therefore, is that which truly ‘grants time’ and ‘adds years’ to one’s life, and therefore “the righteous will live forever” (Wis 5:15; cf. 1:15). This is of course possible only when righteousness and virtue correspond to God rather than to the capriciously chosen ‘righteousness’ of the wicked which is nothing

else than the praise of their own power (cf. Wis 2:11). As Ps.-Solomon expresses it later on: “For knowing you [sc. God] is utter righteousness, and knowing your power is the root of immortality” (Wis 15:3). Insofar as the human being ‘knows God’ and lives virtuously according to God’s righteousness, the human being fulfills the purpose of its creation “unto incorruption” as an “image of God’s own eternity” (Wis 2:23).

Two objections could be raised to the foregoing considerations. First, one might object by pointing out that Wis 3:1–4 and Wis 5:15a suggest that God’s eternity also consists in limitless time. Inferring the character of eternity from some conception of time is indeed sensible, as we see in the Platonic notion that time is the moving image of eternity.¹⁷³ Yet the ‘time’ of the righteous in the Wisdom of Solomon is not a quantitative finite sequence of moments which, by means of a *via negationis*, provides us a concept of eternity as limitless time. Two factors speak in favor of assuming a different conception of the ‘time’ of the righteous and its relation to God’s ‘eternity’ in the Wisdom of Solomon. First, the placement of the *imago*-statement after a critique of the manner of life of the ungodly and before the statements regarding virtue in chapters three and four suggest that the way in which the human is an image of God’s own eternity is not primarily concerned with the afterlife, but rather with life on earth. Second, the ‘time’ of the righteous human – who is the “image of God’s own eternity” – is not quantitatively measured (cf. Wis 4:7–9). The only instances where temporal semantics (γῆρας [...] πολυχρόνιον; ἡλικία γῆρας; πολυετές γῆρας) in Wisdom convey a quantitative measurement of human life are the statements concerning the ‘time’ of the wicked. The ‘time’ of the righteous human who imitates God’s eternity, therefore, is determined by the particular quality granted to it by righteousness and virtue.¹⁷⁴

The second objection would be, with reference to Wis 8:19, that we find in the Wisdom of Solomon an appropriation of the Platonic doctrine of the immortality of the soul and this is what Ps.-Solomon has in mind when he says that the human is the “image of God’s own eternity.”¹⁷⁵ This is a contested issue in scholarship. It seems prudent, however, to interpret Wis 2:23 within

¹⁷³ Cf. Plato, *Tim.* 37d.

¹⁷⁴ For the notion that divine eternity could be conceived as something other than limitless time in the philosophy of the early Roman imperial period, cf. Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 351e, where Plutarch states that God’s eternal life consists in his knowledge of all that exists, of all that was, and all that will be, and that in the absence of such knowledge, the divine immortality would not be *life*, but would rather be the mere passage of time.

¹⁷⁵ Thus Sterling, “The Love of Wisdom.” While Sterling suggests that Wis does affirm the immortality of the soul (200–2), he does subsequently state that “we do not know if the author accepted the full Platonic understanding of immortality of not” (203). Similarly, David Winston, “Weisheit Salomons,” in *Philosophie der Kaiserzeit und der Spätantike*, vol. 5.1 of *Die Philosophie der Antike*, Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie, eds. Christoph Riedweg, Christoph Horn, and Dietmar Wyrwa (Basel: Schwabe, 2007), 715–19, 716.

the more immediate context of the declamation in Wis 1:16–5:23 rather than in the light of the praise of Wisdom, which is the subject of the second major section (Wis 6:12–8:16) of chs. 1–9.¹⁷⁶ Further, as Chrysostome Larcher has demonstrated, the concept of the immortality of the soul cannot be transferred straightforwardly to the content of the Wisdom of Solomon. While this work does presuppose that the soul can survive physical death,¹⁷⁷ the concept of immortality (ἀθανασία) is applied only to the righteous, for they alone merit the “confirmation” (βεβαίωσις) of immortality through observing God’s commands (Wis 6:18).¹⁷⁸

The second statement in the Wisdom of Solomon regarding an image of a divine quality is found in Wis 7:26c: Wisdom is “an image of his [sc. God’s] goodness” (εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ). This occurs in the second major section (Wis 6:12–8:16), which is introduced by the second admonition to the kings, judges, and rulers of the earth (Wis 6:1; cf. Wis 1:1). In contrast to the life of the goddess as it is described in the prior section, Wisdom is “unfading” (Wis 6:12) and those who take care to observe her laws have the confirmation

¹⁷⁶ Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 49, n. 98, points out that the human is no longer any sort of “image” in those passages where Wisdom is considered to be some kind of “image” (49, n. 98). We might point out in this connection that Wis 9:2 does not employ εἰκὼν when referring to the creation of the human.

¹⁷⁷ Whereas Larcher, *Études sur le livre de la Sagesse*, 300, maintains that Wis presupposes distinct natures for body and soul, the exact relation of the two is not entirely clear. Silvia Schroer, for example, maintains that Wis lacks any body-soul dualism and is not interested in the immortality of the soul nor in the resurrection of the body; instead, Wis wants to assure its readers that the righteous are in God’s hands after death and do not slide into oblivion (“Das Buch der Weisheit,” in *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, eds. Christian Frevel and Erich Zenger [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016], 488–501, 498).

¹⁷⁸ On the “nature and destiny of the soul” in Wis, see Larcher, *Études sur le livre de la Sagesse*, 263–327. Larcher points out that βεβαίωσις is a juridical term that evokes the association of merit or recompense (284). The special nature of the soul is supposed but it is not connected with particular systems or philosophical proofs from the Greek tradition; instead, it is close to previous biblical tradition: “En effet l’auteur rattache explicitement sa doctrine de l’immortalité à des données bibliques antérieures. Il parle d’une immortalité qualifiée, qui reste le privilège des âmes justes. Elle a été voulue par Dieu aux origines, elle reste offerte à chaque homme et elle est accordée par Dieu comme une récompense. Conditionnée essentiellement par la justice, elle suppose par conséquent la rectitude morale et religieuse, en conformité avec les exigences divines sur l’homme” (299). Larcher also points out that the souls of both the just and the wicked survive physical death, but they are destined for such different destinies that “life” and “immortality” cannot be predicated of the unjust, for they are handed over to Hades, which is “par excellence, le royaume de la Mort et de la Perdition radicale (I, 12–14)” and which, as seen in the punishment of the unjust in Wis 4:19, is reminiscent of the shadowy oblivion of *Sheol* (300, 309). Mazzinghi as well concludes in his interpretation of ἀφθαρσία in Wis 2:23 that it does not intend a ‘natural’ incorruptibility of the human, but rather “una destinazione dell’uomo – inteso come essere unito – alla vita, come dono da parte del Creatore” (*Libro della Sapienza*, 136).

(βεβαίωσις) of immortality (ἀφθαρσία; Wis 6:18b), and “immortality draws one near to God” (Wis 6:19; cf. 8:13). Wisdom is therefore a “treasure” whose possession procures friendship with God (Wis 7:14), a lasting memory among one’s peers (Wis 8:13), and immortality (Wis 8:17). And whereas the hope of the righteous was said to be “full of immortality,” the rulers are admonished to honor Wisdom so that they might “rule forever” (ἵνα εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα βασιλεύσητε; Wis 6:21b). As the divine will for life was opposed to envy (cf. 1:13–14 with 2:24), so too is Wisdom opposed to envy (Wis 6:23). As childlessness adorned with virtue was considered superior to the abundant offspring of the unjust, so too does Ps.-Solomon consider Wisdom superior to “scepters and thrones [...] [and] wealth” and gold and silver (Wis 7:8–9). These few examples demonstrate how Wisdom is superior to ephemeral earthly goods and pleasures in the same way that virtue was in the first major section.

Yet when it comes to Wisdom, this superiority is also cosmogonically and cosmologically defined. Inspired by the antecedent tradition of Prov 8:22–25, according to which heavenly Wisdom was present with God at the beginning of the world, the Wisdom of Solomon portrays Wisdom as the “fashioner of all things” (ἡ γὰρ πάντων τεχνίτις; Wis 7:21b; cf. 8:6b) who was present with God at creation (Wis 9:9a) and by whom God formed the first human (9:1), and it is Wisdom who “extends mightily from one end [of the cosmos] to the other and orders all things well” (Wis 8:1), “brings forth all things” (Wis 8:5b) and “renews all things” (Wis 7:27a). And in Wisdom is a spirit (πνεῦμα) which, among other things, is beneficent and loves humanity (εὐεργετικόν, φιλόανθρωπον; Wis 7:23).¹⁷⁹ It is precisely in the context of this praise of Wisdom’s beneficent creative power that the *imago* statement appears:

<p>For [Wisdom] is a reflection of eternal light and a spotless mirror of the working of God and an image of his goodness. (Wis 7:26, NRSV, rev.)</p>	<p>ἀπαύγασμα γὰρ ἐστὶν φωτὸς αἰδίου καὶ ἔσοπτρον ἀκηλίδωτον τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνεργείας καὶ εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ.</p>
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Wisdom is the image of God’s goodness because just as God created all things so that they might *be* (Wis 1:13), and just as God is opposed to the death brought into the cosmos by the envy of the devil (Wis 2:24; cf. 1:14), so too does Wisdom have a share in creating and preserving the cosmos and opposing envy (cf. Wis 6:23). This is relevant for the human as the image of God’s eternity, for the virtue requisite for such a status belongs to the “labors” of Wisdom; namely, the cardinal virtues whose value for human beings is surpassed by nothing else on earth (Wis 8:7). Because Wisdom teaches the human being

¹⁷⁹ On the πνεῦμα in Wis, cf. Reinhard Feldmeier, *Gottes Geist: Die biblische Rede vom Geist im Kontext der antiken Welt*, Tria Corda 13 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 103–16. Cf. further Musonius Rufus, *Diat.* 17 (ed. Hense, p. 90, 4–12), where he concludes that God is εὐεργετικὸς καὶ φιλόανθρωπος on the basis of his virtues.

the virtue necessary for imitating God's eternity, Wisdom grants immortality (cf. Wis 6:18b, 19; 8:13, 17). She is also said to be an "initiate (μύστις) in the knowledge of God" (Wis 8:4a) and it is this knowledge of God which is the "root of immortality" (cf. Wis 15:3b). Insofar as Wisdom contributes to the creation and preservation of the cosmos so that it might *be* rather than *not be*, one can say that Wisdom is an image of God's beneficent creative will. The soteriological importance of Wisdom is indicated in Wis 9:18 and by the role Wisdom plays in the preservation of the righteous in the history of Israel as it is recounted as of chapter ten.

While it is disputed whether the figure of Wisdom is a poetic personification or a hypostasis, a decision in the matter is not necessary for our purposes.¹⁸⁰ What is interesting, regardless of the question of the precise ontological status of Wisdom, is that Wis 7:26 presents us with a novel use of εἰκών: it is here not a predicate of the human, but of a supramundane figure.¹⁸¹ "This original application of the motif of the 'image' proceeds from the desire to underline the principal aspects of the divine activity of Wisdom and to trace them back to their source."¹⁸² The designation as an "image" also serves to indicate that Wisdom is not God but rather a figure who, despite being so close to God that their relation can be conveyed through the metaphor of the natural relation between light and radiance, is nevertheless something separate: Wisdom came to be (Wis 6:22a, ἐγένετο) and is guided by God (Wis 7:15) and must be granted by God (8:21).

¹⁸⁰ Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 50, maintains that Wisdom is a hypostasis rather than a mere poetic personification. The study of Martin Neher, *Wesen und Wirken der Weisheit in der Sapientia Salomonis*, BZAW 333 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), is devoted to this very question and he concludes: "Die σοφία befindet sich noch auf dem Weg zur Hypostasierung" (240). One might say in favor of Neher's approach that it takes seriously the insight, expressed by Silvia Schroer, that there is no such thing as 'the' personified Wisdom, for Wisdom can cut a strikingly different profile in the various sapiential texts and any given portrayal of Wisdom must be read in its immediate context before a synthesis is attempted ("Die göttliche Weisheit und der nachexilische Monotheismus," in *Der eine Gott und die Göttin: Gottesvorstellungen des biblischen Israel im Horizont feministischer Theologie*, QD 135, eds. Marie-Theres Wacker and Erich Zenger [Freiburg: Herder, 1991], 151–82, 154).

¹⁸¹ Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 49, states that this "radikale Veränderung" serves to pronounce the divinity of what is depicted.

¹⁸² Larcher, *Études sur le livre de la Sagesse*, 384: "Cette application originale du motif de l' 'image' procède du désir de souligner les principaux aspects de l'activité divine de la Sagesse et de remonter jusqu'à leur source."

II. Summary

The designation of Wisdom as an “image of God’s goodness” serves to express both the proximity and distance in the relation between God and Wisdom¹⁸³ and insofar as Wisdom participates in the beneficent divine creative will,¹⁸⁴ she bears a relation to creation that is qualified as ‘good.’¹⁸⁵ Wisdom’s share in the “profound inclination of divine Being to will and to do good”¹⁸⁶ has anthropological implications of an ethical and, in the framework of the Wisdom of Solomon, therefore a soteriological character. Because Wisdom teaches the divine commands that lead to immortality and incorruption,¹⁸⁷ Wisdom is necessary for the human being to actualize its God-given determination to become an image of God’s eternity.¹⁸⁸ In this sense, Wisdom overcomes the distance between God and humanity.

D. Philo of Alexandria

The Jewish author Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C.–A.D. 49) was a dynamic thinker who applied the methods of Alexandrian philology to his interpretation of the Jewish scriptures – mainly the Pentateuch – and who incorporated philosophical concepts from various schools into his exegetical project. He was

¹⁸³ Though commenting here on Wis 7:25, Neher makes it clear that the same can be said of 7:26c: “Diese doppelte Betonung zum einen ihres göttlichen Wesens und zum anderen ihres Abstands von Gott begründet zugleich, wie es ihr möglich ist, sich aus Menschenliebe auf die Welt einzulassen ohne dabei ihre eigene Göttlichkeit preiszugeben noch die Exklusivität Gottes anzutasten” (Neher, *Wesen und Wirken der Weisheit*, 116, 118).

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Larcher, *Études sur le livre de la Sagesse*, 384.

¹⁸⁵ Larcher, *ibid.*, 383, is certain that Wis 7:26c only concerns Wisdom’s relation to God without any hint of a relation of Wisdom to the world – such as the thought that the character of Wisdom might be visible in her works. This seems to be an unnecessary either/or; why should one exclude the other?

¹⁸⁶ Larcher, *ibid.*, 384: “[...] inclination profonde de l’Être divin à vouloir et à faire le bien.”

¹⁸⁷ Neher, *Wesen und Wirken der Weisheit*, 134, cf. 105; Schroer, “Das Buch der Weisheit,” 497; similarly, Otto Kaiser, *Die Weisheit Salomos: Übersetzt, eingeleitet und durch biblische und außerbiblische Parallelen erläutert* (Stuttgart: Radius, 2010), who does not draw this connection explicitly, but whose specification of the main themes of the two major sections in chs. 1–9 suggests as much, for the theme of the first section is “righteousness as the prerequisite of immortality” (52) and the theme of the second section is “Wisdom as the prerequisite for just rule and for immortality” (53).

¹⁸⁸ Schroer, “Das Buch der Weisheit,” 499: “Unvergänglichkeit ist so die Hoffnung derer, die ein Leben in Gerechtigkeit erstreben, und sie ist die vom Schöpfer intendierte Bestimmung des gottebenbildlichen Menschen (2,23).”

influenced by both Platonism¹⁸⁹ and Stoicism,¹⁹⁰ although the extent of each influence and the relation of them to one another is a topic of debate. On the basis of such influence, some scholars have characterized him as a “philosophically oriented exegete.”¹⁹¹ Because he held the teachings of Moses to be the source of Greek philosophical doctrines, it is reasonable to expect that he would make an eclectic use of the elements of this or that philosophical system in order elucidate the Pentateuch.¹⁹² Rather than making him an anomaly, this ability to borrow from various schools of thought was characteristic of the philosophy of his time.¹⁹³ Even if one contends – rightly – that Philo anticipates

¹⁸⁹ This was noticed in Late Antiquity by Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 11: ἢ Πλάτων φιλονίζει ἢ Φίλων πλατωνίζει (“Either Plato ‘philonizes,’ or Philo ‘platonizes’”; cited in Mauro Bonazzi, “Towards Transcendence: Philo and the Renewal of Platonism in the Early Imperial Age,” in *Philo of Alexandria and Post-Aristotelian Philosophy*, SPA 5, ed. Francesca Alesse [Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008], 233–51, 233). Bonazzi also notes that Philo was likely influenced by a “Pythagoreanizing Platonism” in Alexandria – hence Philo’s arithmology – but that Philo went beyond this by refusing to reduce the Ideas to mathematical entities (244).

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Maren R. Niehoff, “Einführung in die Schrift,” in *Abrahams Aufbruch: Philon von Alexandria, De migratione Abrahami*, SAPERE 30, eds. Niehoff and Reinhard Feldmeier (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 3–26, 1–9, who argues for a shift in philosophical orientation over the course of Philo’s career, beginning with a more Platonically oriented phase and ending with a phase more oriented towards Stoicism. Mireille Hadas-Lebel claims that although Philo took Plato’s *Timaeus* as a literary model for his work *De Opificio Mundi*, he employs there primarily Stoic metaphysical concepts (*Philo of Alexandria: A Thinker in the Jewish Diaspora*, SPA 7 [Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012], 169).

¹⁹¹ Maximilian Forschner, “Philo philosophus?,” in *Das Leben des Weisen: Philon von Alexandria, De Abrahamo*, SAPERE 36, ed. Daniel Lanzinger (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 169–91, 169, referencing the designation of Philo offered by Valentin Nikiprowetzky, *Le commentaire de l’Écriture chez Philon d’Alexandrie*, ALGHJ 11 (Leiden: Brill, 1977).

¹⁹² Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 52: Scripture “ist die Urquelle aller Weisheit. Demnach ist das, was uns als Inkonsequenzen, gegeneinander streitende Ideen und Gedanken, nicht miteinander zu verbindende Auslegungen desselben Schriftverses etc. vorkommen, für Philo eine Tugend; denn dadurch wird die Tiefe und Reichhaltigkeit der Schrift bezeugt.” Maren R. Niehoff points out that Philo’s choice of audience likely influenced the philosophical contours of various writings; writing to non-Jewish Romans in the context of his political activity would likely have pushed his work in a different direction than his attempt to interpret the Pentateuch for his religious community in Alexandria (“Jüdische Bibelinterpretation zwischen Homerforschung und Christentum,” in *Alexandria*, COMES 1, eds. Tobias Georges, Felix Albrecht, and Reinhard Feldmeier [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013], 341–60, 353).

¹⁹³ Bonazzi, “Towards Transcendence,” 233, 251. John Dillon, “Philo and Hellenistic Platonism,” in Alesse, *Philo of Alexandria and Post-Aristotelian Philosophy*, 223–32, 225–26, notes that Philo might well have learned from Antiochus of Ascalon, who himself affirmed a commensurability between Platonic and Stoic thought, holding the latter to be latent in the former (cf. also Karl-Heinz Stanzel, “Antiochos [20],” *DNP* 1:773–74, 773, citing Cicero, *Acad. pr.* 2.132, and Sextus Empiricus, *Pry.* 1.235).

certain trends in Middle Platonism,¹⁹⁴ the problem of finding the right ‘label’ for him can only ever be secondary to reading his works in their own regard.¹⁹⁵ In addition, the question of his influence on Paul or other New Testament authors or figures (e.g., Apollos) has also been much discussed, but any suggestion of influence necessarily remains speculative.¹⁹⁶

I. “His Invisible Image, the Most Holy Logos” (Conf. 147)

Be that as it may: when we consider the writings of Philo of Alexandria, we find a usage of εἰκόν which is dissimilar from the Septuagint. Whereas only 5% of the term’s occurrences in Philo’s corpus refer to idols, 62% of the occurrences have a distinctly theological character.¹⁹⁷ In 39% of the occurrences, Philo refers to the creation of humanity “according to the image of God” (e.g., *Opif.* 69, κατ’εἰκόνα θεοῦ), which aligns with the Septuagint text as we know it.¹⁹⁸ In 17% of the occurrences, we find an identification of the image of God

¹⁹⁴ Such as his use of δι’ οὗ to refer to a mediating force or figure between the noetic and sense-perceptible realms (Gregory E. Sterling, “Prepositional Metaphysics in Jewish Wisdom Speculation and Early Christian Liturgical Texts,” in *Wisdom and Logos: Studies in Jewish Thought in Honor of David Winston*, SPhilo 9, eds. David T. Runia and Gregory E. Sterling [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997], 219–38, 231) and the apparent interest in Plato’s *Timaeus* (Hadas-Lebel, *Philo*, 165; Forschner, “Philo philosophus?,” 188–91).

¹⁹⁵ Hadas-Lebel, *Philo*, 176; cf. Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 53, who claims that the material Philo left to us, for example his interpretation of Gen 1:26–17, cannot justifiably be reduced to a formula.

¹⁹⁶ Roland Deines und Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, “Philo und das Neue Testament – Das Neue Testament und Philo: Wechselseitige Wahrnehmungen,” in *Philo und das Neue Testament: Wechselseitige Wahrnehmungen. 1. Internationales Symposium zum Corpus Judaico-Hellenisticum, 1.–4. Mai 2003, Eisenach/Jena*, WUNT 172, eds. Deines and Niebuhr (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 3–18, 4; see also the contributions, in the same volume, by Gregory E. Sterling, “The Place of Philo in the Study of Christian Origins,” and Larry W. Hurtado, “Does Philo Help Explain Early Christianity?” Cf. also Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *JBL* 81 (1962): 1–13. For a comparison of *topoi* common to Philo and the NT, see Folker Siegert, “Philo and the New Testament,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, ed. Adam Kamesar (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 175–209.

¹⁹⁷ The basis of the statistical analysis is *The Philo Index: A Complete Greek Word Index to the Writings of Philo of Alexandria, Lemmatized & Computer-Generated*, eds. Peder Borgen, Kåre Fuglseth, and Roald Skarsten (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000).

¹⁹⁸ One working assumption of this section of the study is that even though we cannot assume that Philo had before him precisely that redaction of the LXX familiar to us, the similarity of the wording of Philo’s Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures vis-à-vis the LXX must have outweighed the dissimilarity. For an extended discussion of the issue, see Anna Passoni Dell’Acqua, “Upon Philo’s Biblical Text and the Septuagint,” in *Italian Studies on Philo of Alexandria*, SPA 1, ed. Francesca Calabi (Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2003), 25–52.

with the Logos,¹⁹⁹ Wisdom, or the Mind of God, such as in *Conf.* 97 (ἡ γοῦν εἰκὼν αὐτοῦ, ὁ ἱερώτατος λόγος),²⁰⁰ which is grounded in the fact that the Logos “has many names” (*Conf.* 146, πολυώνυμος ὑπάρχων).²⁰¹ In 6% of the occurrences, the universe or some part of it is said to be made “according to God’s image” (e.g., *Opif.* 25).

Why does εἰκὼν in Philo refer so seldomly to idols and so often to God’s own image? Certainly, this is due in part to the material Philo selected for commentary. In 27 of 37 titles, he offers commentary on a passage or figure from the Pentateuch, where we find εἰκὼν in Gen 1:26–27 (LXX) and εἰδωλον in Deut 5:8 (LXX).²⁰² Because he focuses on the Pentateuch, he does not write as much about the writings and the prophets, where the use of εἰκὼν in the Septuagint refers primarily to idols.²⁰³ Yet this is surely not the main reason. If we take a close look at Philo’s use of εἰκὼν, we find that ἡ εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ is a significant theological and anthropological concept for him. In fact, it is one of his *chief* concepts.

The first thing to note is that Philo never equates the εἰκὼν θεοῦ with humanity. This begins with the well-known passage in which Philo portrays the Logos involved in the act of creation as the Image of God:

If someone desired to employ plainer words, he would say that the noetic cosmos is nothing other than the Logos of God

εἰ δέ τις ἐθελήσειε γυμνότεροις χρῆσασθαι τοῖς ὀνόμασιν, οὐδὲν ἄν ἕτερον εἰποι τὸν νοητὸν κόσμον εἶναι ἢ θεοῦ λόγον ἤδη

¹⁹⁹ Erwin Preuschen, “Eikōn [*sic*] τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου Kol 1,15,” *ZNW* 18 (1918): 243. “Bei [Philo] ist der göttliche Logos wiederholt als εἰκὼν θεοῦ bezeichnet.”

²⁰⁰ For a representative sample, see *Conf.* 146–147; *Leg. all.* 1.43; *Somn.* 2.45; *Fug.* 101.

²⁰¹ Philo undoubtedly employs the concept of πολυωνυμία, the notion that a divine figure has or might be called by multiple names. The attribution of πολυωνυμία to a deity or metaphysical principle is firmly established in Greek and Roman philosophical traditions, and its endurance can be seen in the fact that its use ranges from Euclides in the fourth cent. B.C. (*apud* Diogenes Laertius 2.106) through the Hellenistic period (*Hom. hymn* 2.18, 32; Callimachus, *Hymn. Dian.* 6–7), including the Stoics (Diogenes Laertius 7.135), and on to Apuleius in the second cent. A.D. (*Metam.* 11.5).

²⁰² Cf. the list of Philo’s works in Niehoff, “Einführung in die Schrift,” 3–26, 9–11. Philo’s allegorical commentary on Genesis consists of 19 works. An additional 8 titles from his corpus treat a passage or figure from the Pentateuch. The concentration on the “books of Moses” was likely grounded, further, in his view of Moses as the intimate friend of God and receptacle of divine revelation; Philo makes much of God’s direct communication with Moses in Num 12:6–8 (*Leg.* 3.103; cf. David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey*, CRINT Section 3, vol. 3 [Assen/Minneapolis: Van Gorcum/Fortress Press, 1993], 38: “Scripture is effectively restricted by Philo to the books of Moses, i.e. the Pentateuch. The remaining books of the Septuagint are attributed to ‘disciples of Moses’, and possess only derivative authority”).

²⁰³ The term εἰκὼν occurs 43 times in the LXX (including two textual variants, but not *Daniel Theodotion*), with 37 of the occurrences located outside the Pentateuch. Of the 6 occurrences in the Pentateuch, only one refers to idols.

when he was already [in the act of] creating; for the noetic city is nothing other than the reasoning of the architect in the moment of considering how to build the city. This is the teaching of Moses, not my own; for when writing in what follows concerning the genesis of the human, he expressly declares that [the human] was patterned after the image of God. But if the part is an image of an image, it is apparent that the whole is, too; and if the entirety of this very cosmos perceptible to sense – which is something greater than the human [image] – is an imitation of the divine image, it is apparent that the archetypal seal, which we said is the noetic cosmos, would itself be the paradigm, the archetypal idea of ideas, the Logos of God.

(*Opif.* 24–25)²⁰⁴

κοσμοποιούντος· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἡ νοητὴ πόλις ἕτερόν τι ἐστὶν ἢ ὁ τοῦ ἀρχιτέκτονος λογισμὸς ἣδη τὴν νοητὴν πόλιν κτίζειν διανοουμένου. τὸ δὲ δόγμα τοῦτο Μωυσέως ἐστίν, οὐκ ἐμόν· τὴν γοῦν ἀνθρώπου γένεσιν ἀναγράφων ἐν τοῖς ἔπειτα διαρρήδην ὁμολογεῖ, ὡς ἄρα κατ' εἰκόνα θεοῦ διευτυπώθη. εἰ δὲ τὸ μέρος εἰκῶν εἰκόνας δῆλον ὅτι καὶ τὸ ὅλον· εἰ δ' ὁ σύμπας οὗτος ὁ αἰσθητὸς κόσμος, ὃς μείζον τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ἐστίν, μίμημα θείας εἰκόνας, δῆλον ὅτι καὶ ἡ ἀρχέτυπος σφραγίς, ὃν φαμεν νοητὸν εἶναι κόσμον, αὐτὸς ἂν εἴη τὸ παράδειγμα, ἀρχέτυπος ἰδέα τῶν ἰδεῶν ὁ θεοῦ λόγος.

“The Logos is God’s image, so humankind is created as an image of the image.”²⁰⁵ In another, intricate passage, Philo elucidates succinctly the relation between God, the Image, and the human mind made according to the Image:

Therefore, speaking properly about these things, he says, “The birds, however, he did not divide,” labeling as “birds” the two types of reason, winged and given by nature to ponder lofty things, the one being the archetypal [reason] above us, and the other an imitation, which is the one existing in us. And Moses calls the one above us the image of God, yet the one within us is that which receives the impress of the image. “For God made the human,” he says, not the image of God, but “according to the image.” Accordingly, the mind in each one of us – which is indeed properly and truthfully “human” – is an impression two steps removed from the one who has created, yet in the middle is the

Εἰπὼν οὖν τὰ πρόποντα περὶ τούτων ἐπιλέγει· “τὰ δὲ ὄρνεα οὐ διεῖλεν,” ὄρνεα καλῶν τοὺς πτηνοὺς καὶ πεφυκότας μετεωροπολεῖν δύο λόγους, ἓνα μὲν ἀρχέτυπον τὸν ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς, ἕτερον δὲ μίμημα τὸν καθ' ἡμᾶς ὑπάρχοντα. καλεῖ δὲ Μωυσεὺς τὸν μὲν ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς εἰκόνα θεοῦ, τὸν δὲ καθ' ἡμᾶς τῆς εἰκόνας ἐκμαγεῖον. “ἐποίησε” γὰρ φησὶν “ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον” οὐχὶ εἰκόνα θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ “κατ' εἰκόνα”· ὥστε τὸν καθ' ἑκάστον ἡμῶν νοῦν, ὃς δὴ κυρίως καὶ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ἄνθρωπός ἐστι, τρίτον εἶναι τύπον ἀπὸ τοῦ πεποιηκότος, τὸν δὲ μέσον παράδειγμα μὲν τούτου, ἀπεικόνισμα δὲ ἐκείνου.

²⁰⁴ For the line of §25 that begins with εἰ δὲ τὸ μέρος εἰκῶν εἰκόνας, I depart from the text of Cohn and Wendland and follow the reading found in David. T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria: On the Creation of the Cosmos according to Moses. Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series 1 (Leiden/Boston/Cologne: Brill, 2001). See *ibid.*, 150, for a discussion of the textual issue. For a contrary argument, see Roberto Radice, “Commentario a La creazione del Mondo secondo Mosè,” in Roberto Radice and Giovanni Reale, *Filone di Alessandria: La filosofia mosaica* (Milan: Rusconi, 1987), 231–313, 243–44.

²⁰⁵ Runia, *Philo of Alexandria: On the Creation of the Cosmos according to Moses*, 149.

model of the former, which is the copy of the latter.
(*Her.* 230–231)

For Philo, the Logos is the εἰκὼν θεοῦ who stands between God and the human: it is an image which simultaneously has God as its model and yet also functions as the model for that which is truly human, for the human is the ἐκμαγεῖον, “that which receives the impression” of the divine Image. The human (mind) is therefore not itself the εἰκὼν θεοῦ, but rather “two steps removed” from God.²⁰⁶ This does not, however, entail a degradation of the human mind; on the contrary, it is the “ruling part of the soul” (ψυχῆς ἡγεμονικόν) and it functions “like a God” within the human (*Leg.* 1.39–40; *Opif.* 69). Further, it is only the mind that bears the stamp of the Image of God; the body is excluded from this (*Opif.* 69, 135, 145–146).

Furthermore, it is precisely on the basis of the body that Philo distinguishes between the “heavenly human” (οὐράνιος ἄνθρωπος) and the “earthly human” (γῆϊνος ἄνθρωπος) in *Leg.* 1.31–32. The “heavenly human” is mind unmingled with body, whereas the “earthly” one is the mind that has entered the body but has not been mixed with it so as to lose itself entirely.²⁰⁷ In addition, only the “heavenly human” has been “stamped” with the Image of God, whereas the “earthly human” is merely a molded work (πλάσμα).²⁰⁸ Though the “idea” of the human mind need no further formation, the embodied instantiation of it certainly does. It is in this connection that it becomes clear that the εἰκὼν θεοῦ is responsible not only for the creation of the human mind, but also its continuing formation, as is demonstrated by *De confusione linguarum*. When he states that the ‘unity of language’ in Gen 11:1 is a depravity and spiritual disharmony common to all people (*Conf.* 15), Philo presents its opposite; namely,

²⁰⁶ Two seeming exceptions to this basic principle can be found in *Virt.* 205 and *Mos.* 2.65. In the former, Philo says that the first “earthly human” came to be an image of God, “so to speak, on the basis of the sovereign mind within the soul” ([θεοῦ] τρόπον τινὰ γενόμενος εἰκὼν κατὰ τὸν ἡγεμόνα νοῦν ἐν ψυχῇ). I take the expression τρόπον τις to constitute a relativization of the sentence such that Philo is *not* staking the claim that the human simply “is” the image of God. In the latter passage under consideration, Philo says that the human race’s sovereignty over earthly creatures is a close imitation of God’s power, and it is in this sense a “manifest image of the invisible nature.” Without splitting hairs over a possible distinction between “being” the image and “having” something which qualifies as an image, one can safely say that if Philo does indeed state here that humanity “is” the image of God, then this passage represents the exception which proves the rule of Philo’s conception of the εἰκὼν θεοῦ.

²⁰⁷ *Leg.* 1.32: ἀνθρώπων δὲ τὸν ἐκ γῆς λογιστέον εἶναι νοῦν εἰσκρινόμενον σώματι, οὐπω δ’ εἰσκεκρμένον.

²⁰⁸ *Leg.* 1.31: διὸ τὸν μὲν οὐράνιον φησιν οὐ πεπλάσθαι, κατ’ εἰκόνα δὲ τετυπῶσθαι θεοῦ, τὸν δὲ γῆϊνον πλάσμα, ἀλλ’ οὐ γέννημα, εἶναι τοῦ τεχνίτου.

those who live a life of virtue and have thus become the “sons” of the divine Logos (*Conf.* 41, 43). He reiterates this later on:

But those who enjoy the knowledge of the One are rightly addressed as “sons of God,” just as Moses, too, agrees to when he claims: “You are sons of the Lord God” and “God has begotten you” and “Is not this one himself your father?” [...]

οἱ δὲ ἐπιστήμη κεκρημένοι τοῦ ἐνὸς υἱοῦ θεοῦ προσαγορεύονται δεόντως, καθὰ καὶ Μωσῆς ὁμολογεῖ φάσκων· “υἱοὶ ἔστε κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ” καὶ “θεὸν τὸν γεννήσαντά σε” καὶ “οὐκ αὐτὸς οὗτός σου πατήρ; [...]

Yet if it however happens to be so that someone is not yet worthy of being called a “son of God,” let him strive to fashion himself according to God’s firstborn Logos [...].

κἂν μὴδέπω μέντοι τυγχάνῃ τις ἀξιοχρεῶς ὢν υἱὸς θεοῦ προσαγορεύεσθαι, σπουδαζέτω κοσμεῖσθαι κατὰ τὸν πρωτόγονον αὐτοῦ λόγον [...].

For even if we have not yet become worthy to be named “children of God,” I would have you know that we may be children of his invisible image, the most holy Logos; for God’s image is the firstborn Logos. (*Conf.* 145, 146, 147–148)

καὶ γὰρ εἰ μήπω ἱκανοὶ θεοῦ παῖδες νομίζεσθαι γεγόναμεν, ἀλλὰ τοι τῆς ἀειδοῦς εἰκόνος αὐτοῦ, λόγου τοῦ ἱερωτάτου· θεοῦ γὰρ εἰκὼν λόγος ὁ πρεσβύτατος.

Though the human mind be made “according to God’s image,” further formation with the εἰκὼν θεοῦ as one’s model is necessary to become a “son of God.” Although this task falls to the individual – conveyed by the phrase “let him strive to fashion himself” (σπουδαζέτω κοσμεῖσθαι) – it is clear that the εἰκὼν θεοῦ plays a decisive role in continuing the formation of the human begun in the act of creation.

The scope of the εἰκὼν θεοῦ as a model reaches far beyond the creation of the human, however. In the aforementioned passage (*Opif.* 24–25), Philo states that the world discerned only by the intellect (νοητὸς κόσμος),²⁰⁹ akin to an architect’s mental blueprint, is the cognitive act of God in the process of creation. This noetic cosmos must be a reality within the mind of God, for otherwise it would exist *a se* apart from God (*Opif.* 17–19, 20!).²¹⁰ This noetic

²⁰⁹ Dillon, “Philo and Hellenistic Platonism,” 230, notes that Philo presents the first occurrence of the concept νοητὸς κόσμος, although he believes it to be “largely prefigured” in the νοητὸν ζῶον of *Tim.* 39e (230, n. 15).

²¹⁰ Ludovica De Luca, *Il Dio architetto di Filone di Alessandria (De opificio mundi 17–20)*, *Temi metafisici e problemi del pensiero antico. Studi e testi* 147 (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 2021), 80, 221. Cf. also Peder Borgen, “Philo of Alexandria,” in *Jewish Writing of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus*, CRINT Section 2, vol. 2, ed. Michael E. Stone (Assen/Philadelphia: Van Gorcum/Fortress Press, 1984), 233–82, 265: “[...] the model of the city is not material, but an image in the mind. The parable then expresses the idea that the model of this world is the intelligible world conceived by God before He created the sensible world.” Vis-à-vis the uncertain relation between the παράδειγμα and the Demiurge in Plato’s *Timaeus*, Borgen continues:

cosmos is the Logos or Image of God, and thus the entire cosmos perceptible to our senses is an image of the divine Image.²¹¹ As Philo writes in *Spec.* 1.81, this “Logos is the image of God through which the entire cosmos was fashioned” (λόγος δ’ ἐστὶν εἰκὼν θεοῦ, δι’ οὗ σύμπας ὁ κόσμος ἐδημιουργεῖτο).

It is noteworthy that regardless of whatever shifts might have taken place in Philo’s thought throughout his career,²¹² the understanding of the εἰκὼν θεοῦ as the mediator of and model for creation is not only attested in these two works from Philo’s later period, but also in one from the earliest stage of his career: the *Legum allegoriae*. In Book 3, Philo speaks of the Logos as the Image of God and its significance as an archetype of creation. Interpreting the Logos as the “shadow of God” implied in the Hebrew name “Bezalel,” he writes:

The “shadow of God,” however, is his Logos, by which, as it were, God made use of an instrument in creating the world. Yet this shadow and, as it were, the copy [of God], is the archetype of other things. For just as God is the model of the image, which has now been called “shadow,” so too has the image become the model of other things, as he made clear even at the beginning of the giving of the law, saying: “And God made the human according to the image of God,” [speaking,] that is, of the image which on the one hand had been patterned after God, yet on the other of the human [patterned] after the image which received the power of a model.

(*Leg.* 3.96)²¹³

σκιά θεοῦ δὲ ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ ἐστίν, ᾧ καθάπερ ὄργανῳ προσχρησάμενος ἔκοσμοποιεῖ. αὕτη δὲ ἡ σκιά καὶ τὸ ὡσανεὶ ἀπεικόνισμα ἐτέρων ἐστὶν ἀρχέτυπον· ὡσπερ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς παράδειγμα τῆς εἰκόνας, ἦν σκιάν νυνὶ κέκληκεν, οὕτως ἡ εἰκὼν ἄλλων γίνεται παράδειγμα, ὡς καὶ ἐναρχόμενος τῆς νομοθεσίας ἐδήλωσεν εἰπών· “καὶ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον κατ’ εἰκόνα θεοῦ,” ὡς τῆς μὲν εἰκόνας κατὰ τὸν θεὸν ἀπεικονισθείσης, τοῦ δὲ ἀνθρώπου κατὰ τὴν εἰκόνα λαβοῦσαν δύναμιν παραδείγματος.

That the role of the εἰκὼν as the model and archetype of “other beings” includes not only the human being but also the cosmos (cf. ἔκοσμοποιεῖ and ἐτέρων ἐστὶν ἀρχέτυπον) is stated even more clearly in *De somniis*, another early work. Because the “essence of all things was utterly without shape” in the beginning, God imposed order upon it and “perfecting the whole, he sealed the cosmos with [his] image and ideal form, namely his own Logos” (*Somn.* 2.45, ἀσημάτιστον οὔσαν τὴν τῶν πάντων οὐσίαν [...] τελειώσας τὸν ὅλον ἐσφράγισε κόσμον εἰκόνι καὶ ἰδέᾳ, τῷ ἑαυτοῦ λόγῳ).

Just as the εἰκὼν θεοῦ had a role not only in the creation of humanity but also its continuing formation, so too does the influence of the εἰκὼν over the

[...] Philo is the first known [author] to state explicitly that the model, the intelligible world, is God’s creation” (ibid.). Cf. also Dillon, “Philo and Hellenistic Platonism,” 230–31.

²¹¹ For the contrary argument that the Logos does not coincide with the noetic cosmos, see Radice, “Commentario a La creazione del Mondo secondo Mosè,” 243–44.

²¹² Cf. Niehoff, “Einführung in die Schrift,” 3–26.

²¹³ Cf. *Conf.* 62–63.

cosmos itself extend beyond the act of creation. Indeed, it plays a central role in God's governance of the cosmos.

But the divine Logos who is high above these [sc. the cherubim] has not obtained a visible form, being indeed like unto nothing perceptible by sense, but being himself the image of God, supreme as the eldest of all noetic realities, he is closest to the only truly existing One, placed nearest [to him] without anyone taking the place of a dividing interval. For it is said: "I will speak to you from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubim," and thus the Logos is the charioteer of the [divine] powers, but the one speaking is mounted [upon the chariot], commanding the charioteer how to steer the universe rightly. (Fug. 101)

ὁ δ' ὑπεράνω τούτων λόγος θεῶς εἰς ὄρατὴν οὐκ ἤλθεν ἰδέαν, ἄτε μηδενὶ τῶν κατ' αἴσθησιν ἐμφορῆς ὄν, ἀλλ' αὐτὸς εἰκὼν ὑπάρχων θεοῦ, τῶν νοητῶν ἀπαξ ἀπάντων ὁ πρεσβύτατος, ὁ ἐγγυτάτω, μηδενὸς ὄντος μεθορίου διαστήματος, τοῦ μόνου, ὁ ἔστιν ἀψευδῶς, ἀφιδρυμένος. λέγεται γάρ· "λαλήσω σοι ἄνωθεν τοῦ ἰλαστηρίου, ἀνά μέσον τῶν δυεῖν Χερουβίμ," ὥσθ' ἠνίοχον μὲν εἶναι τῶν δυνάμεων τὸν λόγον, ἐπὶ τὸν δὲ τὸν λαλοῦντα, ἐπικελευόμενον τῷ ἠνίοχῳ τὰ πρὸς ὀρθὴν τοῦ παντός ἠνίοχησιν.

That Philo applies to the εἰκὼν θεοῦ the metaphor of a charioteer to describe the governance of the cosmos – applied to Zeus by Dio Chrysostom in his *Borysthenitic Discourse*²¹⁴ – displays the crucial status of the Image: though God gives the orders, it is the εἰκὼν who executes the governance of the universe, and without it, no one would be holding the reins. Should anyone say that the Image of God is replaceable – could not God simply take the reins? – Philo expresses elsewhere the necessity of the εἰκὼν with a metaphor borrowed from Stoic physics:

Though "reasoning" is but a brief name, it is the most perfect and divine work, being a fragment of the soul of the universe, or, to speak in a manner that is more devout for those who philosophize according to Moses, that which has received the impress of the divine Image. (Mut. 223–224)

λογισμὸς δὲ βραχὺ μὲν ὄνομα, τελειότατον δὲ καὶ θεϊότατον ἔργον, τῆς τοῦ παντός ψυχῆς ἀπόσπασμα ἢ, ὅπερ ὀσιώτερον εἰπεῖν τοῖς κατὰ Μωυσῆν φιλοσοφοῦσιν, εἰκόνας θείας ἐκμαγεῖον ἐμφορές.

Here, Philo applies the Stoic description of the human soul as a "fragment of the soul of the universe"²¹⁵ to his conception of the εἰκὼν θεοῦ and its relation to the human rational faculty. Not only does human reasoning resemble the εἰκὼν, but the εἰκὼν is, in this comparison, akin to the soul of the cosmos. As

²¹⁴ Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 36.40 (Feldmeier, *Gottes Geist*, 86).

²¹⁵ The Stoics Chrysippus, Apollodorus, and Posidonius all maintained that the human soul is an ἀπόσπασμα of the soul of the universe (Diogenes Laertius 7.142–143 [= *SVF* 2.633]).

any living organism would die if bereft of its soul, so too would the cosmos ‘die’ if were not enlivened by the Image as its ‘soul.’²¹⁶

Notably, although the εἰκὼν θεοῦ possesses such a central role in Philo’s theology, it can only provide an incomplete knowledge of God.²¹⁷ There are two chief reasons for this. First, it is possible to know *that* God is, but not *what* God is; in other words, humans cannot attain knowledge of God’s essence. Due to human weakness, no one can ascend to God and behold God directly. Akin to the sun, anyone who wagers a direct vision will be blinded by the light’s rays (*Opif.* 69–71); thus, the lot of humans is “to comprehend that God’s being is incomprehensible (ἀκατάληπτος)” and “to know [lit. “see”] this very thing, that God is unseen (ἀόρατος)” (*Post.* 15).²¹⁸ Indeed, some knowledge of God is possible, just as “light is seen by light” and thus the sun is known through the sun (*Praem.* 45), but this does not mean that a direct vision of the sun or God is possible. Human weakness, therefore, stands in the way of direct and perfect knowledge of God.

The second reason for humanity’s imperfect knowledge is precisely that it is *mediated* knowledge. Although the Logos and εἰκὼν of God is, as it were, the “stamp” impressed upon the cosmos, the “form” given to previously disordered matter, it cannot provide an avenue to the direct perception of God’s essence. In *Leg.* 3.97–103, Philo describes the philosophical attempt to draw inferences about the divine nature from what one observes in the cosmos; namely, the “physical theology” of the *theologia tripertita*.²¹⁹ Picking up again the allegorical interpretation of the name “Bezalel,” Philo remarks that perceiving God through his works is like observing the shadow cast by an object rather than observing the object itself. There is a reliable correspondence between the two, of course (*Leg.* 3.100, γνωρίζει [θεόν], ὡς ἂν ἀπὸ σκιᾶς τὸ μένον), yet knowing God through created reality is inferior to knowing God directly, akin to the way in which God spoke directly to Moses (cf. Num 12:6–8). Indeed, the human soul may be “fed” by the Logos, but the “true

²¹⁶ Giovanni Reale and Roberto Radice point in this regard to *Fug.* 110, where Philo states that the Logos ‘wears’ the elements of the cosmos as a garment (*La genesi e la natura della “filosofia Mosaica”*: *Struttura, metodo e fondamenti del pensiero filosofico e teologico di Filone di Alessandria. Monografia Introduttiva ai diciannove trattati del Commentario allegorico alla Bibbia*, in Reale and Radice, *Filone di Alessandria: La filosofia Mosaica*, v–cxli, c).

²¹⁷ Two quite helpful treatments of the matter can be found in Francesca Calabi, “Conoscibilità e inconoscibilità di Dio in Filone di Alessandria,” in *Arrhetos Theos: L’ineffabilità del primo principio nel medio platonismo*, ed. Calabi (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2002), 35–54, and eadem, *Filone di Alessandria*, Pensatori 32 (Rome: Carocci, 2013), 78–82.

²¹⁸ καταλαβεῖν ὅτι ἀκατάληπτος ὁ κατὰ τὸ εἶναι θεὸς [...] καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἰδεῖν ὅτι ἐστὶν ἀόρατος.

²¹⁹ Cf. Varro, *Ant. rer. div. frg.* 6, 8 (ed. Cardauns): *theologia physicon/physicon*.

philosopher” will strive to obtain knowledge directly from God, rather than through secondary agents or objects (*Leg.* 3.176–177, 206–208).²²⁰

Whereas the cosmogonic relevance of understanding the Logos as the εἰκὼν θεοῦ came to the fore in *Opif.* 24–25, we can now see its epistemic relevance. As Plato before him, Philo knows that “an image does not resemble its archetypal model in every way” (*Opif.* 71, οὐ σύμπασα εἰκὼν ἐμφορῆς ἀρχετύπου παραδείγματι). If the Logos *qua* Image leaves traces in the cosmos from which humans may make inferences concerning God’s being, then the resulting knowledge must necessarily have the epistemic value of an image vis-à-vis its model;²²¹ that is, God’s essence and mediated knowledge of it will never be fully commensurate with each other.

II. Summary

The εἰκὼν θεοῦ is described not as the *product* of the creation of the cosmos, but rather as *the sole mediator* in the act of creation and thus as a participant in the process. In Plato’s *Timaeus*, the perceptible world is an εἰκὼν made according to a παράδειγμα. In this way, Plato’s εἰκὼν remains part of the immanent realm; in Philo, the one true εἰκὼν θεοῦ is elevated to the transcendent realm. In addition, the εἰκὼν θεοῦ plays a decisive, integral role not only in the act of creation, but also in the preservation of the cosmos and the improvement of the individual human. As for the human itself, it is not the *imago dei*, but rather has been created “according to the image of God” as its model. Lastly, the Image can lead to knowledge of God, albeit indirect and thus imperfect knowledge.

E. Plutarch of Chaeronea

The philosopher Plutarch of Chaeronea (ca. A.D. 45–120), like Philo, attempted the philosophical interpretation of inherited religious traditions without discarding them²²² and also did not abscond political responsibilities: he

²²⁰ Cf. Georgios F. Farandos, *Kosmos und Logos nach Philon von Alexandria* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1976), 232: “Für die Gotteserkenntnis ist die Eikon-Erkenntnis oder Logos-Erkenntnis ein Vorstadium [...]”

²²¹ Calabi, *Filone di Alessandria*, 78, notes that the three *viae* (*eminentiae*, *negationis*, and *analogiae*) can only provide “blurry and imperfect images” of God.

²²² The *Amatorius* dialogue may serve as a fine example. In *Amat.* 756b, he admonishes Pemptides not to upset their unalterable conviction concerning the gods and to let the “ancient faith of [their] fathers suffice” (ἀρκεῖ γὰρ ἡ πάτριος καὶ παλαιὰ πίστις); in 757b, he rejects the allegorical interpretation of these traditions, which would reduce the gods to human affects, as an “abyss of godlessness” (he does, however, apply allegory to Egyptian and thus ‘foreign’ religious traditions; cf. *De Iside et Osiride*); in *Amat.* 761e–762a, he suggests that even though myths cannot serve as the sole basis of faith, they can nevertheless contain

was sent on diplomatic missions to both Corinth and Rome, also holding philosophical lectures in the latter.²²³ The prolific writer left behind a body of work which, among our extant sources, is the second largest corpus from antiquity, second only to Galen; if the later catalogue of Lamprias can be trusted, then the extant works constitute a mere half of Plutarch's literary production.²²⁴ That his philosophical activity was germane to religious concerns can be seen not only in his writings, but also in the biographical circumstance that he was granted the honor of becoming a priest of Apollo at Delphi, a lifelong appointment held simultaneously by only two persons.²²⁵

In comparison to Philo, determining Plutarch's philosophical profile is somewhat easier. Although he was indebted to Pythagoreanism²²⁶ and Stoicism for certain formulations – despite his polemic against the Stoics²²⁷ – his orientation toward and appreciation for the Platonic tradition is beyond debate. Although this Middle Platonist diverged from Plato in other regards, Plato's notion of an *ὁμοίωσις θεῷ*, an assimilation to God as the highest goal of life (*Theaet.* 176a–177a), provided Plutarch the basic religious drive of his life and work, as can be gleaned from Plutarch, *Sera* 550d–e. Here, he appeals directly to Plato and refers to God as the *παράδειγμα*, the model of all good things and of virtue, and that there is nothing greater (*οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ὃ τι μείζον*) than enjoying God by attaining virtue by way of imitating God and pursuing all which is fair and good in God.²²⁸

elements of truth and be helpful for faith. Franco Ferrari, “Metafisica e teologia nel medio-platonismo,” *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia* 70, no. 2 (2015): 321–38, 323–24, refers to identification of the intelligible realm with Apollo in Plutarch's *De E apud Delphos* as a “kind of fusion of platonic ‘onto-theology’ and traditional religiosity.”

²²³ Herwig Görgemanns, “Einführung,” in *Plutarch: Drei religionsphilosophische Schriften*, Sammlung Tusculum, ed. Herwig Görgemanns in collaboration with Reinhard Feldmeier and Jan Assmann (Düsseldorf/Zürich: Artemis & Winkler, 2003), 293–304, 298.

²²⁴ Görgemanns, *ibid.*, 299; cf. John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996), 187–88.

²²⁵ Görgemanns, “Einführung,” 298. Further, Görgemanns notes: “Religiöse Erkenntnis, also die intellektuelle Durchdringung des Gottesglaubens, erscheint Plutarch am Ende als der eigentliche und höchste Gottesdienst” (*ibid.*, 301).

²²⁶ Plutarch's teacher, Ammonius, is perhaps responsible not only for importing a serious interest in Plato from Alexandria to Athens, but also a vestige of Pythagoreanism (Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 184, 189–92), which had become integrated into the Alexandrian Platonism of the first cent. B.C. (Bonazzi, “Towards Transcendence,” 244.)

²²⁷ Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 186; cf. Plutarch's three writings *De stoicorum repugnantiis*, *Stoicos absurdiora poetis dicere*, and *De communibus notitiis contra Stoicos*. Dillon notes, further, that Epicurean philosophy seems to be the only tradition that was firmly excluded from Plutarch's philosophical project (189); cf. *De latenter vivendo* and *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum*.

²²⁸ *Sera* 550e: *οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ὃ τι μείζον ἄνθρωπος ἀπολαύειν θεοῦ πέφυκεν ἢ τὸ μιμήσει καὶ διώξει τῶν ἐν ἐκείνῳ καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν εἰς ἀρετὴν καθίστασθαι*.

When we consider Plutarch's notion of an εἰκὼν θεοῦ, we are dealing with a phenomenon wherein the noetic realm manifests itself in the cosmos.²²⁹ In Plutarch's distinction between a "noetic/unseen" (τὸ νοητόν/ἀόρατον)²³⁰ realm and a "sense-perceptible/generated" one (τὸ αἰσθητόν/γενητόν), an εἰκὼν serves the purpose of displaying something of the noetic realm by way of using sense-perceptible reality as a medium (cf. *Def. orac.* 416d; *De E* 393d). The cosmos and time are both εἰκόνες θεοῦ, the former being an image of God's essence and the latter of God's motion (*Quaest. plat.* 1007c–d).²³¹ Because the cosmos itself is such an εἰκὼν, one may see phenomena such as the movement of the heavenly bodies and the dynamic vitality of water and earth as "sense-perceptible imitations of noetic realities" (*Tranq. an.* 477c–d, αἰσθητὰ μιμήματα νοητῶν).²³² Although all heavenly bodies could serve this purpose, Plutarch has a particular preference for the sun as an image of the noetic world, for it is a "most beautiful image" (περικαλλὲς εἶδωλον) of God in the heavens (*Princ. iner.* 780f), which displays everything good and divine and blessed and that for which all nature longs (*Fac.* 944e).²³³

I. "Generation in Matter is an Image of Being" (*Is. Os.* 372f)

One writing in particular stands out as far as Plutarch's understanding of images is concerned: *De Iside et Osiride*. Plutarch addresses this treatise to Clea, a priestess of Isis (*Is. Os.* 351e–f) who has also been initiated into the mysteries of Osiris by her parents and is the leader of the Thyiades, the female participants in the cult of Dionysus (364e). This treatise may be seen as Plutarch's own attempt to interpret the myth of Isis and Osiris "as befits the divine and philosophically" (ὡσίως καὶ φιλοσόφως), just as he encourages Clea to do with all Egyptian mythology (*Is. Os.* 355c). Although some details in the dating of the treatise are disputed, it is generally agreed that the treatise was composed

²²⁹ For a summary of the ways εἰκὼν and related terms can be used in other contexts in Plutarch's corpus, see Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, *Plutarchs Denken in Bildern: Studien zur literarischen, philosophischen und religiösen Funktion des Bildhaften*, STAC 14 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 25–39.

²³⁰ Cf. *Gen. Socr.* 591b; *Quaest. plat.* 1001e; Hirsch-Luipold, *ibid.*, 163–64, points out that Plutarch's τὸ νοητόν/τὸ ἀόρατον replaces Plato's world of Ideas.

²³¹ Although merely the effects of time can be seen, but not time itself, Plutarch nevertheless pairs time with the realm of generation (τὸ γενητόν) and eternity with the noetic realm (τὸ νοητόν) (*Quaest. plat.* 1007d). Time might be unseen, but it is not an entity belonging to Plutarch's unseen realm.

²³² Plutarch even considers the crocodile to be an imitation (μίμημα) of God (*Is. Os.* 381b).

²³³ On Plutarch's preference for the sun, see Hirsch-Luipold, *Plutarchs Denken in Bildern*, 165–68.

sometime between A.D. 115 and 119 and thus shortly before Plutarch's death in A.D. 120.²³⁴ The date is significant for two reasons:

1. The treatise was composed during Plutarch's time as one of two priests of Apollo at Delphi,²³⁵ an office he would have held for roughly twenty years at the time of composition, if Klauck's estimate of his inauguration into the office in A.D. 95 is accurate.²³⁶ While the inauguration was likely not the initial cause of Plutarch's disposition toward an "alliance"²³⁷ between religion and philosophy, it stands to reason that this cultic milieu would have provided favorable conditions to further nourish such an alliance. As can be gleaned from *Is. Os.* 351e–f, a key feature of Plutarch's religious philosophy is the notion that the intellectual comprehension of faith in God is the highest form of worship.²³⁸ This, combined with Plutarch's efforts to interpret myths and rituals "as befits the divine and philosophically" so as to avoid falling into superstitious fear of the gods or into atheism (*Is. Os.* 355c–d), offers us a view of the "alliance" of religion and philosophy from two angles: the highest form of religious observance is the philosophical search for the truth about the gods; philosophy, in its turn, serves the ends of religion insofar as it seeks, through a proper view of the gods, to uphold religious faith without letting it devolve into absurdity or be discarded.²³⁹

2. The second reason that the dating of the *De Iside et Osiride* is important has already been suggested by the foregoing remarks: if Plutarch's statements in *De Iside et Osiride* summarize his philosophy of religion well, then it would stand to reason to characterize it as at least one of his "programmatically" treatises, as Mauro Bonazzi puts it.²⁴⁰ Further, if this "programmatically" treatise stems from the end of Plutarch's life, then one can follow the more pointed suggestion of

²³⁴ Görgemanns, "Einführung," 340, estimates A.D. 115; J. Gwynn Griffiths, "Introduction," in *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride: Edited with an Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, ed. Griffiths (Cambridge: Univ. of Wales Press, 1970), 1–110, 17, estimates A.D. 118–119; Franco Ferrari, *Dio, idee e materia: La struttura del cosmo in Plutarco di Cheroinea*, *Strumenti per la ricerca plutarchea* 3 (Naples: M. D'Auria, 1995), 73–74, dates it ca. A.D. 120.

²³⁵ Görgemanns, "Einführung," 298.

²³⁶ Hans-Josef Klauck, *Die religiöse Umwelt des Urchristentums II* (Stuttgart/Berlin/Cologne: Kohlhammer, 1996), 126. In A.D. 95, Plutarch would have been roughly 50 years old.

²³⁷ Mauro Bonazzi, *À la recherche des idées: Platonisme et philosophie hellénistique d'Antiochus à Plotin*, *Histoire des doctrines de l'Antiquité classique* 46 (Paris: Vrin, 2015), 101.

²³⁸ See above, n. 225.

²³⁹ Ferrari, *Dio, idee e materia*, 19–20, notes that the opening of *De Iside* is the "key" to Plutarch's understanding of the rapport between cultic practice and theoretical knowledge.

²⁴⁰ "[...] un des traités 'programmatically' de la philosophie doctrinale de Plutarque" (Bonazzi, *À la recherche des idées*, 98).

Herwig Görgemanns that *De Iside et Osiride* is a “testament of [Plutarch’s] worldview.”²⁴¹

In sum: *De Iside et Osiride* is crucial for an estimation of Plutarch’s philosophy of religion and one facet of its significance is that he discusses images multiple times.

The opening paragraphs of *De Iside* are crucial not only for understanding the purpose of the treatise, but also for understanding Plutarch’s approach to philosophical engagement with religion. He writes to Clea at the beginning:

All good things, O Clea, must be requested of the gods by beings endowed with a mind, but most of all we pray that we might perchance be granted a share, by the gods themselves, of knowledge of them as far as it is within human reach. For humankind can receive nothing greater, nor can God grant anything more worthy of reverence, than the truth. God gives to humankind the other things for which it asks, but of mind and insight he gives a share, for these are his very own possession and they stand at his disposal. [...] Therefore, the attempt to reach the truth, but most of all the truth about the gods, is itself a yearning for the divine, for acquiring knowledge of holy matters includes learning and inquiry and is a more holy labor than any observance of religious duties and temple wardenship.

(*Is. Os.* 351c–e)

Πάντα μὲν, ὦ Κλέα, δεῖ τὰγαθὰ τοὺς νοῦν ἔχοντας αἰτεῖσθαι παρὰ τῶν θεῶν, μάλιστα δὲ τῆς περὶ αὐτῶν ἐπιστήμης ὅσον ἐφικτόν ἐστιν ἀνθρώποις μετιόντες εὐχόμεθα τυγχάνειν παρ’ αὐτῶν ἐκείνων· ὡς οὐθὲν ἀνθρώπῳ λαβεῖν μείζον, οὐ χαρίσασθαι θεῷ σεμνότερον ἀληθείας. τᾶλλα μὲν γὰρ ἀνθρώποις ὁ θεὸς ὧν δέονται δίδωσιν, νοῦ δὲ καὶ φρονήσεως μεταδίδωσιν, οἰκεῖα κεκτημένος τὰτα καὶ χρόμενος. [...] διὸ θεϊότητος ὄρεξις ἐστὶν ἢ τῆς ἀληθείας μάλιστα δὲ τῆς περὶ θεῶν ἔφεσις, ὥσπερ ἀνάληψιν ἱερῶν τὴν μάθησιν ἔχουσα καὶ τὴν ζήτησιν, ἀγνείας τε πάσης καὶ νεωκορίας ἔργον ὀσιώτερον [...].

A few sentences later, Plutarch specifies this further by stating that the *telos* of service in shrines is “the knowledge of the One who is the First, the Lord, the Noetic One” (352a, ἢ τοῦ πρώτου καὶ κυρίου καὶ νοητοῦ γνῶσις). Already here, it should be clear that the God who stands behind various religious phenomena is not identical with them, for he is “first,” prior to generation, and because this God is “noetic,” he is not subject to generation and decay, nor to the passions. Because myths and rituals imply that the gods *are* subject to generation, decay, and suffering, it is clear that if one truly desires to reach this one conceptual God, then myths and rituals need to be interpreted “as befits the divine and philosophically.” In addition, Plutarch points out in *Is. Os.* 351e that the “eternal life” that God possesses consists in God’s knowledge. If God’s knowledge and contemplation of that which exists were to be taken away from him, then God’s immortality would not really be life (βίος) but rather the mere passage of time (χρόνος). Therefore, it is not only God’s imperishable and noetic nature that separates him from humans and the phenomenal world, but also

²⁴¹ “[...] weltanschauliches Testament” (Görgemanns, “Einführung,” 340).

the possession of knowledge.²⁴² There is, therefore, a metaphysical dualism (noetic realm/sensible realm), and the God of this noetic realm is the locus of perfect knowledge. As Mauro Bonazzi has recently pointed out, this metaphysical dualism grounds what he calls a “metaphysical skepticism”; if there are skeptic tendencies in Plutarch’s thought, then it is not first and foremost because of a lack of trust in the capacities of the human senses – in comparison with other forms of skepticism – but rather the recognition of an ontological divide that bears upon human knowledge.²⁴³ One may think in this connection of Ammonius’ remarks at the conclusion of *De E apud Delphos*, according to which the knowledge of divine being has as its counterpart the recognition of human weakness (*De E* 394c).

Now, if there is such a metaphysical gap and the divine is on one side and we are on the other, then how can this gap be bridged? How can humans really have knowledge of the divine? This is one of the chief concerns of *De Iside et Osiride*, and the myth of Isis and Osiris plays a critical role for Plutarch in answering this question. As Plutarch says in *Is. Os.* 354b–c, Egyptian philosophy is largely “concealed in myths and in words containing vague reflections and adumbrations of the truth” (τῆς φιλοσοφίας ἐπικεκρυμμένης τὰ πολλὰ μύθοις καὶ λόγοις ἀμυδρὰς ἐμφάσεις τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ διαφάσεις ἔχουσιν) and “their theology has an enigmatic sort of wisdom” (ὡς αἰνιγματώδη σοφίαν τῆς θεολογίας αὐτῶν ἐχούσης).²⁴⁴

Though Plutarch relays the myth of Osiris’ dismemberment at the hands of his adversary Typhon at a later point of the treatise (cf. 353f–354a; 357f–358a), he states near the beginning that Osiris is “the holy Logos” (ὁ ἱερός λόγος) whom Typhon tears apart, scatters, and whom Isis then reassembles and mediates to those who are to be initiated into her mysteries.

For “Isis” is a Greek word and “Typhon” is as well; because he is an enemy of the goddess and blinded through ignorance and deception, he tears apart and scatters the holy Logos,²⁴⁵ whom the goddess collects and

Ἑλληνικὸν γὰρ ἡ Ἴσις ἐστὶ καὶ ὁ Τυφὼν, πολεμῖος ὢν τῇ θεῷ καὶ δι’ ἄγνοιαν καὶ ἀπάτην τετυφωμένος καὶ διασπῶν καὶ ἀφανίζων τὸν ἱερὸν λόγον, ὃν ἡ θεὸς συνάγει καὶ συντίθησι καὶ παραδίδωσι τοῖς τελουμένοις [...].

²⁴² Ferrari, *Dio, idee e materia*, has pointed out that for Plutarch, thought and knowledge do constitute “il nucleo dell’essenza di dio” (19), though this is not a self-reflective knowledge such as one finds in Aristotle, but rather a “cognitive nature” (“natura conoscitiva”) insofar as God knows (perfectly) the world in its physical-cosmological aspect (22).

²⁴³ Bonazzi, *À la recherche des idées*, 100: “Pour Plutarque, c’est la contraire: ce sont les thèses ontologiques – et notamment le dualisme – qui fondent les thèses épistémologique.”

²⁴⁴ Trans. Babbitt, LCL, rev.

²⁴⁵ I consider Babbitt’s translation of ὁ ἱερός λόγος as “sacred writings” to be inaccurate. Τὰ ἱερὰ γράμματα, “the sacred writings,” does occur elsewhere (383e) and make sense but here, it does not fit the context.

reassembles and whom she hands over to the initiands [...].
(*Is. Os.* 351f)

This is what Plutarch says about the role of Isis in conveying the Logos to human beings:

[They say that Isis] discloses the divine mysteries to those who truly and justly are called “bearers of the holy vessels” and “wearers of the sacred robes.” These are those who bear the sacred *logos* about the gods, purified of all superstition and charlatanism,²⁴⁶ within their own soul as though within a chest, and they cover it up, only to hint in secret at both the dark and shadowy and the clear and bright elements of their opinion about the gods, and this is precisely what is conveyed through the wearing of the sacred garment.
(*Is. Os.* 352b)

[καλοῦσι Ἴσιν] δεικνύουσιν τὰ θεῖα τοῖς ἀληθῶς καὶ δικαίως ἱεραφόροις καὶ ἱεροστόλοις προσαγορευομένοις· οὗτοι δ' εἰσὶν οἱ τὸν ἱερὸν λόγον περὶ θεῶν πάσης καθαρεύοντα δεισιδαιμονίας καὶ περιεργίας ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ φέροντες ὥσπερ ἐν κίστη καὶ περιστέλλοντες, τὰ μὲν μέλανα καὶ σκιώδη τὰ δὲ φανερά καὶ λαμπρά τῆς περὶ θεῶν ὑποδηλοῦντες οἰήσεως, οἷα καὶ περὶ τὴν ἐσθῆτα τὴν ἱερὰν ἀποφαίνεται.

Later on, Plutarch imports the threefold Platonic ontological scheme from the *Timaeus* (Being, Place of Becoming [Receptacle], and Becoming), which allows him to extend the sphere of Isis' influence beyond the close circle of her own initiates.

For Isis is the female principle of nature and the receptacle of every generation, as is expressed through Plato's terms “nurse” and “all-receiving”; and she is called countless names by many people because she receives all the forms and ideas of the holy *logos* and is altered in the process. And she has an innate love for him who is First and Sovereign of all, which is identical with the Good, and she desires and pursues him; she flees from and repels the lot that comes from evil, and although she offers to both [good and evil] a receptacle and matter, she always inclines toward the better and offers herself to it [sc. Osiris] for begetting through her and sowing into her his effluences and likenesses, which she welcomes, and she is overjoyed, for she thus conceives and becomes the mother of many generations. For a

Ἡ γὰρ Ἴσις ἐστὶ μὲν τὸ τῆς φύσεως θῆλυ καὶ δεκτικὸν ἀπάσης γενέσεως, καθὼς τιθήνη καὶ πανδεχὴς ὑπὸ τοῦ Πλάτωνος, ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν πολλῶν μυριώνυμος κέκληται διὰ τὸ πάσας ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου τρεπομένη μορφὰς δέχεσθαι καὶ ιδέας. ἔχει δὲ σύμφυτον ἔρωτα τοῦ πρώτου καὶ κυριωτάτου πάντων, ὃ τὰγαθὸν ταῦτόν ἐστι, κάκεῖνο ποθεῖ καὶ διώκει· τὴν δ' ἐκ τοῦ κακοῦ φεύγει καὶ διωθεῖται μοῖραν, ἀμφοῖν μὲν οὕσα χώρα καὶ ὕλη, ῥέπουσα δ' αἰεὶ πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον καὶ παρέχουσα γεννᾶν ἐξ ἑαυτῆς ἐκεῖνο καὶ κατασπείρειν εἰς ἑαυτὴν ἀπορροὰς καὶ ὁμοιότητας, αἷς χαίρει καὶ γέγηθε κωισκομένη καὶ ὑποπιπλαμένη τῶν γενέσεων. εἰκὼν γάρ ἐστὶν οὐσίας ἢ ἐν ὕλῃ γένεσις καὶ μίμημα τοῦ ὄντος τὸ γιγνόμενον.

²⁴⁶ In agreement with Gōrgemann's trans. of περιεργία as “magische Praktik.” This seems more commensurate with Plutarch's views in *De superstitione* than does Babbitt's trans. of περιεργία as “pedantry.”

generation in matter is an image of being,
and that which becomes is an imitation of
true reality.

(*Is. Os.* 372e–f)

In *Is. Os.* 373a–b, Plutarch speaks of Horus, the son of Osiris and Isis, as the one whom Isis “brings forth as the perceptible image of the noetic world”: ὄν ἢ Ἴσις εἰκόνα τοῦ νοητοῦ κόσμου αἰσθητὸν ὄντα γεννᾷ.²⁴⁷ For Plutarch, it is not only the case that the divine-noetic realm (Osiris) causally effects the shaping of the sensible realm,²⁴⁸ but also that matter itself (Isis) has the active capacity to transmit the principles of the noetic world into the sense-perceptible realm.²⁴⁹

These remarks lay the foundation for considering the perceptible cosmos as an “image of God.” Just as reason and intelligence are the ruling principle of the human soul, so too is Osiris the orderly principle of the cosmos, and anything that reflects this orderly nature can be considered an “effluence and reflected image of Osiris” (371b, Ὀσίριδος ἀπορροή καὶ εἰκὼν ἐμφαινομένη).²⁵⁰ For this reason, a deeper meaning can be found in almost anything, such as: (1) the names of gods; (2) hieroglyphs (e.g., heaven's glyph); and (3) statues (εἰκόν/εἰκόνες) depicting handless and blindfolded judges (*Is. Os.* 354e–355a). In an interpretive maneuver that seems surprising at first, Plutarch argues that animals, precisely because they are alive and have the power of perception “of that which is their own and that which is foreign” (i.e., a basic kind of cognition), are more appropriate images of the divine than inanimate images carved in stone; he speaks in the latter case, presumably, of the anthropomorphic images common to the Greco-Roman tradition (*Is. Os.* 382a–c).²⁵¹

But this does not mean that images are unproblematic. Even though “images” of the divine are not only man-made but also cosmological (e.g., the *sun*

²⁴⁷ The cosmos as a sense-perceptible image of noetic reality is, of course, reminiscent of Plato, *Tim.* 92c.

²⁴⁸ Franco Ferrari, “La trascendenza razionale: Il principio secondo Plutarco,” in *Arrhetos Theos: L'ineffabilità del primo principio nel medio platonismo*, ed. Francesca Calabi (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2002), 77–91, 80.

²⁴⁹ Ferrari, *Dio, idee e materia*, 101, with reference to *Is. Os.* 377a. For Ferrari, the ability of Isis “to transmit the principles of Osiris into her own realm” is grounded in the presence of the intelligible in matter in the latter's precosmic state, namely prior to the demiurgic formation of the cosmos (101, 103).

²⁵⁰ Ferrari, *Dio, idee e materia* 166, notes that the term ἀπορροή indicates “una continuità e una derivazione diretta dal piano eidetico.”

²⁵¹ Yet as Marianne Wifstrand Schiebe points out, this does not entail a wholesale rejection of anthropomorphic images (*Das anthropomorphe Gottesbild: Berechtigung und Ursprung aus der Sicht antiker Denker*, Potsdamer altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 69 [Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2020], 205–7). One need only think of the aforementioned reference in *Is. Os.* 355a to statues of blindfolded judges to realize that anthropomorphic images can have a positive value for Plutarch.

in the cosmos as an image of the transcendent divine), the fact remains that “images” inhabit one side of Plutarch’s metaphysical divide. Plutarch is firmly against mistaking the images of the divine for the divine itself, such as the mistake of supposing that the sun *is* Apollo (*De E* 393d; *Pyth. orac.* 400d). The ontological difference is expressed in a mythical mode of speech in *Is. Os.* 373a–b, Plutarch points out the difference between the incorruptible Osiris (noetic realm) and the perishable Horus (cosmos): the impressions of the model, like seals in wax, are not permanent but are taken over by decay and destruction in the course of time. Accordingly, Typhon accuses Horus in *Is. Os.* 373b of being a bastard precisely because he lacks the decisive and defining characteristics of his father Osiris, namely a pure (καθαρός), unalloyed (εἰλικρινής) rational nature (λόγος) that is unmixed (ἀμιγής) with any bodily element (τὸ σωματικόν) and thus impassible (ἀπαθής). The ontological problem indicated by the mythical accusation of Typhon is simultaneously an epistemological problem: how can we know whether images of the divine are reliable, that they are ‘legitimate offspring’ rather than ‘bastards’? If one assumes that the divine is impassible and ‘unalloyed’ with any corporeal element, then how could a cosmos constantly in flux provide a reliable imitation of that divine nature? The answer is that Hermes, identified here with the Logos, advocates for Horus by stating that “nature, reshaping itself in accordance with the noetic realm, restores the cosmos” (373b, πρὸς τὸ νοητὸν ἢ φύσις μετασχηματιζόμενη τὸν κόσμον ἀποδίδωσιν). Again, we have here a structural similarity with the *Timaeus*, insofar as some noetic reality – mathematical structures in the case of the *Timaeus* – underlies the dissolution and restitution of the cosmos. And Plutarch can therefore say in *De tranquillitate animi* 477c–d, with direct reference to Plato, that the “cosmos is a temple most holy and befitting of a god,” for the “divine mind” has filled it with “sensible imitations of noetic realities (αἰσθητὰ μιμήματα νοητῶν)” that “have innately within them the principle of life and motion” (ἔμφυτον ἀρχὴν ζωῆς ἔχοντα καὶ κινήσεως).²⁵²

Plutarch points out later on that the stakes in this question are high: in a passage concerning his view of polylatric monotheism,²⁵³ Plutarch certainly does claim that various peoples use symbols to represent the one God, but he calls them “consecrated symbols,” some which are dim and faint, others which

²⁵² The positive connection between a representation of the divine and a vital principle is also found in *Is. Os.* 382a–c, where Plutarch goes so far as to express his sympathy for the way Egyptians honor animals, for because these living beings mirror “the nature that lives and sees and has the principle of motion within itself and the knowledge of what is its own and what is foreign” (382b), they surpass lifeless (anthropomorphic) images carved in stone.

²⁵³ On the concept “polylatric monotheism,” see Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, “Viele Bilder – ein Gott: Plutarch’s polylatrischer Monotheismus,” in *Bilder von dem Einen Gott: Die Rhetorik des Bildes in monotheistischen Gottesvorstellungen der Spätantike*, Philologus Supplemente 6, eds. Nicola Hömke, Gian Franco Chiai, and Antonia Jenik (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 43–68.

are clearer, but either way, their use does not transpire without a particular amount of danger (378a, καὶ συμβόλοις χρῶνται καθιερωμένοις οἱ μὲν ἄμυδροῖς οἱ δὲ τρανοτέροις, ἐπὶ τὰ θεῖα τὴν νόησιν ὀδηγοῦντες οὐκ ἀκινδύνως). Precisely because the images used are consecrated by humans – that is, chosen and legitimized through human sanction – we arrive once again at the basic epistemological question: how should we know which images to sanction in the first place?

This refers us to an issue in Plato's consideration of the nature of images: in order to know whether an image is a good one, we need to be able to compare it with its model. But if we cannot perceive the model with our senses, as is the case with the intelligible realm, then how can we even begin the process of estimation by comparison? Even if we reason with one another, that reasoning is still mediated through language, which is itself an "image" of reality and not reality itself. It is therefore not surprising that Plutarch points to the need for an epoptic vision in which, "like a flash of lightning," one immediately – in the strict sense of the term: 'without mediation' – recognizes true being (*Is. Os.* 382d).²⁵⁴ However, Plutarch does not provide a method for attaining the epoptic vision.²⁵⁵ Plutarch might interpret myths and rituals as "images" of the divine, but he does not derive his critical norms for such an interpretation from these myths and rituals themselves; any such critical norms must come from another quarter. Images surely have a referential character, but they cannot provide the criteria for their own evaluation.

II. The Philosophically Educated Ruler as εἰκὼν θεοῦ

Is there any sense in which Plutarch considers the human being to be an image of God? Plutarch speaks often enough of heavenly bodies and natural

²⁵⁴ ἡ δὲ τοῦ νοητοῦ καὶ εἰλικρινοῦς καὶ ἀπλοῦ νόησις ὥσπερ ἀστραπὴ διαλάμψασα τῆς ψυχῆς ἅπαξ ποτὲ θιγεῖν καὶ προσιδεῖν παρέσχε. Ferrari, *Dio, idee e materia*, 22, stresses that this apprehension of true being may occur only once (ἅπαξ ποτὲ) for the human being; this distinguishes human knowledge from God's own knowledge of the cosmos, which is immediate and eternal.

²⁵⁵ This would mean that Clea, the addressee of the treatise, will be dependent on the judgment of those who have had the epoptic vision – presumably, Plutarch – until she experiences it herself. Because the scant biographical information we have about Clea derives directly from *De Iside et Osiride*, we do not know precisely how Clea viewed Isis: would her views be more akin to the view of Isis as the supreme cosmic principle as found in Apuleius and the Isis aretologies or – if we consider Plutarch's rendering of the myth to be a more or less faithful rendering of the Isis of ancient Egyptian tradition – to the view of Isis as merely one among other deities and not even the chief among them? It is unfortunate that we do not know, because having some notion of Clea's views might shed some light for us on whether Plutarch's presentation of Isis and Osiris is meant as an interpretation of Clea's cultic milieu or, perhaps, as a correction of it.

phenomena as εἰκόνες or μιμήματα θεοῦ, and although he denied divine corporeality²⁵⁶ and rejected the notion that the divine is anything like the human²⁵⁷ – also rejecting the idea of divine desire for human bodies²⁵⁸ – there is nevertheless room in his philosophy to think that humans, too, can function as representations of the divine. Of course, if the whole of the universe as well as its parts may function as sense-perceptible representations of God, then it stands to reason that humans can do so as well. In *Amat.* 765a–b, he claims that Eros uses beautiful bodies as instruments in the process of anamnesis. He compares this to a geometry teacher: the teacher cannot lecture new pupils about incorporeal and apathetic substances – the geometrical forms – but instead must use tangible and visible imitations (ἀπτά και ὀρατά μιμήματα) of geometrical shapes. He continues:

[In] the same way, the heavenly Eros contrives for us, as in a glass, beautiful reflections of beautiful realities. These are, however, merely mortal reflections of the divine, corruptible of the incorruptible, sensible of the intelligible.
(*Amat.* 765b [Helmbold, LCL, rev.]

οὕτως ἡμῖν ὁ οὐράνιος Ἔρως ἔσοπτρα
καλῶν καλά, θνητὰ μέντοι θείων και
ἀπαθῶν παθητὰ και νοητῶν αἰσθητὰ
μηχανώμενος [...]

Accordingly, if the beloved possesses a “holy and orderly character” that shines through its outer form,²⁵⁹ then the sight of the beloved occasions in us “good and holy impulses, which we call recollections (ἀναμνήσεις), [which] guide [us] towards that divine, true, Olympian beauty [...]”²⁶⁰ Therefore, not only can humans perceive something of the divine in other humans, but the god of Love might use precisely this intimation of the divine to draw the observer in a heavenly direction.

Yet Plutarch does not go so far as to label these humans explicitly as εἰκόνες θεοῦ. Is there perhaps an even more basic sense in which the human is an image of God? Perhaps, innately, by virtue of the soul? In the second of his

²⁵⁶ Plutarch also argues against the Stoic notion of God as a σῶμα νοερόν in *Comm. not.* 1085b. Interestingly enough, he claims that contrary to their intentions, this notion leads the Stoics to make matter to be a simple principle and make God to be a composite substance, thus contradicting the basic Stoic tenet of the duality of principles.

²⁵⁷ *Cor.* 38.4: οὐδὲν γὰρ οὐδαμῶς ἀνθρωπίνῳ προσέοικεν οὔτε φύσιν οὔτε κίνησιν οὔτε τέχνην οὔτ' ἰσχύν.

²⁵⁸ See *Num.* 4.3, and *Adol. poet. aud.* 30f.

²⁵⁹ *Amat.* 766e: ὅταν ἦθος ἀγνὸν και κόσμιον ἐν ὄρα και χάριτι μορφῆς διαφανὲς γένηται [...]

²⁶⁰ *Amat.* 766e. I follow here the text, with emendations, of Herwig Görgemanns in *Plutarch: Dialog über die Liebe (Amatorius)*, SAPERE 10, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011): και τὰς καλὰς ταύτας και ἱερὰς ὀρμάς, ἃς ἀναμνήσεις καλοῦμεν ἡμεῖς, ἐπὶ τὸ θεῖον και ἀληθινὸν και Ὀλύμπιον ἐκεῖνο κάλλος ἀγούσας [...]. See annotation 358 for Görgemanns' argument in favor of inserting ὀρμάς and ἀγούσας into the text.

Quaestiones Platonicae, Plutarch considers just what Plato might have meant when he called the highest God the “father and maker” of all things (1000e). In essence, God is the sire of rational beings, yet merely the maker of irrational and inanimate entities. Any crafted object can be separated from its maker as soon as it is finished: a carpenter can discard a chair and he will not have lost anything that bears an essential similarity to himself. A father, however, passes on something of himself to his offspring, namely his ἀρχὴ καὶ δύναμις, which becomes part of the offspring’s nature (φύσις). This nature, in turn, is a fragment and portion (ἀπόσπασμα καὶ μόνιον) of the begetter (1001a). Seeing that the universe contains vitality (ζωότης) and divinity (θειότης), it is proper to speak of God as its father. Going beyond an interpretation of Plato, Plutarch offers his own thoughts on the issue. The universe consists of two parts: body and soul. While God does not beget bodies, but rather forms them out of passive matter, it can be said that the source of the soul lies in God. Plutarch writes:

Yet the soul, when it partakes of mind and reasoning and harmony, is not only God’s handiwork, but is also a part of him, having arisen not only by him, but also from him and out of him. ἡ δὲ ψυχὴ, νοῦ μετασχοῦσα καὶ λογισμοῦ καὶ ἁρμονίας, οὐκ ἔργον ἐστὶ τοῦ θεοῦ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ μέρος, οὐδὲ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐξ αὐτοῦ γέγονεν.

(*Quaest. plat.* 1001c)

Although Plutarch elsewhere affirms a human kinship with the gods on account of the immortality of the soul,²⁶¹ it is unclear whether he here means to assert that the affinity with the divine is inborn, or whether it must be realized in time. While the verbal form μετασχοῦσα (from μετέχω) is a feminine nominative singular aorist participle modifying ψυχῇ, it is not immediately clear – thanks in part to the description of creation via mythical language denoting a divine parent passing on its nature to its progeny – whether this aorist participle should be interpreted as an ingressive aorist participle or a coincident aorist participle.²⁶² Does the action described by μετασχοῦσα transpire at a later point than the action of God’s begetting (1001b, ἐγέννησε) or does its action coincide with the act of begetting? Does the soul partake of νοῦς – and thus resemble the divine – at the moment of its creation, or at a later point? There is good reason for reading the verbal form as an ingressive aorist participle if we read this text in the light of *Quaestiones Platonicae* 4. There, Plutarch discusses the conundrum of how the soul, according to Plato, could precede and be generative of the body and yet itself be dependent upon the body for its generation (1002f). Plutarch’s first move is to assert in 1003a that what coexisted with

²⁶¹ Cf. *Sera* 560b, where Plutarch addresses this kinship through the analogy of a father and his offspring. Similar to *Quaest. Plat.* 2, Plutarch distinguishes modalities of generation through the prepositional phrases ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ and ἐξ αὐτοῦ.

²⁶² Cf. CGCG §33.29–30; esp. §33.59.89–90.

each other were “mindless soul” (ἄνους ψυχῆ) and “formless body” (ἄμορφον σῶμα). His second move is to say that it was first when soul acquired a share in mind (νοῦς) and concord (ἄρμονία) and developed sentience through consonance (γενομένη διὰ συμφωνίας ἔμφρων) that it was able to give body a shape. Therefore, soul gave rise to body by turning a formless, disorderly mass into a well-ordered and obedient entity (1003a). It seems, based on this text, that Plutarch considers the rationality of the soul to be something that the soul must attain; it does not possess this quality from the moment of its creation, but must *enter into* this state. Based on this reading of the fourth *Quaestio*, I would argue that the verbal form μετασχοῦσα in the final statement of the second *Quaestio* (1001c) should be read as an ingressive aorist. Therefore, although Plutarch considers the soul to be kindred with the divine on account of its immortality, its affinity with the divine νοῦς – which, as we have seen in *Is. Os.* 351d, is constitutive of God’s being – is something that must be realized in time. There is an asymmetry between God’s being and the human soul: the divine being is eternally self-same, but the human soul must develop. This is where the analogy of a father serves Plutarch well: the divine parent passes on its ἀρχὴ καὶ δύναμις to its offspring, but like any offspring, the soul must first grow and develop into something like its parent. This need for the soul to develop a superior affinity with the divine might explain why Plutarch restricts his application of the designation εἰκὼν θεοῦ to one particular kind of person.

Who, then, among humans does Plutarch consider to be an εἰκὼν θεοῦ? The clearest statement appears in *Ad principem ineruditum*, which deserves to be quoted at length.

Justice is the end of the law, and the law, in its turn, is the work of the ruler, and the ruler is the image of the God who orders all things. He requires no sculptor such as Pheidias nor Polycleitus nor Myron, but through his virtue makes himself to be a divine likeness, crafting of all images the one most pleasant to behold and the most befitting of the divine. For as God has set the sun and moon in the sky as an exceedingly beautiful image of himself, so too in cities is his imitation and radiance the ruler ‘who, being godlike, upholds divine justice’; that is, he who trains his mind on divine reason, not on a scepter nor thunderbolt nor trident, as some do who portray themselves in their sculpture and verses in a fashion beyond human reach, senselessly making themselves liable to divine envy. For God justly feels resentment towards those who imitate his thunder and bolts and rays of light, but because he is well-pleased with those strive

δίκη μὲν οὖν νόμου τέλος ἐστί, νόμος δ’ ἄρχοντος ἔργον, ἄρχων δ’ εἰκὼν θεοῦ τοῦ πάντα κοσμοῦντος, οὐ Φειδίου δεόμενος πλάττοντος οὐδὲ Πολυκλείτου καὶ Μύρωνος, ἀλλ’ αὐτὸς αὐτὸν εἰς ὁμοιότητα θεῶ δι’ ἀρετῆς καθιστᾶς καὶ δημιουργῶν ἀγαλμάτων τὸ ἥδιστον ὀφθῆναι καὶ θεοπρεπέστατον. οἷον δ’ ἥλιον ἐν οὐρανῷ περικαλλὲς εἶδωλον ἑαυτοῦ καὶ σελήνην ὁ θεὸς ἐνίδρυσε, τοιοῦτον ἐν πόλεσι μίμημα καὶ φέγγος ἄρχων ὅστε θεουδῆς εὐδικίας ἀνέχησι, τοιτέστι θεοῦ λόγον ἔχων ἐν διανοίᾳ, οὐ σκηπτρὸν οὐδὲ κεραυνὸν οὐδὲ τρίαιναν, ὡς ἐνιοὶ πλάττουσιν ἑαυτοῦς καὶ γράφουσι τῶ ἀνεφίκτω ποιοῦντες ἐπίφθονον τὸ ἀνόητον· νεμεσᾶ γάρ ὁ θεὸς τοῖς ἀπομιμουμένοις βροντᾶς καὶ κεραυνοῦς καὶ ἀκτινοβολίας, τοὺς δὲ τὴν ἀρετὴν ζηλοῦντας αὐτοῦ καὶ πρὸς τὸ καλὸν καὶ φιλόανθρωπον ἀφομοιοῦντας ἑαυτοῦς ἡδόμενος αὐξίει καὶ μεταδίδωσι τῆς περὶ αὐτὸν εὐνομίας καὶ δικῆς καὶ ἀληθείας καὶ

after his virtue and assimilate themselves to what is good and benevolent, he makes them grow in stature and bestows upon them a share in his uprightness and justice and truth and gentleness. Indeed, nothing is more divine than these, not fire nor light nor the course of the sun nor the risings and settings of stars nor that which is eternal and immortal. For God is not blessed²⁶³ on account of the duration of his life, but rather through the sovereignty of his virtue; for that is what it means to be divine, and submitting to virtue's rule is good as well.

(*Princ. iner.* 780e–781a)

πραότητος· ὦν θεϊότερον οὐ πῦρ ἐστὶν οὐ φῶς οὐχ ἡλίου δρόμος οὐκ ἀνατολαὶ καὶ δύσεις ἄστρον οὐ τὸ αἰδίον καὶ ἀθάνατον. οὐ γὰρ χρόνον ζωῆς ὁ θεὸς εὐδαίμων ἀλλὰ τῆς ἀρετῆς τῷ ἄρχοντι· τοῦτο γὰρ θεῖον ἐστὶ, καλὸν δ' αὐτῆς καὶ τὸ ἀρχόμενον.

This passage is embedded in a *speculum principis*, a disquisition on the ideal ruler. In it, Plutarch makes clear that the ruler is not *eo ipso* an image of God; indeed, many rulers fall shy of this divine appointment. Just as there are material images of the gods and “spoken images” – that is, poetry – that are less-than-accurate depictions of the divine, so too can rulers act in such a way as to falsely represent the gods (*Princ. iner.* 779a–780b). For the ruler to become an image of the divine, a critical precondition must be met: the ruler must have “living reason” within him (780c), specifically a “philosophical reason” that he has installed as his chief assistant (πάρεδρος) and guardian (779f).²⁶⁴ For Plutarch, representing the divine is achieved through virtue, not through the attempt to project one's power (cf. 779b).²⁶⁵ If he is to rule well, the ruler must first straighten out his own soul, and only after that may he attempt to conform his subjects to his own pattern.²⁶⁶ That the ruler would live up to his divine appointment and become an image of God in the city has a goal, of course, and the goal is not the ruler's own benefit. “[One] might say more truly that rulers serve god for the care and preservation (σωτηρία) of men, in order that of the glorious gifts which the gods give to men they may distribute some and safeguard others” (780d [Fowler, LCL]). Unless the ruler serves by way of law and justice, none of these gifts can be used (780e). The second purpose is

²⁶³ That God is blessed on account of his virtue is also implied in Musonius' 17th diatribe, in which he says that when the human exists in a manner like to God, who is in possession of the cardinal virtues, then the human becomes blessed (εὐδαίμων).

²⁶⁴ *Princ. iner.* 779f: ὁ δ' ἐκ φιλοσοφίας τῷ ἄρχοντι πάρεδρος καὶ φύλαξ ἐγκατοικισθεὶς λόγος [...].

²⁶⁵ Hirsch-Luipold points out that Plutarch's rejection of the use of external attributes of the divine, such as lightning, on the part of rulers is entailed by the deeper meaning of εἰκόν: “[Die Selbstdarstellung mit solchen Attributen] ist eine Anmaßung, die Plutarch verschiedentlich kritisiert, und zudem ein Mißverständnis der Bildhaftigkeit. Denn zum Bild wird der Mensch nicht durch äußere Attribute, sondern durch eine Angleichung im Wesen” (*Plutarchs Denken in Bildern*, 170).

²⁶⁶ *Princ. iner.* 780b: Καὶ καταστησάμενον τὸ ἦθος οὕτω συναρμόττειν τὸ ὑπήκοον.

simultaneously epistemological and ethical: just as the sun is the “exceedingly beautiful image” (780f, περικαλλές εἶδωλον) of God in the heavens, God’s mirrored likeness (781f, δι’ ἐσόπτρου εἶδωλον) in which humanity can see God, so too God has placed within cities the “light of justice and knowledge of himself” as an image (εἰκῶν) which wise folk may copy by shaping themselves (πλάττειν ἑαυτούς) in accordance with it (781f–782a).²⁶⁷ I would argue that the “light” (φέγγος) and “image” (εἰκῶν) mentioned in 781f is the very ruler who in 780f is called God’s “imitation” (μίμημα) and “radiance” (φέγγος) because he trains his mind on divine reason (780f, θεοῦ λογὸν ἔχων ἐν διανοίᾳ) rather than on outward displays of power. The ruler as an “image of God” therefore contains the following three aspects: (1) “soteriological” in a non-Christian sense; that is, the ruler tends to the well-being and preservation (σωτηρία) of his subjects;²⁶⁸ (2) an epistemological one; (3) an ethical one.²⁶⁹

The import of the ethical dimension of the εἰκῶν θεοῦ for Plutarch might go unnoticed unless the reader pays close attention. For as much as Plutarch can praise wisdom and knowledge, it is clear that these are not merely ends in themselves; instead, they have as their end ὁμοίωσις τῷ θεῷ, assimilation to God. After describing the ruler as an εἰκῶν θεοῦ in 780e, Plutarch states that those who imitate God’s goodness will be granted a share in God’s virtues, for “nothing is more divine than these, not fire nor light nor the course of the sun nor the risings and settings of stars nor that which is eternal and immortal” (781a). Not even the well-ordered movements of the heavenly bodies, the “harmony of the spheres,” which among Plato, Plutarch himself, and other philosophers has fundamental significance for knowledge of the divine and for being the starting point of philosophy,²⁷⁰ is as divine as God’s own virtue. What is most important is not the knowledge of how the cosmic harmony works nor even the power to reproduce it or something like it, but rather the virtue by

²⁶⁷ Namely, with the help of philosophy.

²⁶⁸ This, as stated quite directly in *Princ. iner.* 780e, reflects Plutarch’s understanding of God as the king, ruler, leader, and lord of all things; cf. Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, “Plutarch,” in *Plutarch: Ist “Lebe im Verborgenen” eine gute Lebensregel?*, SAPERE 1, 2nd ed., eds. Ulrich Berner et al. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001), 11–30, 22, esp. n. 24, with references to Plutarch’s understanding of God as “ἡγεμῶν καὶ βασιλεὺς (*De. Is. et Os.* 78,383a); ἄρχων καὶ κύριος πάντων (*De sera* 4,550a); ἱατρὸς καὶ σωτὴρ (*Amat.* 19,765a).”

²⁶⁹ The ruler as an ethical role model is a common theme of the *speculum principis* literature. Cf. Matthias Becker, “Ekklesiologie der sanften Macht: Der 1. Timotheusbrief und die antike Fürstenspiegel-Literatur,” *BZ* 62, no. 2 (2020): 277–305, who references Seneca, *Clem.* 1.1.6, addressed to the young Nero; Pliny, *Pan.* 45.5, addressed to Trajan; Dio Chrysostom’s *Or.* 3.9–11, also addressed to Trajan. In each of these writings, the ruler is admonished to be a role model for his subjects.

²⁷⁰ E.g., Plato, *Tim.* 47a–c; Plutarch, *Sera* 550d; cf. Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 12.34, where the role of the observation of the heavenly bodies as it concerns knowledge of God is compared to an initiation into a mystery cult, yet one provided by the gods themselves.

which God is blessed, and it is a participation in this virtue that God grants to the wise.²⁷¹

In light of the importance Plutarch ascribes to the assimilation to the divine, it is noteworthy that he refers only to the wise ruler as an εἰκὼν θεοῦ – the analogy with such a singular entity as the sun, as God’s image in the heavens, serves to buttress this observation. Despite the fact that there is nothing in Plutarch’s anthropology that would exclude certain groups of people from pursuing assimilation to the divine, we should not obscure the fact that Plutarch does not use the term εἰκὼν of any other human group, not even of the philosophers.²⁷² There was a clear precedent among his philosophical ancestors for doing so: Menander Comicus (fourth/third cent. B.C.) called the elderly man an image of God;²⁷³ Diogenes of Sinope (fourth cent. B.C.) stated that good men are images of God;²⁷⁴ Diodorus of Aspendus (fourth cent. B.C.) made a basic human characteristic, namely the soul, to be the image of God within the human.²⁷⁵ Further, the only other time Plutarch applies the term εἰκὼν to a human person is in his retelling of the encounter between Themistocles and the Persian Artabanus in his *Lives*. Artabanus says to Themistocles: “[But] for us, this is the most beautiful thing, more than many laws and fair realities,²⁷⁶ [namely,] to honor the king and worship [him] as the image of the God who preserves all things.”²⁷⁷

This application of the *imago dei* to the king alone was, as indicated above (see above, “The Hebrew Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls”), a notion implicitly rejected by the theological anthropology of the Priestly Document. And yet it is clear that Plutarch does not make this move on the basis of some structural anthropological difference between rulers and the ruled; at any rate, he seemed content to refer to animals as images of the divine because they “have in themselves the principle of motion and a knowledge of things own and foreign” (*Is. et Os.* 382b), and these are traits shared by humans. Nevertheless, Plutarch does

²⁷¹ In other words, it is neither philosophical dogma nor a sophisticated technology that might elevate the human to the divine, but rather the act of living through divine virtue.

²⁷² Neither does Plutarch apply to human beings the terms ἄγαλμα, ἔδος, ζόανον, or βρέτας in any combination with θεός or θεῖος.

²⁷³ Menander Comicus, *Sententiae e papyris* 2.3 (ed. Jaekel): Γέροντα τίμα τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν εἰκόνα.

²⁷⁴ Diogenes of Sinope *apud* Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 6.51: τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς ἄνδρας [ἔλεγε] θεῶν εἰκόνας εἶναι. [...].

²⁷⁵ *FPG*, 112: Τινὲς κατ’ εἰκόνα θεοῦ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐνόμισαν κατὰ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἄορατον (πεπλάσθαι) (*apud* Theodoret of Cyrus, *Quaestiones in Genesin*, ed. Sirmond, vol. I, p. 19).

²⁷⁶ Does Artabanus mean metaphysical realities? If so, then Plutarch portrays Artabanus as devaluing two items that were the object of the philosopher’s quest since Plato: (1) obtaining knowledge of true being, for the sake of (2) drafting proper laws. Artabanus places the act of honoring the king above these two goals of philosophy.

²⁷⁷ *Themistocles* 27.4–5: ἡμῖν δὲ πολλῶν νόμων καὶ καλῶν ὄντων κάλλιστος οὗτός ἐστι, τιμᾶν βασιλέα καὶ προσκυνεῖν ὡς εἰκόνα θεοῦ τοῦ τὰ πάντα σφύζοντος.

not call the human *qua* human the *imago dei*. Perhaps he makes this move because only the ruler is placed into a situation that presents the opportunity not only to be wise and virtuous, but also to rule and order his surroundings in the same way God rules, directs, and gives shape to the cosmos. For Plutarch, the question might not be, “Which subgroup of humanity has the requisite psychological constitution of an εἰκὼν θεοῦ?” but rather, “Who gets the opportunity to be such an εἰκὼν?” Apparently, only rulers, due to their situation. Therefore, any rational being standing at the top of a power structure will face the opportunity – and the prospect of success or failure – of becoming an image of God.

III. Summary

In view of Plutarch’s metaphysical dualism that divides reality into a noetic realm and a sense-perceptible realm, an image serves to manifest noetic reality in the world of generation and decay. Because matter has within it the ability to transmit the principles of the noetic realm into the cosmos, various aspects of cosmic reality may function as images of the divine, yet only if they be interpreted “as befits the divine and philosophically.” Through the proper philosophical interpretation of such images, humans may approximate knowledge of the divine. And yet the only basis on which one might receive the criteria for discerning the propriety of images is an immediate knowledge of “the One who is the First, the Lord, the Noetic One,” which is only possible through a sudden and temporary illumination of the mind.

As it concerns human beings, Plutarch refers directly only to the philosophically educated ruler as an εἰκὼν θεοῦ. The human soul might derive its immortality from God, but it must grow and develop into a rational entity before it can claim a superior and true resemblance to its divine parent. Further, such a resemblance remains dependent on God, for humans can only ‘receive a share’ in divine νοῦς καὶ φρόνησις (*Is. Os.* 351d). And even then, only rulers are in a situation that demands of them an ordering and preservation of their share of the world in a manner that befits divine reason and insight and thus mirrors God’s ordering and care of the cosmos. Εἰκὼν θεοῦ, therefore, characterizes a subset of humans and is not a basic human predicate.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸ Based on the material left to us, it is conceivable that Plutarch could have considered ‘scaling down’ his conception of the ruler as an εἰκὼν θεοῦ to other authority figures, such as a *pater familias* or an οἰκονομικός, but he never does so explicitly. In addition, one may only speculate whether Plutarch’s thought does allow εἰκὼν θεοῦ to become a basic human predicate. At any rate, there is nothing in Plutarch’s anthropology that might suggest that assimilation to God is the privilege only of the ruling classes – or only of men, for that matter. Plutarch’s corpus suggests rather that insofar as progress in virtue contributes to an assimilation to God, anyone, regardless of biological and socio-historical distinctions, has the capacity of becoming like God. That women are not excluded from this can be gleaned from Plutarch’s praise of Semiramis at the expense of Sardanapalus (*Alex. fort.* 336c–d) and

F. Dio Chrysostom's *Olympic Discourse* (*Oratio* 12)

Dio Chrysostom, "the foremost Greek orator of the first century A.D.,"²⁷⁹ lived from ca. A.D. 40–120 and was thus squarely contemporary with Plutarch.²⁸⁰ His corpus contains about eighty works on a variety of topics.²⁸¹ Though the question of his philosophical influences and allegiances is debated, it seems clear that he was influenced by Stoic thought,²⁸² perhaps through Musonius Rufus,²⁸³ and that traces of Platonic and Cynic traditions are to be found in his corpus as well.²⁸⁴ In this sense, he is a prime example of the cross-pollination of various philosophical traditions that was characteristic of the first century A.D. The inclusion of his 12th Oration, the "Olympicus, or, On Humankind's First Conception of God" (Ὀλυμπικός ἢ περὶ τῆς πρώτης τοῦ θεοῦ ἐννοίας) recommends itself by its very subject matter, for in this discourse,²⁸⁵ Dio includes figural images of deities produced by artisans as a source of theological knowledge,²⁸⁶ which evinces a certain affinity with the Middle Platonist

from his *De mulierum virtutibus*. And yet, Plutarch addresses this only under the category of ὁμοίωσις τῶ θεῶ, not εἰκὼν θεοῦ.

²⁷⁹ Donald A. Russell, "Introduction," in *Dio Chrysostom: Orations VII, XII and XXXVI*, Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics: Imperial Library, ed. Russell (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 1–25, 1.

²⁸⁰ Hans-Josef Klauck, "Einleitung," in *Dion von Prusa: Olympische Rede oder Über die erste Erkenntnis Gottes*, SAPERE 2, ed. Hans-Josef Klauck, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000), 9–43, 17–18.

²⁸¹ See Russell, "Introduction," 7, for a catalogue arranged by various criteria.

²⁸² Hans-Josef Klauck, "Interpretationen," in Klauck, *Dion von Prusa: Olympische Rede*, 160–216, 192.

²⁸³ Russell, "Introduction," 4.

²⁸⁴ On the question of Platonic influence in Dio's corpus, see Michael Trapp, "Plato in Dio," in *Dio Chrysostom: Politics, Letters, and Philosophy*, ed. Simon Swain (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 213–39. Trapp argues that Platonic influence is restrained mainly to stylistic and literary features rather than philosophical content (*ibid.*, 236–39). For an argument in favor of Platonic philosophical influence, see Géraldine Hertz, "Dion aux prises avec la θεία καὶ ἀμήχανος φύσις: étude de l'*Olympikos* et de son ancrage platonicien," in *Dion de Pruse: l'homme, son œuvre et sa postérité. Actes du Colloque international de Nantes (21–23 mai 2015)*, Spudasmata 169, eds. Eugenio Amatao et al. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2016), 199–215.

²⁸⁵ Klauck characterizes it as an epideictic speech (*ibid.*, 160); for an extended discussion of the oration's genre, see Gianluca Ventrella, "Notice," in *Dion de Pruse, dit Dion Chrysostome: Œuvres. Discours Olympique, ou sur la conception première de la divinité (Or. XII). À Athènes, sur sa fuite (Or. XIII)*, ed. Ventrella (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2017), 1–87, 14–34.

²⁸⁶ Cf. the use of πηγῆ in *Or.* 12.39 in reference to the first source, the "innate" idea of God; that the metaphor πηγῆ is also applied to the other sources under discussion is made clear by Dio's use of the feminine form of the ordinal number in the subsequent paragraph (cf. *Or.* 12.40). Klauck, "Interpretationen," 191, notes that Dio contributes to the

tradition.²⁸⁷ In addition, the topics addressed in his corpus and the manner in which he addresses them can serve as an indicator of the topics that would have been of interest to a broader, less educated audience in the early Roman imperial period, and also of the mode of treatment that the orator thought his audience could easily understand.

I. A Single, Immovable, and Enduring Form

The *Olympic Discourse*, Dio's "most 'philosophical' speech,"²⁸⁸ was held at Olympia in A.D. 97, 101, or 105 during the Olympic games.²⁸⁹ Through an analogy wherein the wise owl is compared with other birds, Dio begins his oration by stylizing himself as a philosopher in the Socratic tradition through professing his own ignorance and distinguishing himself from the sophists (*Or.* 12.1–15, esp. 14). Considering the "delightful spectacles" (*Or.* 12.5, θεάματα [...] τέρπνα) and speeches offered by the sophists – the "colorful peacocks" in the analogy – Dio is surprised that such an audience has appeared to listen to him, a philosopher (cf. *Or.* 12.9–10, 15)²⁹⁰ and asks whether "some divine purpose" (δαμονίας τινὸς βουλήσεως) might be behind it (*Or.* 12.5), for he is all-too aware that there are others who preserve the outer appearance of a philosopher and yet are foolish.²⁹¹ Already in this introduction, Dio sets the stage in two decisive ways. First, he clearly presents himself as a philosopher and therefore as a member of that class who, as he states later, expounds the divine nature most truthfully and completely (*Or.* 12.47). Secondly, the suggestion of a divine catalyst for the gathering conveys to his audience the theological importance of his subject matter, an importance that he will underscore at two later points when he claims that "divine matters" are more important than human affairs (*Or.* 12.20) and when he calls the question of the appropriateness of a representation of God in an image "the greatest contest (ἀγών) there has ever been" (*Or.* 12.55). Through these statements, he draws a contrast with the

"emancipation" of the visual arts, which had previously been little more than the handmaiden of the mythological tradition.

²⁸⁷ Cf. Ventrella, "Notice," 36; similarly, Boris Nikolsky, "Images of Zeus in Dio's Olympian Oration," in Amatao et al., *Dion de Pruse: l'homme, son œuvre et sa postérité*, 177–84, 179.

²⁸⁸ Russell, "Introduction," 19.

²⁸⁹ The precise dating is not decisive for our study. For discussions of the problem of dating, see Ventrella, "Notice," 1–13, who votes for A.D. 97; Russel, *Dio Chrysostom: Orationes*, 16, and Klauck, "Einleitung," 27, vote against A.D. 97, but refer to 101 and 105 as equally plausible choices.

²⁹⁰ In *Or.* 12.15, Dio indicates that his long hair might be a reason for the audience showing up; this is of course a reference to the philosopher's *habitus*, which would include long hair and a beard (cf. *Or.* 35.2; 71.2).

²⁹¹ Cf. *Or.* 71.16, where Dio also employs the owl analogy in the context of discussing the philosopher's appearance.

human struggle to procure the power to rule over others (ἀρχή), which – as he tells the audience – he has witnessed firsthand while touring the frontlines of an armed conflict prior to his arrival in Olympia. Such human striving is inferior to “divine matters,” and the philosophical contest pursued by Dio is superior to the contests of rulers and military commanders.

Yet now having come to the festival to honor a vow, he asks his audience whether he should speak of his journey or, instead, “celebrate in a hymn” (ὕμνῳ) the “nature” (φύσις) and “power” (δύναμις) of Zeus, the “king and ruler and lord and father common both to humankind and the gods” at whose temple he and the audience now stand (*Or.* 12.22). After referring to the Olympic statue of Zeus as a “blessed image” (μακάρια εἰκόν) which of all the statues of the earth is “the most fair and dear to the gods” (*Or.* 12.25, κάλλιστον καὶ θεοφιλέστατον),²⁹² Dio proceeds to ask whether poetry and votive statuary can influence humankind’s opinion (δόξα) of God.

To answer this question, Dio begins by describing the primary source of humankind’s knowledge of God. This is an innate conception common to all peoples:

Now concerning the gods, both their general nature and, chiefly, that of the one who rules over all things, there is first of all an opinion and notion common to the entire human race, in like measure for the Greeks and for the barbarians, necessary and innate in every rational being, arising in accordance with nature without the involvement of a mortal teacher and mystagogue, and accompanied by love and joy on account of humankind’s kinship with the gods and the many evidences of [their] goodness, which prevented our eldest and most ancient forebears from becoming lethargic and indifferent [toward the gods] [...].

(*Or.* 12.27)

περὶ δὴ θεῶν τῆς τε καθόλου φύσεως καὶ μάλιστα τοῦ πάντων ἡγεμόνος πρῶτον μὲν καὶ ἐν πρώτοις δόξα καὶ ἐπίνοια κοινὴ τοῦ ξύμπαντος ἀνθρωπίνου γένους, ὁμοίως μὲν Ἑλλήνων, ὁμοίως δὲ βαρβάρων, ἀναγκαία καὶ ἐμφυτος ἐν παντὶ τῷ λογικῷ γιγνομένη κατὰ φύσιν ἀνευ θνητοῦ διδασκάλου καὶ μυσταγωγοῦ οὐ χωρὶς ἀγάπης²⁹³ καὶ χαρᾶς διὰ τε τὴν συγγένειαν τὴν πρὸς αὐτοὺς καὶ πολλὰ μαρτύρια τάληθοῦς, οὐκ ἔδῶντα κατανυστάξει καὶ ἀμελεῖσαι τοὺς πρεσβυτάτους καὶ παλαισιότατους: [...].

Because humankind at that time was closer to God, it was aware of God’s parental care and therefore developed a bond with God akin to that between a child and parent (cf. *Or.* 12.42). This innate conception has stood the test of time and is common to all rational beings (*Or.* 12.39).

In distinction from this innate (ἐμφυτος) conception of the divine (*Or.* 12.39, τὸ θεῖον), humankind also has a conception acquired (ἐπίκτητος) “by means of

²⁹² On the statue itself, see Pausanias’ description (*Descr.* 5.11), and Balbina Bäbler, “Der Zeus von Olympia,” in Klauck, *Dion von Prusa: Olympische Rede*, 217–38.

²⁹³ I follow here Ventrella’s conjecture <οὐ> χωρὶς ἀγάπης in place of Budé’s χωρὶς ἀπάτης. On reading ἀγάπης instead of ἀπάτης, cf. Ventrella, “Notice,” 253–54.

stories and myths and customs” (*Or.* 12.39, *λόγοις τε καὶ μύθοις καὶ ἔθεσι*).²⁹⁴ The primacy of the innate conception of the divine vis-à-vis the acquired conception is subtly indicated in *Or.* 12.42, when Dio speaks of the “first and immortal parent, whom we who have a share in the heritage of Hellas call Ancestral Zeus” (Cohoon [LCL]).²⁹⁵ The contributions of poetry and legislation can therefore offer something positive to theology, but Dio also makes it clear that they are not sufficient: they can exhort us to be grateful for divine parental care (poetry) and can threaten us with punishment if we refuse our obedience (legislation), but they cannot make it plainly evident *who* the divine parents (οἱ γονεῖς) are and why we owe these benefactors a debt (*Or.* 12.43).

In addition to these second and third sources, Dio introduces a fourth:

The fourth we may call the figural and creative [art] of those who concern themselves with divine statues and images; I am speaking of painters and sculptors and stonemasons and of anyone who generally considers himself worthy of standing out as an imitator of the divine nature through his art [...]. (*Or.* 12.44)

τετάρτην φῶμεν τὴν πλαστικὴν τε καὶ δημιουργικὴν τῶν περὶ τὰ θεῖα ἀγάλματα καὶ τὰς εἰκόνας, λέγω δὲ γραφέων τε καὶ ἀνδριαντοποιῶν καὶ λιθοξόων καὶ παντὸς ἀπλῶς τοῦ καταξιώσαντος αὐτὸν ἀποφῆναι μιμητὴν διὰ τέχνης τῆς δαιμονίας φύσεως [...].

Dio subsequently lists famous artists, such as Pheidias, who made all kinds of images (εἰκόνες) of the god and thereby “filled people with numerous and manifold conceptions of the divine.”²⁹⁶ He states that they did not diverge too much from the portrayals of the poets and lawgivers, in the latter case out of fear of

²⁹⁴ As for *λόγοις*, I follow the translations of Cohoon (LCL: “narrative accounts”) and Ventrella (Les Belles Lettres: “les récits”). Klauck’s translation of *λόγοις* as “Belehrungen” rests on the assumption that Dio employs here the notion of a *theologia tripertita* and that *λόγοις* thus refers to sphere of philosophy (*Dion von Prusa: Olympische Rede*, 132, annotation 203). This does not square, however, with the fact that the philosopher is introduced separately as an additional source later on, in *Or.* 12.47, after the initial discussion of the poets and lawgivers. Ventrella argues that the *τε καὶ* construction combines *λόγοις* and *μύθοις* as a “coherent unity” (i.e., a hendiadys) and that the two should therefore be understood as a description of one source rather than two (cf. the discussion of the phrase in Gianluca Ventrella, “Commentaire,” in *Dion de Pruse, dit Dion Chrysostome: Œuvres*, 137–493, 348–51). Lastly, it seems that Dio offers a modification of the *theologia tripertita* that expands the series (cf. Klauck, *Dion von Prusa: Olympische Rede*, 136, annotation 242; cf. Donald A. Russell, “Commentary,” in Russell, *Dion Chrysostom: Orations VII, XII and XXXVI*, 109–247, 189, who says Dio “distorts” it for the express purpose of examining Pheidias; Ventrella, “Commentaire,” 349, speaks of Dion’s “(ré)élaboration de cette théorie”). Yet if the series is different and the philosopher is evidently located elsewhere in it, it is hard to grasp why *λόγοις* should refer here to philosophical activity. On the *theologia tripertita*, cf. Varro, *Ant. rer. div. frg.* 6–11 (ed. Cardauns).

²⁹⁵ [...] τοῦ πρώτου καὶ ἀθανάτου γονέως, ὃν καὶ πατρῶον Δία καλοῦμεν οἱ τῆς Ἑλλάδος κοινωοῦντες [...].

²⁹⁶ Following Klauck’s trans. (*Dion von Prusa: Olympische Rede*).

punishment, but in the former case because the poet's "image-making" (ειδωλοποιία) was older and they did not want to be perceived as innovators (*Or.* 12.45–46). Nevertheless, they did introduce something of their own (τὰ δὲ καὶ παρ' αὐτῶν εἰσέφερον) and thereby become the competitors and fellows (ἀντίτεχνοι καὶ ὁμότεχνοι) of the poets. Further, it is "through the sense of sight" that they "interpret the divine matters" (δι' ὄψεως ἐξηγούμενοι τὰ θεῖα) for their spectators.

To the aforementioned sources, Dio now adds the philosopher, who is "through reason (λόγῳ) the most truthful and perhaps most perfect interpreter (ἐξηγητής) and prophet (προφήτης) of the immortal nature" (*Or.* 12.47).²⁹⁷ Having now introduced all the sources of humankind's knowledge of God – the innate conception, poets, lawgiver, the plastic arts, and philosophers – Dio proposes that the best representative of each class be put to the test in order to see how their work has affected notions of the divine. Dio names three criteria: (1) whether piety is harmed or hindered by their work; (2) whether and to what extent they agree with and diverge from one another; and (3) proximity to the "truth" of the "first" and "guileless" innate conception of God.

Dio chooses to imagine an examination of Pheidias, the craftsman behind the Olympian statue of Zeus. The examiner notes that this image (εἰκόν) inspires awe in animals and could even make a man who has had his share of suffering forget his woes (*Or.* 12.51–52); in this and other ways, the statue commands respect. The question Pheidias must answer, however, is this: are the materials, the human form, and the attributes of the image appropriate to the divine nature (*Or.* 12.52)? The inquiry concludes with a reminder that Iphitus and Lycurgus, ancient rulers and the founders of the Olympic games, did not set up such an image, perhaps because they "feared they would never be able to imitate the highest and most perfect nature sufficiently through the art of mortals?"²⁹⁸ The reference to Iphitus and Lycurgus challenges Pheidias to justify his divine image in light of the seeming infraction of a local *mos maiorum* – which could make him an unwanted innovator (cf. *Or.* 12.46) – and in view of a potential conflict with another source of knowledge of God; namely,

²⁹⁷ The philosopher certainly has primacy of place among human actors in Dio's scheme. Nevertheless, his fivefold classification of the sources of theological knowledge simultaneously curtails the ability of philosophers to change notions concerning the divine: "Er [sc. Dio] hat [...] die Reflexion über die primären Quellen der menschlichen Gotteserkenntnis, die selbstverständlich einen zentralen Gegenstand der Religionsphilosophie ausmacht, von der Philosophie abgetrennt und dem Ganzen vorangestellt" (Klauck, "Interpretationen," 191; cf. also Russell, "Introduction," 18). This is very well the reason why Dio can utter a categorical rejection of the Epicureans in *Or.* 12.36–37; per his definition, they are not philosophers, for they reject the innate conception of God, the basis on which all other sources of theological knowledge are evaluated.

²⁹⁸ *Or.* 12.54, [...] ἢ μᾶλλον φοβηθέντας μήποτε οὐκ δύναντο ἰκανῶς ἀπομιμήσασθαι διὰ θνητῆς τέχνης τὴν ἄκραν καὶ τελειοτάτην φύσιν;

the legislative.²⁹⁹ This could disqualify Pheidias on the basis of the second of the three criteria named above.

Pheidias – the mouthpiece for Dio’s own viewpoints³⁰⁰ – begins by replying that such a question makes for “the greatest contest (ἀγὼν [...] μέγιστος) there has ever been,” for he is being challenged to give an answer:

concerning the God who rules all things and of this his likeness, whether it has been wrought with decency and in verisimilitude, lacking nothing of the representation of the divine that is within human reach, or whether it be worthless and unbecfitting. *(Or. 12.55)*

περὶ τοῦ πάντων κρατοῦντος θεοῦ καὶ τῆς πρὸς ἐκεῖνον ὁμοιότητος, εἴτε εὐσχημόνως καὶ προσεοικότως γέγονεν, οὐδὲν ἐλλείπουσα τῆς δυνατῆς πρὸς τὸ δαιμόνιον ἀνθρώποις ἀπεικασίας, εἴτε ἀναξία καὶ ἀπρεπής.

Pheidias begins by pointing out that Greece and its theological traditions precede him, being so old and immovable that he would not have been able to challenge them, and furthermore, there were other “craftsmen of divine things” (δημιουργοὺς ἄλλους περὶ τὰ θεῖα) who were older and wiser than he was; namely, the poets (*Or. 12.57*).³⁰¹ At this point, Pheidias initiates a comparison between the arts of poetry and sculpture that ostensibly praises the versatility of poetry but which, in the end, serves to illustrate how his art is superior in portraying the divine nature.

To begin with, Dio notes that mind (νοῦς) and intelligence (φρόνησις) themselves cannot be “captured in an image” (*Or. 12.59*, νοῦν γὰρ καὶ φρόνησιν [...] οὔτε τις [...] εἰκάσαι δυνατὸς ἔσται). But in order to become visible, they need a vessel. And so, because humans are the prime example of rational animals and because we are “in want of a better model and have no other way out” (ἐνδεία καὶ ἀπορία παραδείγματος), artisans choose the human form in order to depict God, “seeking to display through something visible and portrayable

²⁹⁹ On Lycurgus, the founder of the Spartan order, as a lawgiver (νομοθέτης) and his possible connection with Iphitus, cf. Plutarch, *Lyc.* 1.1 (Klauck, “Interpretationen,” 141, n. 278). It is perhaps not insignificant that such aniconism is not only associated with philosophers, but also with lawgivers. In Plutarch’s account of the life of Numa Pompilius, the second king of Rome and founder of its legal order and the figure with whom Plutarch compares Lycurgus, Plutarch recounts how Numa forbade images of the divine (Plutarch, *Numa* 8.7–8). One might note here that whatever the true origins of the Mosaic prohibition of images might be, the fact remains that in the early Roman imperial era, it would have been perceived as the pronouncement of the lawgiver Moses.

³⁰⁰ Klauck, “Interpretationen,” 192: Pheidias functions as Dio’s “Sprachrohr.”

³⁰¹ This line of argument is repeated in *Or. 12.62* when Pheidias claims that if anyone is upset by the anthropomorphic form of the statue, then he should criticize Homer first.

that which cannot be captured in an image (τὸ ἀνεΐκαστον) and is unseen (ἀφανές)" (*Or.* 12.59).³⁰²

Poetry, on the other hand, is so versatile as to be autonomous (*Or.* 12.64, αὐτόνομος). This is grounded in the medium itself, for the productions of human language are not only quantitatively inexhaustible, but they also have the ability to express any idea whatsoever and, with some skill, convince the audience of anything (*Or.* 12.65). In contrast, Pheidias' art is subject to other constraints. Because the sculptor must work with material that is not only hard but also limited, the artist needs more time and has fewer chances of portraying an object well.

In addition to these factors, it is necessary to craft one form for each image, one that is immovable and enduring, so as to capture in it the whole of the divine nature and power.

[...]

Yet what is most difficult of all is that it is necessary for the craftsman to always retain the same image in his soul until he completes his work, and this often takes many years.

(*Or.* 12.70, 71)

πρὸς δὲ αὐτὸ τούτοις ἐν σχῆμα ἑκάστης εἰκόνοσ ἀνάγκη εἰργάσθαι, καὶ τοῦτο ἀκίνητον καὶ μένον, ὥστε τὴν πᾶσαν ἐν αὐτῷ τοῦ θεοῦ ξυλλαβεῖν φύσιν καὶ δύναμιν.

[...]

τὸ δὲ πάντων χαλεπώτατον, ἀνάγκη παραμένειν τῷ δημιουργῷ τὴν εἰκόνα ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ τὴν αὐτὴν αἰεὶ, μέχρις ἂν ἐκτελέσῃ τὸ ἔργον, πολλάκις καὶ πολλοῖς ἔτεσι.

Whereas a poet like Homer was able to offer the Greeks "many and beautiful images" of the all the gods and of the greatest God,³⁰³ the sculptor is forced to be selective and thereby to identify one immovable, enduring form that captures the totality of the divine nature and power and retain it "in his mind" throughout the creative process. In so doing, the artist is not oriented toward a

³⁰² Though the direct referent of τὸ ἀνεΐκαστον in *Or.* 12.59 is "mind" and "intelligence," Dio's Stoic leanings and the reference to Iphitus and Lycurgus in *Or.* 12.54 imply that this is simultaneously predicated of the "highest and most perfect nature."

The orator Maximus of Tyre (second cent. A.D.) demonstrates the continuing currency of Dio's idea that human representations of the divine spring from some human lack and perplexity, yet he goes a step further. In *Dissertationes* 2.10 (ed. Trapp), he states that the invisibility of God attests to divine *ineffability*. Not only does human capacity fail at perceiving God with the senses, but human speech, too, falls short of being able to communicate the nature of the divine properly; a humbling admission for one whose craft is a captivating eloquence: "For God, the father and fashioner of all things, elder than the sun, elder than the heaven, [is] greater than time and season and every flowing nature, not named by the law-givers, inexpressible by voice, and invisible (ἀόρατος) to the eyes; not being able to apprehend his essence, we strive with our utterances, and with names and images (ζῳοις), and with patterns made of gold and ivory and silver, and with plants and rivers and mountaintops and running streams, desiring knowledge of him, yet under weakness naming his nature by way of the things that are beautiful to us" (*Diss.* 2.10).

³⁰³ *Or.* 12.73: πολλὰς καὶ καλὰς εἰκόνας.

physical model, but rather towards a *mental image* (εικόν) and therefore does not reproduce an external reality, but rather creates on the basis of the innate conception of the divine as it presents itself to the artist.³⁰⁴ Dio does not use the term οὐσία, but he is in effect saying just that: due to the constraints of his art, the sculptor must identify the essence of the deity, that ‘core’ or ‘self-same element’ that remains immutable over an infinite number of discrete actions *ad extra*. This is crucial for understanding Pheidias’ comments about the attributes of his image:

But consider whether or not you shall find this image befitting of all the names of the God: for Zeus alone of the gods is named “Father” and “King,” “Guardian of the City” and “God of Friendship” and “the Companionable” as well, and in addition to these “Protector of Suppliants” and “Protector of the Rights of Strangers,” and “Giver of Fruits,” and who has myriad other names that convey something good. He is named “King” on account of his reign and power, “Father,” it seems to me, because of his care and gentle nature, “Protector of the City” because he guards the law and the common good, “Protector of Kin” because of the community of kinship between gods and humans, “God of Friendship” and “the Companionable,” for he brings all people together and desires that they be friends with one another, being neither enemy nor adversary to anyone, “Protector of Suppliants” as one who listens and is gracious to suppliants, “God of Refuge” because he is a refuge from all evils, and “Protector of the Rights of Strangers” because one must neither neglect strangers nor consider anyone a foreigner, “Protector of the Home” and “Giver of Fruits,” for he is the cause of fruits and the giver of wealth and power.
(*Or.* 12.75–76)

σκοπέι δέ, εἰ μὴ πάσαις ταῖς ἐπωνυμίαις ταῖς τοῦ θεοῦ πρέπουσαν εὐρήσεις τὴν εἰκόνα· Ζεὺς γὰρ μόνος θεῶν πατὴρ καὶ βασιλεὺς ἐπωνομάζεται, Πολιεύς τε καὶ Φίλιος καὶ Ἐταιρεῖος, πρὸς δὲ αὐ τοῦτοις Ἰκέσιός τε καὶ Ξένιος καὶ Ἐπικάρπιος καὶ μυρίας ἄλλας ἐπικλήσεις ἔχων πάσας ἀγαθὰς, βασιλεὺς μὲν κατὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ δύναμιν ὀνομασμένος, πατὴρ δὲ οἶμαι διὰ τε <τὴν> κηδεμονίαν καὶ τὸ πρᾶον, Πολιεύς δὲ κατὰ τὸν νόμον καὶ τὸ κοινὸν ὄφελος, Οὐμόγιος δὲ διὰ τὴν τοῦ γένους κοινωνίαν θεοῖς καὶ ἀνθρώποις, Φίλιος δὲ καὶ Ἐταιρεῖος, ὅτι πάντας ἀνθρώπους ζυνάγει καὶ βούλεται φίλους εἶναι ἀλλήλοις, ἐχθρὸν δὲ ἢ πολέμιον οὐδένα οὐδενός, Ἰκέσιος δὲ, ὡς ἂν ἐπήκοός τε καὶ ἴλεως τοῖς δεομένοις, Φύξιος δὲ διὰ τὴν τῶν κακῶν ἀπόφυξιν, Ξένιος δὲ, ὅτι δεῖ μὴδὲ τῶν ξένων ἀμελεῖν μὴδὲ ἀλλότριον ἡγεῖσθαι ἀνθρώπων μὴδένα, Κτήσιος δὲ καὶ Ἐπικάρπιος, ἅτε τῶν καρπῶν αἴτιος καὶ δοτὴρ πλοῦτου καὶ δυνάμεως.

³⁰⁴ Ventrella, “Notice,” 53–54: “Selon l’orateur, Phidias n’a pas reproduit un modèle concret: il a libéré de la matière la forme qu’elle contenait, éliminant le superflu et avec le regard constamment tourné vers une image purement mentale (τὴν εἰκόνα ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ) [...]. L’interprétation de l’œuvre d’art réalisée par imitation d’une réalité idéale établie dans l’esprit du δημιουργός/artifex présuppose une lecture stoïcienne des idées platoniciennes, entendues non plus comme entités du monde supracéleste, mais comme *logoi* qui habitent l’esprit de l’homme. Une telle vision de l’artiste présuppose l’interprétation des idées platoniciennes comme pensées de dieu [...].” Cf. also Nikolsky, “Images of Zeus,” 179.

Dio – through Pheidias – thereby demonstrates that divine images can be interpreted as symbols of a philosophically informed conception of God in much the same way that earlier Stoics had done through the allegorical interpretation of myth.³⁰⁵ The impetus of the plastic arts, therefore, need not come from sensible realities, but rather the domain of metaphysics and, therefore, is relevant for theology.³⁰⁶ After assuring his audience twice that his image appropriately captures these divine attributes (*Or.* 12.77, 78), he explains – and this is perhaps the very point of the comparison of the arts of poetry and sculpture – why he chose not to portray other aspects of Zeus: the issuing of lightning and other omens of war, destructive meteorological events, the sowing of strife (ἔρις) and the love of war, and the mixing of fates that so arbitrarily leads to life or death for demigods and whole armies. Though Pheidias claims that his art would be incapable of portraying such things – a tenuous claim at best – he gives this the lie when he admits that he would not have desired to do so even if he had been able (*Or.* 12.78–79). In other words, he sorts out Zeus' 'unpalatable' qualities and retains only those which are philosophically tenable and socially useful.³⁰⁷ In so doing, Pheidias displays how his image aligns with the innate conception of the divine nature – at whose heart is the awareness of a providential, beneficent parent – which was one of the criteria Dio had set up for evaluating the representatives of the various sources of theology.

II. Summary

Dio Chrysostom presents us with five sources of theological knowledge classified according to two types: the innate conception, common to all people and the foundation for evaluating the other sources, and acquired conceptions, which encompass the work of poets, lawgivers, artisans, and philosophers, the latter having prime place in evaluating the others on the basis of the innate conception.

The makers of images cannot operate independently of prior theological tradition, but they can and do add something of their own to the mix. Further, because their art operates under different constraints than those of poetry, the artisans are forced to be selective and thereby to identify the 'essence' of the

³⁰⁵ Klauck, "Interpretationen," 212: "Er treibt die stoische Akkommodation an den überlieferten Volksglauben, die durch philosophische Lektüre der zugrundeliegenden Mythen ermöglicht wurde, ein Stück weiter voran und bezieht klarer noch, als sonst geschehen, die sakralen Erzeugnisse der bildenden Kunst mit ein. Aber er geht damit so um wie die stoische Allegorese mit dem Mythos: Er fasst die Kunst als eine Art Sprache auf, die Sachverhalte *symbolisch* zur Darstellung bringt und daher wie ein Dichtwerk interpretiert werden kann."

³⁰⁶ Ventrella, "Notice," 35–36: "L'anthropomorphisme théologique de Phidias invite donc le spectateur à aller au-delà du sensible, pour établir les raisons de l'art dans une dimension purement transcendante et métaphysique [...] l'art finit par devenir une sorte de 'théologie par l'image', et de 'philosophie visuelle' [...]."

³⁰⁷ Klauck, "Interpretationen," 213.

divine, capturing the totality of the divine nature and power in a single, immovable, and enduring form. It is not the case that the creation of divine images is bad; the question is whether the artisan will have carefully considered, in accordance with the knowledge of the “highest and most perfect nature,” the image he desires to produce.³⁰⁸ In this way, the constraints under which the plastic arts operate can make such artistry superior to the ‘overflowing stream of poetic verses’ (cf. *Or.* 12.70).³⁰⁹ In addition, divine images can be considered a legitimate source of theological knowledge, provided that they correspond to the divine nature which is known innately by all and is clarified by the interpretation of philosophers (cf. *Or.* 12.47).

G. Three Stoics of the First Century A.D.

I. Seneca the Younger

Seneca the Younger (ca. 4 B.C.–A.D. 65), though born in Corduba (modern day Córdoba) in Hispania Baetica to a well-respected and wealthy equestrian family, moved to Rome at a young age and was educated there.³¹⁰ Aside from a series of exiles, the Stoic philosopher made his career as a philosopher, poet, and politician in the imperial city, even acting as co-regent for the first five years of Nero’s reign (i.e., A.D. 54–59). Though accused by some of an inconsistency between his philosophical doctrine and personal conduct, he was nevertheless known as a rigorous ethical thinker who sought to eradicate vice.³¹¹

For Seneca, an *imago* can be an outward manifestation of inner qualities. In warning of the vitiating nature of anger in *Ira* 2.35.3–4, Seneca writes of the distortions that anger causes to one’s physical appearance, such as trembling hands, distended neck, and swollen veins. If the outer appearance (*imago*) is so ugly, what kind of inward state should one suppose is present? *Qualis intus putas esse animum, cuius extra imago tam foeda est?* (35.4). However,

³⁰⁸ Nikolsky “Images of Zeus,” 180: “The inertness of the material thus becomes a particular benefit for a sculptor, for it compels him to represent not changing images of the sensible world but the true reality of immovable ideas.”

³⁰⁹ The beneficial character of such restraint need not be limited to sculpture. Cleanthes, the second scholar of the Stoics, is said to have applied this very thought to poetry, in the sense that the constraint of the poetic rules of composition forces poets to clarify what they mean (*apud* Seneca, *Ep.* 108.10; cited in Johan C. Thom, *Cleanthes’ Hymn to Zeus: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, STAC 33 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005], 5).

³¹⁰ Joachim Dingel, “L. Annaeus Seneca [2],” *DNP* 11:411–19, 411–12.

³¹¹ Christine Schmitz, citing Tacitus, *Ann.* 13.42; Cassius Dio, 61.10; Quintilian, *Inst.* 10.1.128: *egregius* [...] *vitiorum insectator* (“Seneca,” in *Brill’s New Pauly Supplements II. Volume 7: Figures of Antiquity and Their Reception in Art, Literature and Music*, eds. Peter von Möllendorf, Annette Simonis, and Linda Simonis, trans. Chad M. Schroeder [Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2015]: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2468-3418_bnps7_SIM_004736).

although he affirms here that an image is the outward manifestation of inward qualities, his remarks in *Ira* 2.36.1–2 make it clear that an image does not fully reproduce such inward qualities. Although an *imago* as representation has an epistemic value, an *imago* is not a perfect nor complete reproduction.

Seneca never directly applies the syntagma *imago dei* to the human, choosing rather to hint at the possibility that the human may become such an *imago*. To begin with, he affirms the *possibility* of a basic kinship between God and humanity. Human reason derives from the divine reason that rules all things and is, in this sense, of the same nature.³¹² And yet not all humans make use of their reason. While Seneca does admonish his addressee Lucilius to recognize that God is “near you, with you, within you” (*Ep.* 41.1–2, *prope est a te deus, tecum est, intus est*), it would be mistaken to understand this dynamic indwelling of the divine spirit as an anthropological universal, for a few lines later, he specifies his statement by stating, “in each good man a god dwells, though it is uncertain which one it is” (*ibid.*, *in unoquoque virorum bonorum (quis deus incertum est), habitat deus*; cf. *Ep.* 95.50). It is clear that this power does not indwell all, but rather only superior people whose souls surpass those of others (41.3–5), namely those who have attained an *animus excellens* (41.5). It is the pursuit of philosophy that results in the virtue which places the human on the level with God and even makes the human to be a god.³¹³ Seneca states quite directly that God surpasses the wise through the length of his life rather than through his virtue, for virtue is not made greater by way of the temporal duration of its presence in a subject.³¹⁴

What seems at first glance to be the human presumptuousness of such a claim, however, is declared to be a benefit grounded in God’s goodness. As Seneca writes elsewhere, God does not begrudge humanity the attainment of parity in status, but rather invites humanity to it insofar as God approaches (exemplary) humans to dwell within them.

God draws near to human beings; no, it is more proper [to say], [God] enters into the human; no mind at all is good without God. Divine seeds have been sown in human bodies, which the cultivator – if he be good – receives; [seeds] similar to the [divine] origin spring up and [seeds] equal to those [sc. the divine seeds] from which they came rise up. (*Ep.* 73.16)

Deus ad homines venit, immo quod est proprius, in homines venit: nulla sine deo mens bona est. Semina in corporibus humanis divina dispersa sunt, quae si bonus cultor excipit, similia origini prodeunt et paria iis ex quibus orta sunt surgunt.

³¹² Seneca, *Ep.* 92.1: *Nam illa quoque divina ratio omnibus praeposita est, ipsa sub nullo est; et haec autem nostra eadem es, quae ex illa est.*

³¹³ Seneca, *Ep.* 73.11, speaking of the leisure which allows the pursuit of philosophy: *hoc otium, quod inter deos agitur, quod deos facit.*

³¹⁴ Seneca, *Ep.* 73.13–14: *Deus non vincit sapientem felicitate, etiam si vincit aetate; non est virtus maior, quae longior.*

And yet, this divine initiative does not release the human from striving upwards. In *Ep.* 31, Seneca tells Lucilius to “rise” to the task of becoming like God (31.9, *par deo surgere*). It is this epistle in which Seneca comes the closest to describing the human as an image of God, albeit indirectly. He writes to Lucilius:

Only rise, “And mold yourself, too, to be worthy like a god.” You will not mold, however, with gold nor silver: for it is not possible for an image like unto God to be shaped from this material [...].
(Ep. 31.11)

exurge modo et te quoque dignum finge deo. Finges autem non auro vel argento: non potest ex hac materia imago deo exprimi similis [...].

The implication is clear: if there is a material from which an appropriate image of God might be formed, then it is the material which houses the rational soul.

The consequences of this wide-sweeping anthropological statement are brought into sharper focus by noting whence the quotation in *Ep.* 31.11 comes. It stems from Virgil, *Aen.* 8.364 and the sentiment is addressed to Aeneas by King Evander when they enter the latter’s house. This line concludes a long episode in which Hercules is celebrated and his lore is recounted, such as his defeat of Cacus and his other labors (*Aen.* 8.184–305). After commending Hercules, Evander recounts the history of his territory, a history replete with the acts of gods and nymphs and heroes who decisively changed the nature of the place (i.e., Saturn civilizing the nameless natives by giving them laws and naming the place Latium; how Albula was renamed Tiber, etc. [*Aen.* 8.313–358]). Evander therefore tells Aeneas to make himself worthy to be a god in the context of the lore of those gods and heroes who shaped Rome’s history. After Evander says this, they go to bed, and the scene switches to Venus’ visit to Vulcan in which the shield of Aeneas is forged (*Aen.* 8.370–453), an episode which is clearly reminiscent of the manufacture of the shield of Achilles in Book 18 of Homer’s *Iliad*. The line “mold yourself, too, to be worthy like a god” is therefore embedded in the human recounting of the history of gods and heroes who shaped Rome’s history and the divine machinations, invisible to humanity, that will shape its future. What is significant about Seneca’s use of this line is that he has lifted it from a context concerning mythical heroes and inserted it into a short discussion about virtue of mind and character, and he does so directly after having discarded heroic labors (*Ep.* 31.9), wealth, strength, and beauty as means of attaining a virtuous life (31.10). The extent to which Seneca may have intended an intertextual reading remains a speculative issue, yet the fact remains that his criteria for succeeding in the game of life are not quite the same as what would have been necessary in the heroic age; on the contrary, he relativizes the importance of those qualities. Chief in Seneca’s pursuit of becoming an “upright, good, and great soul” (31.11) is philosophy,

the “art by which things human and divine are known.”³¹⁵ The result – a great soul – is not a matter of fortune nor something which is subject to external and irresistible powers, and is therefore a pursuit open to all, noble and slave alike (31.11). For this reason, the challenge to “rise” and make oneself into something like an image of the divine can be issued to all, not just to those of good birth and means.

II. Musonius Rufus

Gaius Musonius Rufus (ca. A.D. 29–100) was born to an Etruscan family in the vicinity of Volsinii, was a member of the equestrian class, and was “a staunch Roman [Stoic]” who composed in Greek.³¹⁶ There are no extant writings by his own hand; all we have are comments made by Gellius, Plutarch, his student Epictetus, and excerpts from twenty-one diatribes published by Lucius, another of his students.³¹⁷

He affirmed the basic rational character of all humans (not just men)³¹⁸ and also affirmed that human nature is such that each and every person can live well and free from error.³¹⁹ It is therefore perhaps no coincidence that when he describes the potential of the human to develop in virtue, he uses the metaphor of a seed.³²⁰ The seed cannot be cultivated, however, unless one learns what virtue is.³²¹ Philosophy thus encompasses both a theoretical and a practical-ethical task, namely the examination of what it means to live well and the endeavor to do so.³²² To reject the notion that virtue might arise merely through

³¹⁵ Seneca, *Ep.* 31.8: the *summum bonum* is the *ars per quam humana ac divina noscantur*. It is this which makes humans to be companions of the gods rather than their suppliants (*deorum socius esse, non supplex*).

³¹⁶ Rainer Nickel, “Nachwort,” in *Epiktet, Teles, Musonius: Ausgewählte Schriften*, Sammlung Tusculum, ed. Nickel (Zürich: Artemis & Winkler, 1994), 539–52, 551: “[Er] war ein überzeugter römischer, aber griechisch schreibender Stoiker.” Cf. also Brad Inwood, “C.M. Rufus,” *DNP* 8:553.

³¹⁷ Nickel, “Nachwort,” 551.

³¹⁸ In his third diatribe, “That Women, Too, Should Do Philosophy” (ὅτι καὶ γυναῖξί φιλοσοφητέον), he argues that “women have received from the gods the same reason as men” (Λόγον μὲν, ἔφη, τὸν αὐτὸν εἰλήφασι παρὰ θεῶν αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἀνδράσιν (ed. Hense, p. 9, lines 1–2). In his fourth diatribe, he makes a case for educating sons and daughters in the same way, “for it is easy to learn that the virtues of a man are not different than the virtues of a woman” (*Diatr.* 4, ed. Hense, p. 14, lines 4–6).

³¹⁹ Musonius Rufus, *Diatr.* 2, ed. Hense, p. 6, lines 5–6: Πάντες, ἔφη, φύσει πεφύκαμεν οὕτως, ὥστε ζῆν ἀναμαρτήτως καὶ καλῶς, οὐχ ὁ μὲν ἡμῶν ὁ δ’ οὐ [...].

³²⁰ Musonius Rufus, *Diatr.* 2, ed. Hense, p. 8, lines 1–2: σπέρμα ἀρετῆς ἐκάστῳ ἡμῶν [ἔνεστι].

³²¹ Musonius Rufus, *Diatr.* 2, ed. Hense, p. 6, lines 16–18.

³²² Musonius Rufus, *Diatr.* 3, ed. Hense, p. 9, lines 14–15: ζητεῖν καὶ σκοπεῖν ὅπως βιώσονται καλῶς, ὅπερ τὸ φιλοσοφεῖν ἐστι [...]; cf. *Diatr.* 8, ed. Hense, p. 34, lines 18–p.

knowledge in the absence of effort, Musonius underscores in his fifth diatribe (“Whether Habit [ἔθος] or Theory [λόγος] Is Better?”) and in his sixth (“On Practice” [ἄσκησις]) that theory, though necessary for orientation, is useless without the habit born by practice³²³ and that whosoever desires to become good must not only learn one’s lessons, but must also train oneself in accordance with them ambitiously and industriously.³²⁴ Taken to the extreme, the pursuit of such virtue can even make the human to be godlike.

In his 17th discourse, “What is the Best Provision for Old Age?,” Musonius states that a good life is a life lived according to nature,³²⁵ which includes the task of fulfilling one’s τέλος. For the human, this does not consist in a life lived according to pleasure.³²⁶ Arguing *a minori ad maius*, he states:

For neither the horse nor the dog nor the cow, the very things that are more ignoble than the human, came into being for the sake of pleasure; for surely no one would think that a horse would fulfil his own telos by eating and drinking and mating without restraint, doing nothing which is proper to a horse?

οὐδὲ γὰρ ἵππος οὐδὲ κύων οὐδὲ βοῦς, ἅπερ ἀτιμότερα πολὺ ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν, οὐ πρὸς ἡδονὴν γέγονεν· οὐδὲ γὰρ νομισθεῖη ἂν τυγχάνειν τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ τέλους ἵππος ἐσθίων μὲν καὶ πίνων καὶ ὄχευων ἀνέδη, πράττων δὲ μηδὲν ὧν ἵππο προσήκει·

(*Diatr.* 17, ed. Hense, p. 89, lines 3–8)

In like manner, human life does not consist in living for pleasure, but in living a life of virtue. For this reason, Musonius can say:

On the whole, the human alone of all creatures upon earth is the imitation (μίμημα) of God, for it has virtues similar to [God].

καθόλου δὲ ἄνθρωπος μίμημα μὲν θεοῦ μόνον τῶν ἐπιγείων ἐστίν, ἐκείνῳ δὲ παραπλησίας ἔχει τὰς ἀρετάς·

(*Diatr.* 17, ed. Hense, p. 90, lines 4–6)

Because God possesses the cardinal virtues (φρόνησις, ἀνδρεία, σωφροσύνη, δικαιοσύνη), God cannot be conquered by pleasure nor greed nor desire; instead of being corrupted by the latter, God is high-minded, beneficent, and loving towards humankind (φιλόανθρωπος). Thus, whenever the human lives according to its nature and in a state similar to God’s own, it must be considered to be God’s imitation (τὸ ἐκείνου μίμημα), and the human who lives in such a

35, line 5, where Musonius claims that only philosophy leads to prudence, mastery over desire and greed, the ability to control one’s tongue, etc.

³²³ Musonius Rufus, *Diatr.* 5, ed. Hense, p. 21, lines 16–22.

³²⁴ Musonius Rufus, *Diatr.* 6, ed. Hense, p. 22, line 12–p. 23, line 3.

³²⁵ Musonius Rufus, *Diatr.* 17, ed. Hense, p. 89, line 1. This is a firm tenet of the Stoic tradition; cf. Cicero, *Fin.* 4.14 (= *SVF* 3.13); Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.7.6e (ed. Wachsmuth, vol. 2, p. 77, lines 16–19 [= *SVF* 3.16]).

³²⁶ Musonius Rufus, *Diatr.* 17, ed. Hense, p. 89, lines 2–3: [ἡ] ἀνθρώπου φύσι[ς] ὡς οὐ πρὸς ἡδονὴν γέγονεν.

state is, in its turn, worthy of being imitated.³²⁷ When humans live in this way according to their nature, they may even be called divine (θεῖος) or godlike (θεοειδής).³²⁸

Though Musonius does not use the term “model” (παράδειγμα) to describe how such a human “imitation” of God can become a model for others, it is clear that such a conceptual structure is in place: the human who becomes an imitation of God through the cultivation of virtue becomes an ethical model for others (lit. “ought to be emulated,” ζηλωτόν). As in the case of Seneca, we see that Musonius as well views kinship with the divine to be a latent human possibility that must be realized through philosophical knowledge and, above all, through ethical striving. If the human is successful in this endeavor, it may rightly be called an “imitation of God.”

III. Epictetus

The Stoic Epictetus (ca. A.D. 50–125) was a pupil of Musonius who, similar to his teacher, is known to us through the notes taken by one of his own students: the works known to us as his *Diatribes* and *Encheiridion* were compiled and published by Arrian.³²⁹ Epictetus maintained Musonius’ focus on the practical import of philosophy by focusing primarily on ethics,³³⁰ contributing to the Stoic ethical discourse the concept of προαίρεσις, the notion of the individual’s basic ability to resolutely choose one path or another and thereby take responsibility for one’s life.³³¹ Theoretical knowledge serves precisely this end, namely that we may learn what is in our power (ἐφ’ ἡμῖν) and what is not,³³² and proper reflection will help us discard the notions (φαντασίαι) which obscure our estimation of what is or is not in our power.³³³

Similar to his teacher, Epictetus thinks that what makes humans akin to the gods is reason and intelligence,³³⁴ for the divine nature consists not in “flesh” (σάρξ), but in mind, knowledge, and right reason (νοῦς, ἐπιστήμη, λόγος ὀρθός).³³⁵ Yet this is not the sum of our being, for we inhabit a body and it is this body (σῶμα) which we share with other animals. Some incline (ἀποκλίνω)

³²⁷ Musonius Rufus, *Diatr.* 17, ed. Hense, p. 90, lines 13–15: οὕτω καὶ τὸ ἐκείνου μίμημα τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἡγητέον, ὅταν ἔχη κατὰ φύσιν, ὁμοίως ἔχειν, καὶ οὕτως ἔχοντα εἶναι ζηλωτόν [...].

³²⁸ Musonius Rufus, *Diatr.* 17, ed. Hense, p. 91, lines 1–2.

³²⁹ Simplicius, *Comm. in Epict. Enchr. praeef. init.* (cited in the *testimonia* in Schenkl’s ed., iii).

³³⁰ Nickel, “Nachwort,” 547: “Das Problem der sittlichen Lebensführung hat in seinem Denken eine ebenso zentrale wie alles beherrschende Stellung.”

³³¹ Brad Inwood, “Epiktetos [2],” *DNP* 3:1123–25, 1124.

³³² Epictetus, *Ench.* 1.1.

³³³ Epictetus, *Ench.* 10.

³³⁴ Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.3.3: ὁ λόγος δὲ καὶ ἡ γνώμη κοινὸν πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς.

³³⁵ Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.8.2–3.

to this affinity with beasts while only a few (ὀλίγοι δέ τινας) incline toward their similarity with the divine.³³⁶ Even the very title of this discourse reveals both aspects of the Stoic position that a divine-human kinship is latent and yet must be developed within the human: “From the thesis that God is the father of mankind how may one proceed to the consequences?”³³⁷ Although Epictetus clearly affirms a genealogical connection between God and humanity (cf. *Diatr.* 1.3.1) and no doubt understands this to be the source of our rationality, human assimilation to God can only transpire insofar as humans “incline” toward reason.

Unsurprisingly, this can entail denying the body and its needs any kind of importance. And yet Epictetus is careful to point out that this is no justification for capriciously escaping the body because it might seem wretched and limiting and it might be more desirable for the human soul to depart and be with its kindred deity.³³⁸ Epictetus rejects this because he understands the cosmos as a kind of government (σύστημα) composed of God and humanity;³³⁹ the right moment to make one’s quietus is whenever the Ruler [sc. God] sees fit to release a human being from his service.³⁴⁰ The aim is not to be free *of* the limitations imposed by corporeal existence, but rather to be free *within* them.³⁴¹ He points to Socrates’ refusal to lay down his teaching activity – and thus the “post” to which God had assigned him – due to fear of temporal authorities. This ability to be in control of oneself through one’s mind and therefore to be loyal to one’s divine appointment in the face of a threat to one’s physical well-

³³⁶ Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.3.3–4.

³³⁷ Πῶς ἂν τις ἀπὸ τοῦ τὸν θεὸν πατέρα εἶναι τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπὶ τὰ ἐξῆς ἐπέλθοι.

³³⁸ Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.9.10–15.

³³⁹ Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.9.4. It might be pointed out that in *Diatr.* 2.5.26, Epictetus can speak in this connection of the human state (πόλις) as a “little imitation” (μικρόν [...]) μίμημα) of the cosmic city of gods and humanity.

³⁴⁰ Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.9.16: ὅταν [...] ἀπολύσῃ ὑμᾶς ταύτης τῆς ὑπηρεσίας.

³⁴¹ Cf. Epictetus, *Diatr.* 4.1, “On Freedom” (Περὶ ἐλευθερίας). Epictetus says that the free human is the one who lives as it wills (4.1.1), yet we all are hindered by the fact that the circumstances of our lives are our masters and, in this connection, the persons who have power over these circumstances (4.1.59–60). Therefore, it cannot be the outward circumstances of wealth or political power that grant us freedom (4.1.62; cf. 4.1.77), but rather the ability to take command of the direction of our will (4.1.74). Epictetus puts a theological point on this when he says that his freedom consists in consigning his will to God (4.1.89–90). Because the Stoic cosmic God is the active principle (ἀρχή), the λόγος that permeates and shapes passive matter (ὕλη) and thus brings about and preserves the cosmos (cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.134 [= *SVF* 1.85]), one might say that the progression of events in time which affect our bodies, such as sickness or death or even pain inflicted upon our bodies by others, is itself the unfolding of the divine will. As Epictetus puts it: “He wills that I obtain something; I, too, desire it. He does not will it; I do not wish it. Therefore, I will to die; thus, I will to be tortured. Who is able to stand any longer in the way of what appears right to me, or who could compel me? That is just as impossible as it would be with Zeus” (*Diatr.* 4.1.90).

being is, for Epictetus, precisely how the human being approximates the divine most fully.³⁴²

Both poles of the Stoic conception – an inborn affinity with the divine on the one hand and the requirement that this be realized through virtuous action on the other – are presented even more intensely in the discourse, “What is the Nature of the Good?” (*Diatr.* 2.8, Τίς οὐσία τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ). The nature of the good is identical with God’s own nature, which consists in “intelligence, knowledge, [and] right reason” (2.8.2–3, νοῦς, ἐπιστήμη, λόγος ὀρθός). Animals do not possess this, but the human being does, for it is a “fragment of God” (ἀπόσπασμα [...] τοῦ θεοῦ), a “portion of [God]” (μέρος ἐκείνου), bearing a kinship (συγγένεια) with God, and what is more, it even carries God within it (2.8.11–13, θεὸν περιφέρω).³⁴³ Epictetus directly points out that he does not mean a portable cultic image made of gold or silver, but rather the God “within.”³⁴⁴ To sharpen the point, he states that just as people are careful not to act ignobly in the presence of a cultic image, it behooves them to act nobly at all times, for God is always with(in) them. He asks rhetorically: should the human being forget that it, too, is a work of art (κατασκευάσμα), just like the statues made by Pheidias (2.8.18), yet an even greater one made by a greater artist (2.8.21)?

Although he has not yet used the term εἰκὼν nor ἄγαλμα, it is clear that Epictetus employs the metaphor of a material image of the divine when comparing humanity to God based on the rational faculty; indeed, no other work of art (κατασκευάσμα) is able to exhibit the same faculties through which it was made,³⁴⁵ but the human does just this by virtue of reason. And yet, Epictetus does not rest content with the assertion that the human is a unique “work of art” based on the inborn affinity with the divine: though the human being be an imitation of the divine, it is quite a unique one, insofar as it must continue the work that God had begun in it. Epictetus knows that he is “not yet” where he ought to be (2.8.24, οὐπω κατ’ ἀξίαν) due to his weakness (2.8.25), and he still needs time to work on himself. Yet when the time comes when he has

³⁴² Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.9.25: τοῦτ’ ἔστιν ἄνθρωπος ταῖς ἀληθείαις συγγενῆς τῶν θεῶν.

³⁴³ Jordi Pià Comella notes that Epictetus’s comparison of the ‘divine portion’ in the soul with a cultic image serves a similar ethical purpose as the δαίμων in some Middle Platonists, such as Apuleius (*Une piété de la raison: Philosophie et religion dans le stoïcisme impérial. Des Lettres à Lucilius de Sénèque aux Pensées de Marc Aurèle*, Philosophie hellénistique et romaine 3 [Turnhout: Brepols, 2014], 397).

³⁴⁴ For a similar train of thought, cf. Seneca, Ep. 41.2: *prope est a te deus, tecum est, intus est. Ita dico, Lucili: sacer intra nos spiritus sedet, malorum bonorumque nostrorum observator et custos.*

³⁴⁵ Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.8.20: Καὶ ποῖον ἔργον τεχνίτου εὐθὺς ἔχει τὰς δυνάμεις ἐν ἑαυτῷ, ὡς ἐμφαίνει διὰ τῆς κατασκευῆς;

completed and polished his “statue” (ἄγαλμα), he will display it.³⁴⁶ Comparing humanity to an ἄγαλμα θεοῦ therefore serves Epictetus’ parenetic purpose: it is the duty of each human to “complete” and “polish” itself as an image.³⁴⁷ After speaking of himself within the analogy of an icon of God, and promising the completion of this work, Epictetus lists the qualities which he considers godlike. They all have to do with consciousness, being either states of mind or actions proceeding from a stable, godlike bearing. He therefore brings his discourse full circle, in that he shows how humanity can mimic the “intelligence, knowledge, [and] right reason” that constitute the divine essence and therefore also the nature of the good.

IV. Summary

On the one hand, these three Stoics affirm a basic, inalienable similarity of the human with the divine on the basis of the rational faculty. This distances humanity from all other earthly entities without denying that those other entities are rightfully considered God’s handiwork (cf. Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.8.11). As Epictetus puts it, God’s very essence is intelligence, knowledge, and right reason (*Diatr.* 2.8.2–3), and while brutish animal life cannot direct itself according to reason, the human can. In this sense, humans are similar to the divine.

On the other hand, these Stoics claim that the human becomes godlike by living in accordance with Nature (sc. God) and thus by living virtuously. That a certain tension exists here is clear. For our purposes, however, we may note that these Stoics only speak of the human as an image of God when and where the human lives in a way that corresponds to divine reason. The human subject has within it the power to choose to live life according to right reason and thus in accordance with its kinship with the divine.

In this sense, we might say that the manner in which the human is an image of God consists in a universal human potential. Whether a discrete human may be called an *imago dei* or not depends on whether the human actualizes its

³⁴⁶ Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.8.25–26: τότε ὑμῖν δεῖξω τὸ ἄγαλμα, ὅταν τελειωθῆ, ὅταν στυλπωθῆ.

³⁴⁷ As it concerns the ethical implications of being an “image of God,” one finds a similar train of thought in Cicero, *Leg.* 1.58–61: philosophy is the greatest gift of the gods to man; she teaches us that which is most difficult of all things – to know ourselves (1.58). When we come to know ourselves, we realize that we have a divine element (*divinum ingenium*) in us, and we see that we have within us something like a consecrated divine image (*suum sicut simulacrum aliqod dicatum*). For this reason, we will act and think in a way worthy of the gods; this leads us to be happy (1.59, *beatus*). This is reached when the mind has attained knowledge of the virtues and has freed the human subject from subservience to the body, for being led by the mind rather than the body allows us to foster a clear mind and thus choose rightly between good and evil (1.60). One of the things learned along the way is that we are not citizens of one fixed locality, but rather citizens of the universe (1.61).

latent affinity with God and, in this way, makes itself to be an image, a representation of God in the world. Similar to Seneca's understanding of an *imago* in *Ira* 2.35.3–4, the human who is an *imago dei* serves to be an outward manifestation of inner qualities; one will certainly not have a physical appearance that looks divine but rather will evince a character commensurate with divine virtue and this will display itself through one's actions. When it comes to the concept of an "image of God" among these Stoics, we are therefore dealing primarily with an ethical matter.

In conclusion: among the Stoics Seneca the Younger, Musonius Rufus, and Epictetus, the notion of an *imago dei* or εἰκὼν θεοῦ is a primarily ethical concept that serves a paraenetic function.

H. The Apostle Paul

According to Lukan tradition, the Apostle Paul (ca. A.D. 5–65) hailed from Tarsus but was "brought up" and educated in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3; cf. further 9:11; 21:39). Although the precise historical details of his birth, citizenship, and circumstances of his move to Jerusalem can only be vaguely reconstructed,³⁴⁸ Luke's portrayal manages to capture in one brief sentence the multifaceted character of Paul's religious and educational background. To begin with, Tarsus was a city whose inhabitants were known for their intense passion for philosophy and general learning,³⁴⁹ and Asia Minor itself was home to a cross-pollination of various currents of philosophy and religion.³⁵⁰ Though Paul as a Diaspora Jew would have likely fostered a strong sense of Jewish identity, this by no means excludes the possibility that he would have been exposed, already at a young age, to various aspects of an Hellenistic education. His later training as a Pharisee in Jerusalem served to deepen his sense of identity, his knowledge of the Torah and various Jewish exegetical methods, and surely also contributed to his zeal for God's righteousness, the holiness of

³⁴⁸ On Paul's origins, education, and social status, see Michael Wolter, *Paulus: Ein Grundriss seiner Theologie*, 3rd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021), 8–23; Udo Schnelle, *Paulus: Leben und Denken*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 39–54; Tor Vegge, "Die kulturelle Prägung: Sprache, Erziehung, Bildung," in Horn, *Paulus Handbuch*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Horn (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 66–72.

³⁴⁹ Strabo, *Geogr.* 14.5.13 (Jones, LCL): "The people at Tarsus have devoted themselves so eagerly, not only to philosophy, but also to the whole round of education in general (σπουδῆ πρὸς τε φιλοσοφίαν καὶ τὴν ἄλλην παιδείαν ἐγκύκλιον ἅπασαν γέγονεν), that they have surpassed Athens, Alexandria, or any other place that can be named where there have been schools and lectures of philosophers" (cf. Thomas Wagner, *Neues Testament und Antike Kultur*, vol. 5, *Texte und Urkunden*, [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2011], 62–63).

³⁵⁰ See below, "Target Location."

God's people Israel, and the Law as a way of maintaining Israel's relationship with God; all of this is clearly echoed in his letters, occasionally with direct statements to that effect (Phil 3:5; 2 Cor 11:22; Rom 11:1; cf. Acts 22:3).

Though the "revelation of Jesus Christ" through which he received his Gospel message (Gal 1:11–12, 15–16; cf. also 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8) – portrayed dramatically by Luke in Acts 9:1–9 – fundamentally altered key components of his theology, there is no reason to think that it diminished his self-understanding as a Jew: "Paulus war Jude und blieb dies auch nach seiner Christusbegegnung in seinem ganzen Wirken als Apostel Jesu Christi."³⁵¹ In his letters, Paul consistently draws on the traditions of Israel and situates Christ in Israel's salvation history, and we find in his writings no indication that he ever would have considered locating himself or Christ and his significance outside of this framework. And it is precisely in these writings that we hear echoes of Hellenistic παιδεία. Paul's ability to draw from this "dual profundity of tradition" (*doppelte Traditionstiefe*)³⁵² to give expression to his understanding of the significance of Jesus Christ in God's salvation history not only enabled the new faith to assume a distinctive profile, but also was a condition for the positive reception of the Pauline Gospel in mixed communities.³⁵³

When we consider the undisputed letters of Paul, we should be little surprised that his use of εἰκών fits this picture. His conception of images and the way he applies the term εἰκών to Jesus Christ invoke the traditions of Israel, for when Paul presents Christ as the image of God to which believers shall be conformed, he does so in the context of portraying a transition in salvation history to Christ from two figures of Israel's scriptures: Adam and Moses. The three undisputed Pauline letters that are relevant for Paul's image concept (1 Cor, 2 Cor, Rom) happen to be the same and sole letters where Paul sets Jesus Christ in relation to Adam, to Moses, or to both.³⁵⁴ Further, his remarks also

³⁵¹ Jörg Frey, "Die religiöse Prägung: Weisheit, Apokalyptik, Schriftauslegung," in Horn, *Paulus Handbuch*, 59–66, 59.

³⁵² Udo Schnelle, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 3rd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 168. Schnelle makes this statement here in reference to all NT authors, but it applies especially to Paul.

³⁵³ Udo Schnelle, "Methodische Probleme der (Re)konstruktion der Theologie aus den erhaltenen Briefen," in Horn, *Paulus Handbuch*, 273–79, 276: "Speziell die Erfolge der paulinischen Mission lassen sich nur unter der Voraussetzung erklären, dass eine hohe Anschlussfähigkeit in Bezug auf die jüdischen und griechisch-römischen Traditionsströme bestand. Diese Anschlussfähigkeit ließ sich nicht durch Verweigerung, sondern nur durch eine bewusste Teilnahme an den Debatten erreichen, die im Umfeld der Gemeinden und in den Gemeinden geführt wurden."

³⁵⁴ Aside from Rom 4, the only other place in the protopauline letters where Abraham plays a role in the elucidation of the significance of the Christ-event is Gal 3 and 4:22. Neither in the mention of Abraham nor in the typology of Hagar and Sarah in Gal 4:21–31 does the term εἰκών play a role.

bear similarity to other Jewish thinkers and writers influenced by Hellenism, such as Philo and the Wisdom of Solomon.

While the analysis of the εἰκόν-Christology of 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, and Romans is critical for our study of Col 1:15–20, the goal of any ensuing comparison of the protopauline letters with Colossians will not be the drafting of a ‘genealogy of early Christology.’ If Colossians is ‘neither Pauline nor post-Pauline’ and could be dated between A.D. 52 and 64 (see below, “Author of Colossians” and “Place and Time of Composition”), then we would have to leave open the possibility, however slight, that Colossians predates, for example, 2 Corinthians, which was composed around A.D. 55/56.³⁵⁵ Similar to the analysis of Colossians’ other contemporaries (Wisdom, Philo, Plutarch, Dio Chrysostom, the three Stoics), the purpose of this analysis is not genetic, but rather the elucidation of the contours of the εἰκόν-Christology of the protopauline letters for the sake of bringing the contours of the εἰκόν-Christology of Colossians into sharper focus.

While a consideration of various passages in 1 Cor, 2 Cor, and Rom is necessary for the elucidation of Paul’s image concept, we begin with a brief consideration of two verses that fall outside the pale of Paul’s otherwise Christologically determined use of εἰκόν: Rom 1:23 and 1 Cor 11:7.

I. The Outliers: Romans 1:23 and 1 Corinthians 11:7

It is often stated in exegetical literature that Paul’s remarks in Rom 1:23 and 1 Cor 11:7 form the exception to Paul’s use of εἰκόν or εἰκὼν θεοῦ, which otherwise is restricted to Jesus Christ. In the first instance, Paul critiques figural images as a failure to recognize and worship the God of Israel as the one true God; the remark is reminiscent of the aniconic discourse of the Hebrew Bible (see above). Paul’s critique of images otherwise employs the terms εἰδῶλον (e.g., 1 Cor 8:4; 12:2) and εἰδωλολατρία (Gal 5:20) and Rom 1:23 is the only place in the entire Corpus Paulinum where Paul uses the term εἰκόν for this purpose.³⁵⁶

The other outlier, namely 1 Cor 11:7, asserts that the “man [...] is the image and glory of God” (Ἄνθρωπος [...] εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ ὑπάρχων), but not the women nor Christ. As the present topic is concerned, two conspicuous peculiarities characterize the passage. First, the issue at hand in 1 Cor 11:2–16 is the behavior of Corinthian women in worship (vv. 5, 10, 13), and Paul addresses it at first by employing the motif of a “head” in 1 Cor 11:3, wherein Christ, the

³⁵⁵ Thomas Schmeller, “Zweiter Korintherbrief,” in *Paulus Handbuch*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Horn (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 185–94, 190, proposes A.D. 55/56 for the composition of 2 Corinthians. Udo Schnelle, *Paulus: Leben und Denken*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 244, votes for the late fall of A.D. 55.

³⁵⁶ See Christiane Zimmermann, “Paulus und die Macht der Bilder,” *ZTK* 199, no. 1 (2022): 31–54, 33–37.

man, the woman, and God are mentioned. In v. 7, however, where the expression εικόν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ occurs, Christ has simply been removed from the equation. Second, this use of εικόν cuts against the grain of Paul's εικόν concept in another significant way: it is gender exclusive. Otherwise, as we shall see, Christ's status as the εικόν θεοῦ or the εικόν ἐπουρανίου to which believers shall be conformed serves as a fixed reference point for the eschatological destiny of *all* believers, without any distinction arising from biological and socio-historical categories. This tension in the application of εικόν is present within the letter itself (cf. 1 Cor 15:49) and might be best explained by the following factors. First, Paul seems to be following an early Jewish interpretation of Gen 1:27 according to which only the man Adam was created in God's image.³⁵⁷ Second, and in connection with the first point, Paul's exegesis is Mid-rashic, interpreting a verse of scripture to address a particular issue of religious practice; this could explain discrepancies with other Pauline statements.³⁵⁸ Finally, Paul appeals to creation in 1 Cor 11:7, whereas in 1 Cor 15, Paul argues from the perspective of the eschatological future. It is possible that the appeal to creation in 1 Cor 11:7 is a response to a Corinthian view of a realized eschatology in which man and woman have already attained the status of the *imago dei*;³⁵⁹ Paul's 'eschatological reservation' (cf. 1 Cor 4:1–13) and his admonition that believers retain the standing in which they were called (1 Cor 7:17–24) buttress this hypothesis. For Paul, as we shall see, some measure of conformity to Christ's image is possible in this life, but *full* conformity is a future reality.³⁶⁰

II. From Adam to Christ

1. 1 Corinthians 15

After an initial block of material in chapters one through four, 1 Corinthians proceeds with what appears to be a scattershot series of discrete ethical problems such as sexual licentiousness, legal suits between community members, marriage, the consumption of meat sacrificed to idols, the practice of prayer,

³⁵⁷ Reading אָדָם in Gen 1:27 as the proper name of the man rather than as a generic designation for the human being, and accordingly reading the direct object marker modified by the singular masculine pronoun in וְאֵלֹהִים אֵלֶיךָ to apply only to the male. The resulting reading would be, "And God created Adam in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Cf. Christian Wolff, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther*, THKNT 7 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1996), 251; Schnelle, *Paulus*, 583.

³⁵⁸ Cf. Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 295.

³⁵⁹ Cf. Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther (1Kor6,12–11,6)*, EKK 7/2 (Düsseldorf/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger/Neukirchener, 1995), 511–12.

³⁶⁰ Even the progressive conformation to the image of the Son in 2 Cor 3:18 is different from a fully realized conformation.

communion, and the gifts of the Spirit. Even if one peers just beneath the surface and supposes to have found an underlying tectonic structure that unites the seemingly disparate parts of chapters five through fourteen, it may nevertheless appear that we are confronted with a ‘hard cut’ when our attention is subsequently redirected to the significance of the resurrection in 1 Cor 15. One might ask: what does that have to do with the gifts of the Spirit, which were the subject of chapters twelve through fourteen, or the issue of sacrificial meat in chapter eight?

It seems, however, that Paul has spanned an arc from the first to the penultimate chapter of the letter. Just as he treated the centrality of Christ in the first chapter (1 Cor 1:11–19, 26–31), he does so here as well, although it is more detailed and transpires in a different mode, as it were. Whereas the rest of the letter contains stark traces of community life in Corinth, chapter fifteen possesses more the character of a theological treatise, insofar as references to community life are sparse (cf. 15:12, 29).³⁶¹ This brief treatise serves the purpose of underscoring a topic that is woven through the entire letter like a red thread: the centrality of Christ.³⁶²

The context of chapter fifteen is a dispute concerning the reality of the resurrection of the dead (v. 12) and its nature (see v. 35, though the question might be a rhetorical flourish).³⁶³ Paul begins the chapter on the resurrection by immediately referencing the Gospel he preached to his addressees, which they accepted and through which they have been saved (15:1–2). This is no Pauline invention, for he himself had received it (15:3). Its content can be summarized concisely: it contends that Christ “died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day, according to the scriptures,” and that he appeared to several witnesses, including Paul (15:3–8). Though the twofold reference to the scriptures serves in part to address concerns over the legitimacy of Paul’s teaching (cf. 2:1–5), it also signals to the addressees that the Christ-event transpired in accordance with Israel’s scriptures and therefore with Israel’s own history. It is indeed something new insofar as a new humanity appears on the scene (cf. 15:45–49), but it is also undoubtedly ancient insofar as “God determined [it] before the ages” (2:7).

³⁶¹ It seems that a reference may occur in 15:35, but it is more likely that we are dealing here with the use of a rhetorical technique rather than with a question that had truly been communicated to Paul.

³⁶² For a treatment of “oneness” as the overarching theme that Paul expounds theologically, Christologically, ecclesiologically, anthropologically, and eschatologically throughout the letter and through which he replies to the concerns of the Corinthian community, see Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, “Einende Einheit: Zum theologischen Gesamtkonzept des 1. Korintherbriefs,” *ZTK* 119, no. 2 (2022): 107–27.

³⁶³ See Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther (1Kor 15,1–16,24)*, EKK 7/4 (Düsseldorf/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger/Neukirchener, 2001), 270–72.

Paul begins to address the arrival of a Christologically mediated new humanity in 15:20: “But now Christ has been raised, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.” This is explained in 15:21–22 to the effect that just as death entered the world through Adam and therefore “all died,” so too have the possibility and reality of resurrection entered the world through Christ. As death came to all “through [the one] man” (δι’ ἀνθρώπου), so too did resurrection come “through [the one] man,” and just as “all died in Adam,” so too “shall all be brought to life in Christ.” This leads to the circumstance that after the Parousia of Christ, the “end” (τὸ τέλος) will be reached, wherein Christ delivers the kingdom to the Father and thereby condemns every ruler and authority and power and death, the final enemy, will be defeated (15:24–26). In this way, the basic structure of human existence that culminates in death, which no one can escape and which would otherwise overtake everyone in the end, will be made new.³⁶⁴

After illustrating how the central place of Christ mirrors the central place of Adam in this affair in 15:20–22, Paul returns to the topic in 15:42–49. After Paul raises the question of the nature of the resurrected body (15:35) and after he has explained in 15:39–41 that every flesh (σάρξ) is not the same, nor every body (σῶμα), he employs the comparison of Adam with Christ in an attempt to describe the nature of a resurrected body. Whereas the “first man, Adam,” became a “living soul” (ψυχή ζῶσα), the “last Adam” became a “life-giving spirit” (15:45, πνεῦμα ζωοποιῶν). The body that the latter has and which he will enable all others to have is a “spiritual body” (15:44, σῶμα πνευματικόν; cf. v. 46). “The first man, taken from the earth, is earthly, the second man is from heaven” (15:47). According to this scheme, the “first Adam” is the representative of a humanity that is “earthly,” imperfect, perishable, that has estranged itself from God and thus is subject to death. In contrast, Jesus Christ is the “last Adam,” the ground and representative of a new humanity that according to its basic nature is “heavenly” and therefore related to the divine in such a way that nothing can once again estrange it from God.³⁶⁵ Two agrarian metaphors in 1 Cor 15 are crucial for an understanding of Paul’s perspective of the “last Adam” vis-à-vis the perspective of the Corinthians, who presumably thought that this new human existence could be attained in the present.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ Similarly, Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther (1Kor15,1–16,24)*, 161.

³⁶⁵ Similarly, Wolff, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther*, 411: “Der zweite Adam ist ‘aus dem Himmel’, hat von dorthier seine Existenz als der Auferweckte, Erhöhte durch Gottes Kraft bzw. Geist (vgl. 6,14; Röm 1,4; 8,11).”

³⁶⁶ Many thanks to my colleague Stefano De Feo for pointing out how Paul’s use of ἔσχατος Ἀδάμ rather than δεύτερος Ἀδάμ might be read as a reference to the “kleines apokalyptisches Drama” in 1 Cor 15:23–28 (Andreas Lindemann, “Paulus und die korinthische Eschatologie: Zur These von einer ‘Entwicklung’ im paulinischen Denken,” NTS 37, no. 3 [1991]: 373–99, 383) and thus an instrument in Paul’s rejection of the Corinthian viewpoint of a realized eschatology (cf. esp. 1 Cor 15:26), according to which they would have already

First, Christ is the ἀπαρχή, the “first-fruits” of those who have already passed (15:20). Ἀπαρχή does not merely convey a temporal priority of Christ’s bodily resurrection, but rather that it is the “commencement, the ground, and the promise of the general resurrection of the dead.”³⁶⁷ Therefore, Christ does not remain alone in this radically new nature,³⁶⁸ but rather is the spearhead of a new humanity which, to put it in the terms of 1 Thess, will be “drawn upwards” with him in the Parousia (1 Thess 4:14).³⁶⁹

Secondly, Paul states that without the requisite condition that the human, like a seed (cf. 1 Cor 15:36–38), die and thereafter become something new,³⁷⁰ the human will have no share in the kingdom of God. As Alessandro Biancalani points out, the metaphor of the seed serves to underscore the *difference* between what is sown and the result; regardless of the kind of body that dies, God can make it into a different kind of body (cf. 15:44b, σπείρεται σῶμα ψυχικόν, ἐγείρεται σῶμα πνευματικόν). It is precisely the difference between the present body and the future body that Paul underscores here, and this has significant implications for understanding when believers will become like the “second Adam.”

The two agrarian metaphors illustrate the argument of 1 Cor 15, namely that the resurrection is necessary because “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (15:50). It is precisely in this context that Paul first applies the term εἰκόν to Jesus Christ:

attained a new humanity inalienable from God that would provide justification for the behaviors that Paul criticizes in the letter; cf. also Wolter, *Paulus*, 188–90, on the “eschatische Bedeutung” of Christ as “der letzte Adam”; cf. also Margaret E. Thrall, “Christ Crucified or Second Adam? A Christological Debate between Paul and the Corinthians,” in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament*, eds. Barnabas Lindars and Stephen S. Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1973), 143–56.

³⁶⁷ Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther (1Kor, 1–16, 24)*, 160.

³⁶⁸ Though commenting on ἀρχή in Col 1:18b, Giovanni Luzzi draws on the agrarian metaphor of 1 Cor 15:20 in order to express Christ’s significance: as the ἀπαρχή, Christ is the *first* to be raised, but not the *only* one (“il primo, non il solo”). Luzzi, *Le lettere di San Paolo agli Efesini, ai Colossesi, a Filemone, ai Filippesi*, Commentario esegetico-pratico del Nuovo Testamento 3/3 [Florence: Claudiana, 1908], 81.

³⁶⁹ Literally, “[God] will lead [them] with him” (ἄξει σὺν αὐτῷ). The twofold movement described in 1 Thess 4:13–18, however, according to which the Lord will descend from heaven (4:16) and the living and the dead will be “stolen away” (ἄρπαγησόμεθα) to meet him in the air (4:17), makes it clear that the resurrected dead and the living will be “drawn up” to him.

³⁷⁰ Alessandro Biancalani, “Le lettere ai Corinti,” in *Le lettere di San Paolo*, Commentari biblici esegetico-teologici, eds. Biancalani and Benedetto Rossi (Siena/Rome: Cantagalli/Città Nuova, 2019), 1:105–531, 363.

The first human, taken from the earth,³⁷¹ is earthly, the second human is from heaven. Such as the earthly one is, so too are those who are of the earth, and such as the heavenly one is, so too are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly human, so too shall we bear the image of the heavenly one.
(1 Cor 15:47–49)

ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος ἐκ γῆς χοϊκός, ὁ δεύτερος ἄνθρωπος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ. οἷος ὁ χοϊκός, τοιοῦτοι καὶ οἱ χοϊκοί, καὶ οἷος ὁ ἐπουράνιος, τοιοῦτοι καὶ οἱ ἐπουράνιοι· καὶ καθὼς ἐφορέσαμεν τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ χοϊκοῦ, φορέσομεν καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ ἐπουρανοῦ.

Here, the term εἰκόν is crucial. Whereas Paul had communicated the centrality of Christ in chapter one by stating that Christ has “become wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” for believers (1:30), he does so in chapter fifteen by illustrating how Christ’s death and resurrection make him the “last Adam” whose image believers shall bear in the eschatological future. In this way, the “last Adam” is the beginning of a new humanity.

As we have already seen, an image (εἰκόν) receives the form of its model (παράδειγμα) and can in its turn become the model for a subsequent image. A similar thought is present in Gen 5:3 (LXX), where Adam is said to beget Seth κατὰ τὴν ἰδέαν αὐτοῦ καὶ κατὰ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ. In 1 Cor 15:47–49, we see that Paul underlines the prototypical nature of Adam and Christ and how other humans come to participate in their nature insofar as they bear the respective “image.”³⁷²

Further, as pointed out in studies by Christoph Poetsch³⁷³ and Stefanie Lorenzen,³⁷⁴ an εἰκόν bears a somatic character insofar as it is the outward manifestation of an inner quality. Paul clearly contrasts various σώματα in 1 Cor 15:35–44 and the σῶμα ψυχικόν and the σῶμα πνευματικόν correspond, respectively, to the first Adam as the ψυχὴ ζῶσα and to the last Adam as the πνεῦμα ζωοποιῶν in v. 45. When Paul subsequently refers to the respective εἰκόν of both in v. 49, he points out their different somatic character. When

³⁷¹ As translated in *La Bibbia: Nuova Riveduta* (Geneva: Geneva Bible Society, 2006), which translates ἐκ γῆς as “tratto della terra” (“Il primo uomo, tratto dalla terra, è terrestre [...]”).

³⁷² Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther (1Kor15,1–16,24)*, 314; Wolff, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther*, 412; cf. Christoph Niemand, “Teilhabe an der Bildgestalt des Sohnes: Die paulinische εἰκόν-Christologie (2 Kor 3,18; 4,4; 4,6; Röm 8,29) und ihre Kontexte,” in *Kontexte neutestamentlicher Christologien*, QD 292, eds. Gerd Häfner, Konrad Huber, and Stefan Schreiber (Freiburg: Herder, 2018), 9–59, 26–27, regarding the conformation to an εἰκόν as a “*partizipatives Beziehungsgeschehen*” (italics in original), and 34–35 regarding 1 Cor 15:49.

³⁷³ Poetsch, *Platons Philosophie des Bildes*, 46–60.

³⁷⁴ Stefanie Lorenzen, *Das paulinische Eikon-Konzept: Semantische Analysen zur Sapientia Salomonis, zu Philo und den Paulusbriefen*, WUNT 2/250 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 172–86, 195–211.

believers “shall bear the image of the heavenly human,” they shall bear a σῶμα equal in nature to Christ’s own resurrected body.³⁷⁵

Like the description of events in 1 Cor 15:20–28, where “the end” (v. 24) follows the general resurrection that occurs in Christ’s Parousia (vv. 22b, 23b, ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ πάντες ζωοποιηθήσονται [...] ἀπαρχὴ Χριστός, ἔπειτα οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ), so too does the statement made in v. 49 pertain to an eschatological future.³⁷⁶ Not only is the future φορέσομεν to be read from the perspective of the end, but also the aorist ἐφορέσαμεν, which means that until that point, everyone will continue to bear the “image of the earthly human.”³⁷⁷ At the sounding of “the last trumpet,” however, “the dead shall be raised [as] incorruptible [humans] and we shall be changed” (v. 52b). The new humanity exemplified in Christ will be transferred to others or, as Paul puts it, they “shall bear the image (εἰκόν) of the heavenly human” (v. 49).

2. 2 Corinthians 5

Though the figure of Adam does not appear in 2 Cor 5:11–21, the same pattern of thought that is central to the Adam-Christ typology is in fact present, insofar as the significance of Christ as the “one man” in whom all died and by whom all shall live plays a critical role:

For the love of Christ compels us, having tested and approved this, that one man died for all, therefore all died; and he died for all so that those who live may no longer live unto themselves but rather unto the one who died and was raised for them.

(2 Cor 5:14–15)

ἡ γὰρ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ συνέχει ἡμᾶς, κρίναντας τοῦτο, ὅτι εἷς ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀπέθανεν, ἄρα οἱ πάντες ἀπέθανον· καὶ ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀπέθανεν, ἵνα οἱ ζῶντες μηκέτι ἑαυτοῖς ζῶσιν ἀλλὰ τῷ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἀποθανόντι καὶ ἐγερθέντι.

Because “all died” in Christ, no one is any longer “known according to the flesh,” not even Christ himself (5:16). Instead, anyone who is “in Christ” is a “new creation” (καινὴ κτίσις), for the old state of affairs has departed and a new one has arrived (5:17). This “new creation” is subsequently explained to have its foundation in the presence of God in Christ, through whom God reconciled the world to himself:

And all things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave

τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ καταλλάξαντος ἡμᾶς ἑαυτῷ διὰ Χριστοῦ

³⁷⁵ Cf. also Phil 3:21, ὃς [sc. Ἰησοῦς Χριστός] μετασχηματίσει τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν σύμμορφον τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ δύνασθαι αὐτὸν καὶ ὑποτάξει αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα.

³⁷⁶ See Giuseppe Barbaglio, *La teologia di Paolo: Abbozzi in forma epistolare*, La Bibbia nella storia 9, 2nd ed. (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 2001), 200; Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther (1Kor15,1–16,24)*, 314.

³⁷⁷ Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther (1Kor15,1–16,24)*, 312.

us the ministry of reconciliation; namely, *καὶ δόντος ἡμῖν τὴν διακονίαν τῆς*
 that God was in Christ, reconciling the *καταλλαγῆς, ὡς ὅτι θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῷ*
 world to himself [...]. *κόσμον καταλλάσσων ἑαυτῷ [...].*
 (2 Cor 5:18–19a)

Similar to 1 Cor 15, where Paul elaborates for the first time how Christ is the “last Adam” in whom a new humanity has dawned, he affirms here once more that the Christ-event establishes a “new creation.” And similar to Rom 5, as we shall see, Paul connects here the “last Adam” to the topic of reconciliation.

3. Romans 5 and 8

Paul addresses the Adam-Christ typology once again in Rom 5:12–21. This passage follows the discussion of justification through faith rather than through the works of the Law in Rom 3 and the discussion of Abraham’s righteousness through faith in Rom 4. After Paul states that Abraham’s trust in God’s promise and in God’s ability to fulfill that promise was “reckoned to him as righteousness” (Rom 4:20–22), he turns his attention to the relevance of this for his addressees:

But it was not written for his sake alone that *Οὐκ ἐγράφη δὲ δι’ αὐτὸν μόνον ὅτι*
 “It was reckoned to him,” but also for our *ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ ἀλλὰ καὶ δι’ ἡμᾶς, οἷς μέλλει*
 sake, those to whom it should later be reck- *λογίζεσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν*
 oned, those who trust in the one who raised *ἐγεῖραντα Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν ἐκ*
 Jesus our Lord from the dead, who gave *νεκρῶν, ὃς παρεδόθη διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα*
 himself on account of our transgressions *ἡμῶν καὶ ἠγέρθη διὰ τὴν δικαιοσύνην ἡμῶν.*
 and was raised for the sake of our justifica-
 tion.
 (Rom 4:23–25)

In this way, the discussion pivots from the topic of Abraham’s faith to the topic of reconciliation through Christ, which is treated in Rom 5:1–11. After affirming that such faith resulting in justification establishes one’s peace with God “through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1), Paul proceeds to say that God’s love is demonstrated in the circumstance that Christ died while the addressees were still sinners (5:8). Paul then raises the rhetorical question in 5:10 that if such a reconciliation took place through Christ’s death, then how much more “will those who have been reconciled live with him in his life?” What it means to “live with him in his life” is explained by Paul through the Adam-Christ typology in Rom 5:12–21. The notion that 5:12–21 explains 5:1–11 lies not only in the content, but also in the semantic link between the two passages, namely the syntagma *διὰ τοῦτο ὡσπερ* in 5:12, which directly follows the affirmation of the reception of reconciliation through Christ (5:11).

The syntagma *διὰ τοῦτο ὡσπερ* introduces the first figure of the Adam-Christ typology: “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man and

death through sin – and thus death came to all, because all sinned ...” (5:12).³⁷⁸ What follows in 5:13–14 is the parenthetical explanation that even though sin cannot be “reckoned to one’s account” (ἐλλογέω) in the absence of a law, death nevertheless “reigned (ἐβασίλευσεν) from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin in like manner of the transgression of Adam, who is a pattern (τύπος) of the one to come.” This mention of a “pattern” in 5:14 leads the comparison introduced with ὥστερ in 5:12 to resume in 5:15, when the antitype is introduced: Jesus Christ. The comparison is characterized by two chief aspects: (1) the symmetry of the “patterns” embodied in each figure, and (2) the asymmetrical effect of the action accomplished by the two figures. In the first case, Adam is shown to be a “pattern” of Christ insofar as his transgression ushered in sin and, subsequently, death for others and Christ corresponded to this pattern insofar as his obedience provided for the justification and righteousness of others (5:18–19). The correspondence is underscored explicitly through the parallel universal scope of both figures in 5:18–19: just as condemnation came “to all” (εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους) through the transgression of Adam, so too did the “justification of life” come “to all” (εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους) through the righteous act of Christ, and just as “the many” (οἱ πολλοί) were made sinners by the one man’s disobedience (παρακοή), so too were “the many” (οἱ πολλοί) made righteous by the one man’s obedience (ὑπακοή). However, right from the introduction of the antitype (i.e., Christ) in 5:15, Paul is clearly concerned to stress the *asymmetry* of the result of each figure’s action: “Yet it is not the same with the transgression as it is with the gift: for if by the transgression of the one man the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gift in the grace of the one man Jesus Christ abound for the many?” This thought is repeated, as though through variations on a theme, in 5:16–17. Key for our purposes is the closing statement of 5:17, namely that those who “have received the abundance of the grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.” Whereas the result of the one man’s action is the introduction of death, the result of the latter man’s action is the possibility that believers may participate in the life that he procured through his obedience: “Where sin abounded, grace abounded even more, so that just as sin reigned (ἐβασίλευσεν) in death, thus too might grace reign (βασιλεύση) through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (5:21).

The postlude follows in Rom 6, wherein Paul affirms that those who have been conformed to Christ’s death in baptism will also be conformed to his resurrection (6:5), and therefore “our old human has been crucified with [Christ]” (6:6), and whoever has died with Christ will live with him (6:8), for death will no longer have any hold over such persons (6:9). Rather than living for sin, they live for God (6:10), a reality that applies to Paul’s addressees: “Thus you,

³⁷⁸ Similarly, Dieter Zeller, *Der Brief an die Römer*, RNT (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1985), 114, who sees an interruption at v. 12; see also Wolter, *Paulus*, 189.

too: consider yourselves to be dead to sin but living for God in Christ Jesus” (6:11).

In sum: the obedience of the ‘second Adam’³⁷⁹ in Rom 5:12–21, which replaces the reign of death with the reign of grace, righteousness, and life (v. 21), is the foundation of God’s reconciliation (v. 1–11). Its significance for the addressees is underscored by the affirmation that being conformed to Christ’s death through baptism means that “the old human” has been crucified and what subsequently awaits the believer is a life “lived for God in Christ Jesus” (6:11). As Michael Wolter has pointed out, the eschatological eradication of death is the common denominator of the Adam-Christ typologies in Rom 5 and 1 Cor 15, notwithstanding the different argumentative bases on which they operate (salvific obedient death and resurrection, respectively).³⁸⁰ This eschatological character is indicated subtly by the future tense forms ἐβασίλευσεν (Rom 5:17) and κατασταθήσονται (Rom 5:19), but it comes into full view in chapter eight.

After a treatment of the complex relationship of God’s holy Law (cf. 7:12) and its subversion by the power of sin (cf. 7:13) in chapter seven, Paul proceeds in chapter eight to treat the promise of life and freedom effected by the “Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (v. 2). He pursues this by treating the antithesis of the flesh (σάρξ) and Spirit (πνεῦμα) in vv. 1–13 (cf. Gal 5:16–24). This leads to the metaphor of divine sonship through adoption in the Spirit in vv. 14–17.

For however many people are led by the Spirit of God, these people are God’s sons. For you did not receive a spirit of servitude [that binds you] anew to fear, but rather you have received a Spirit of adoption as sons in whom we cry, “Abba, father!” The Spirit itself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God. But if children, then heirs; heirs of God, but co-heirs of Christ, if indeed we suffer with [him] so that we also may be glorified with [him].
(Rom 8:14–17)

ὅσοι γὰρ πνεύματι θεοῦ ἄγονται, οὗτοι υἱοὶ θεοῦ εἰσιν. οὐ γὰρ ἐλάβετε πνεῦμα δουλείας πάλιν εἰς φόβον ἀλλ’ ἐλάβετε πνεῦμα υἰοθεσίας ἐν ᾧ κράζομεν· ἀββα ὁ πατήρ. αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα συμμαρτυρεῖ τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν ὅτι ἐσμὲν τέκνα θεοῦ. εἰ δὲ τέκνα, καὶ κληρονόμοι· κληρονόμοι μὲν θεοῦ, συγκληρονόμοι δὲ Χριστοῦ, εἴπερ συμπάσχομεν ἵνα καὶ συνδοξασθῶμεν.

This Spirit serves as the promise that just as the Father raised Christ from the dead, so too shall he raise those who are in Christ (v. 13). That this song is played in the key of the eschatological future is made evident by the assertion of the fundamental diastasis between the sufferings of the present and the coming glory that shall be revealed (v. 18), the eager expectation of the creation in awaiting the revelation of the glory of the children of God (vv. 19–21), the

³⁷⁹ If one synthesizes the formulations “last Adam” and “second man” from 1 Cor 15:45 and 15:57, the result is “second Adam,” a fitting description of the Adam-Christ typology in Rom 5:12–21, where Paul emphasizes the replacement of an old manner of human existence (disobedience to God) with a new manner of human existence (obedience to God).

³⁸⁰ Wolter, *Paulus*, 188–89.

assurance that those who bear the “first-fruits of the Spirit” (ἀπαρχή τοῦ πνεύματος; cf. ἄρραβόν in 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5) are those who await adoption and redemption (v. 23), that this salvation is not yet visible (v. 24–25), and by the future tense verbal forms strewn throughout the chapter.³⁸¹

Just as Christ is called the “first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep” in 1 Cor 15:20, so too does the agricultural metaphor here applied to the Spirit (Rom 8:23) serve to assure the addressees that whatever life the Spirit grants them in the present is a small yet telltale sign of what is to come.³⁸² The focus on the Spirit appears interrupted when Paul refers to the benefit for Christians of God’s purpose (πρόθεσις) and calling in v. 28, followed by a *concatenatio* affirming the glorification of believers by sharing in the image of the Son in vv. 29–30.³⁸³

We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, for those called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to share the form of the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers; and those whom he foreordained, these he also called; and those whom he called, these he also justified; and those whom he justified, these he also glorified. (Rom 8:28–30)

Οἶδαμεν δὲ ὅτι τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν τὸν θεὸν πάντα συνεργεῖ εἰς ἀγαθόν, τοῖς κατὰ πρόθεσιν κλητοῖς οὖσιν. ὅτι οὖς προέγνω, καὶ προώρισεν συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνας τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν πρωτότοκον ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς· οὖς δὲ προώρισεν, τούτους καὶ ἐκάλεσεν· καὶ οὖς ἐκάλεσεν, τούτους καὶ ἐδικαίωσεν· οὖς δὲ ἐδικαίωσεν, τούτους καὶ ἐδόξασεν.

The disappearance of the future tense and the introduction of the aorist might lead one to think that Paul has redirected his attention entirely to the present. It is possible, however, that v. 28 begins with a ὅτι *recitativum*, indicating that Paul is reciting an early Christian tradition; this could explain the shift in tense. It might also explain the “protrusion” (*Ausbuchtung*), as Christoph Niemand calls it,³⁸⁴ that interrupts the *concatenatio* between the two instances of προορίζω by inserting a reference to the Son; perhaps Paul has Christologically modified a traditional formula. Yet even if the shift in tense is not explained by the use of traditional material, it is still plausible to read vv. 28–30 within the clearly eschatological context of the entire chapter. Just as the aorist ἐφορέσαμεν in 1 Cor 15:49 is best read from the perspective of the eschaton

³⁸¹ ζωοποιήσει (v. 11), ζήσεσθε (v. 13), ἀποκαλυφθῆναι (v. 18), ἐλευθερωθήσεται (v. 21), χαρίσεται (v. 31), δυνήσεται (v. 39).

³⁸² On the similarity between ἀπαρχή and ἄρραβόν in Pauline pneumatology, see Friedrich Wilhelm Horn, *Das Angeld des Geistes: Studien zur paulinischen Pneumatologie*, FRLANT 154 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 389–94.

³⁸³ On συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνας τοῦ υἱοῦ as a statement regarding *participation* in Christ’s mode of existence entailed by his status as εἰκὼν, see Josef Kürzinger, “Συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνας τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ (Röm 8,29),” *BZ* 2, no. 2 (1958): 294–99.

³⁸⁴ Niemand, “Teilhabe an der Bildgestalt des Sohnes,” 21.

(see above), so too can vv. 29–30 be read *sub specie finis*.³⁸⁵ Further, this section of chapter eight is best understood against the duality of Paul's eschatological outlook: life in the Spirit enables an anticipation in the present of the eschatological future, as is suggested by the metaphor of "first-fruits" and by the juxtaposition in vv. 14–17 of the metaphor of adoptive sonship, which points to the soteriological present, and the metaphor of inheritance, which points to the soteriological future.³⁸⁶

It is within this tension between present and future salvation that we can best understand the term εικόν in Rom 8:29. Whereas Paul made grand announcements of God's salvation in Christ in Rom 1:16–17 and Rom 5, where Christ brings the life that overcomes the death introduced by Adam, he addresses the concern of the reality of redemption in view of the present sufferings of the believers and all of creation in chapter eight.³⁸⁷ The vanishing point of chapter eight, therefore, is the final glorification of the children of God in which they "share the form of the image of [God's] Son," having been raised in glory (cf. 1 Cor 15:43) just as the Son has been raised. This follows upon their justification, made clear not only by δικαίω in v. 30, but also by the juridical semantics of vv. 1–11 (κατάκριμα, νόμος, κατακρίνω, δικαίωμα, δικαιοσύνη), and by the affirmation that the only one who might judge them is the God who justifies them (v. 33), and the only one who might pass a sentence against them is the very Christ who died, was raised, and now intercedes for them at the right hand of God (v. 34).³⁸⁸ Christ intercedes for them because just as he died and was raised and thus vindicated by God, so too do the believers "share the image of [the] Son" insofar as they "suffer with [him]" so that they might "be glorified with [him]" (v. 17).³⁸⁹ The freedom wrought through the Spirit (cf. 8:2, 21)

³⁸⁵ Zeller, *Der Brief an die Römer*, 165: "Paulus erküht sich hier, die Heilslaufbahn der Christen ganz aus der Perspektive Gottes zu sehen."

³⁸⁶ On this point, see Horn, *Das Angeld des Geistes*, 394–95; cf. Samuel Vollenweider, *Freiheit als neue Schöpfung: Eine Untersuchung zur Eleutheria bei Paulus und in seiner Umwelt*, FRLANT 147 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 387, who notes that whereas faith and new life in Christ leads Christians to experience a discontinuity between their past and the present, a fundamentally greater continuity between the present and their future is granted by the Spirit; this finds expression in the "oscillation between presentist and futuristic statements" in Rom 8.

³⁸⁷ Zeller, *Der Brief an die Römer*, 168: "Die Frage, die Paulus in diesem imposanten Kap. umtreibt, ist die nach der Wirklichkeit der Erlösung. Wie steht es mit dem Leben und dem Heil, das 1,16f und Kap. 5 dem Glaubenden zugesagt hatten?"

³⁸⁸ Reading a continuity rather than antithesis of grammatical subjects in v. 33 (τίς – θεός) and v. 34 (τίς – Χριστός Ἰησοῦς) is supported by Rom 2:16 (κρίνει ὁ θεός [...] διὰ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ). A similar interpretation is found in Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, AB 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 530–33, and Benedetto Rossi, "La lettera ai Romani," in Biancalani and Rossi, *Le lettere di San Paolo*, 1:701–1029, 886.

³⁸⁹ Kürzinger, "Συμμόρφους," 296: "Diese Stelle [sc. 8:17] ist für 8,29 deswegen wichtig, weil kaum zu übersehen ist, daß der Apostel mit dem Ausdruck συμμόρφους auf 8,17

does not provide the believers a way of circumventing suffering; instead, it leads them to be “children of God” and “co-heirs with Christ” (vv. 16–17) through suffering alongside Christ (v. 17), not only in the ritual of baptism (cf. the *verba* and *nomina composita* with $\sigma\upsilon\nu$ - in Rom 6:3–8), but also in the sufferings of the present.³⁹⁰ It is in this sense that they “share the image of his Son,” and therefore Christ can be the “firstborn among many brothers” (v. 29). Whatever concrete form this takes is not made clear in v. 29; it seems, however, that the process of becoming like Christ through suffering is the basis for Christ’s intercession for believers before God in v. 34, for Christ sees them traveling a path similar to his own. Insofar as the “first Adam” has been surpassed by the “second Adam” (Rom 5:12–21), and insofar as Christians partake in Christ’s life through the Spirit (8:1–2, 11) and their “old human” (i.e., the Adamic human) has been crucified with Christ (Rom 6:6) in baptism and they “suffer with” Christ (Rom 8:17) in this life by virtue of being driven by the Spirit rather than the flesh (cf. Rom 8:1–14), they begin to partake in the image of the Son, the second Adam, in a process that will be completed in the eschaton.³⁹¹

Whereas the prospect of bearing the image of the second Adam was reserved entirely for the eschatological future in 1 Cor 15, a shift occurs in Rom 8:29 insofar as sharing in the image of the Son is part of the life lived in the Spirit,³⁹² which begins now and will be consummated at the eschaton.³⁹³

zurückblickt. An allen diesen Stellen ist nicht zuerst an das Gleichsein gedacht, sondern an das Verbundensein, Teilhaben, Verknüpftheit des Christen mit Christus.”

³⁹⁰ Cf. Feldmeier, *Gottes Geist*, 166, who notes how Rom 8:17 impedes any straightforward *theologia gloriae*. This aspect of Paul’s thought is observable in the description of Christ in the Gospels, whose anointing in the Spirit ultimately leads him to the cross (146). The conception of the Spirit as a means of personal gain and avoidance of suffering “steht in deutlichem Widerspruch zu dem Geist, der nach dem biblischen Zeugnis Menschen – vom jesajanischen Gottesknecht über den galiläischen Gottessohn bis zu den missionierenden Gottesboten – ergreift und für einen Weg aussondert, der in einer von Gott entfremdeten Schöpfung keineswegs eine *success story* darstellt, sondern in Leiden und Tod führt” (4).

³⁹¹ Cf. Vollenweider, *Freiheit als neue Schöpfung*, 386–87: “Neue Schöpfung vollzieht sich bereits innerhalb der alten Welt, und eben diese verborgene, im Herzen der Menschen anhebende Verwandlung wird kühn als endzeitliche Schöpfung aus dem Nichts, als vorweggenommene Totenaufweckung identifiziert ([cf.] Röm 4,17).”

³⁹² Kürzinger, “ $\Sigma\upsilon\mu\mu\acute{o}\rho\phi\omicron\varsigma$,” 297: “Zum vollen Verständnis unseres Gedankens in Röm 8,29 ist auch die von Paulus hervorgehobene Stellung Christi als zweiter Adam, als Haupt einer neuen Menschheit (vgl. $\text{Πρωτότοκον ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς}$), wichtig. Auch hierfür bietet ja der Römerbrief in 5,12–21 die erwünschte Auskunft. Auch unter diesem Gesichtspunkt steht bei der Christwerdung das Einbezogenwerden, das Partizipieren, im Vordergrund der Aussage.”

³⁹³ Cf. Thrall, “Christ Crucified or Second Adam? A Christological Debate between Paul and the Corinthians,” esp. 143–46, 155–56. Thrall entertains that idea that the Corinthian correspondence allows the identification of different emphases in Paul’s proclamation of the Gospel to the Corinthians. For Thrall, the emphasis on the crucified Christ in 1 Cor might

III. From Moses to Christ

In 2 Cor 4:4, we read that “the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not glimpse the illumination of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” This is the first instance in the protopauline letters where the syntagma εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ is predicated of Jesus Christ, and therefore it is particularly relevant for the consideration of the phrase εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου in Col 1:15.

The context of 2 Cor 3–4 is a defense of Paul’s apostolate. For our purposes, the text to be analyzed is 2 Cor 3:4–4:6, a section of text that begins and ends with a direct reference to the significance of Christ for Paul’s ministry. In 3:4, Paul contends that before God, his confidence in his ministry derives from Christ.³⁹⁴ In the intervening sections (3:4–18; 4:1–6), Paul aims to substantiate this by demonstrating how his service under the “new covenant” (3:6) surpasses the service of Moses under the “old covenant” (3:14), and he subsequently proceeds to explain how some people do not recognize “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (4:6).

While Paul is clearly the counterpart in the comparison with Moses in the first section (3:4–18), the statement that Jesus is the εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ occurs in a passage where he, not Paul, stands in as the counterpart in the comparison with Moses (4:1–6). On this basis, as we will argue, the predication εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ serves to underscore how the Christ-event surpasses the ministry of Moses and thus marks a new stage in the history of God’s dealings with Israel.

In 2 Cor 3:4–18, Paul begins by contrasting his service under the “new covenant” (3:6) with Moses and the “old covenant” (3:14). Following the remark that “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6b), Paul refers to the shining face of Moses illumined by God’s presence prior to his descent from Sinai with the tablets of the covenant (cf. Exod 34:29–35) and he raises the question:

Yet if the ministry leading to death, whose letters were engraved in stone,³⁹⁵ came

Εἰ δὲ ἡ διακονία τοῦ θανάτου ἐν γράμμασιν ἐντετυπωμένη λίθοις ἐγενήθη ἐν δόξῃ, ὥστε

have been a correction of a falsely understood Pauline emphasis on the risen, glorified Christ as the second Adam. If this is the case, then the portrayal of Christ in 2 Cor 4:4–6 would be closer to Paul’s original Corinthian proclamation than anything in 1 Cor. Yet the emphasis placed on the crucified Christ in 1 Cor – thus Thrall – would have led Paul, upon further reflection, to relocate Christ’s manifestation of his status as the second Adam from his resurrection to his earthly life, wherein he was obedient to the Father unto death, in contrast with Adam’s disobedience. And precisely such a view is expressed in Rom 5.

³⁹⁴ 2 Cor 3:4, Πειοίθησιν δὲ τοιαύτην ἔχομεν διὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ πρὸς τὸν θεόν.

³⁹⁵ For ἐν γράμμασιν ἐντετυπωμένη λίθοις, I follow here the translation of Friedrich Lang, *Die Briefe an die Korinther*, NTD 7 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 271: “Wenn aber schon der Dienst, der zum Tod führt und dessen Buchstaben in Stein gemeißelt waren [...]” (italics mine). Despite the plural of γράμμα in v. 7, the key in the comparison

about with such glory that the sons of Israel were not able to gaze upon the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, which fades away, how much more will the ministry of the Spirit result in glory? (2 Cor 3:7–8)

μη δύνασθαι ἀτενίσειαι τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραὴλ εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον Μωϋσέως διὰ τὴν δόξαν τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ τὴν καταργουμένην, πῶς οὐχὶ μᾶλλον ἢ διακονία τοῦ πνεύματος ἔσται ἐν δόξῃ;

As Exodus recounts it, Moses placed a veil on his face due to the fear that the sight caused in the Israelites (Exod 34:30). This “glory” in the face of Moses is the result of the nearness of God’s own presence, the experience of God’s own “glory,” namely his power and holiness manifested in light. Moses would approach God, receive instruction for the Israelites, hand it on to them, and subsequently cover his face. Here, the glory on Moses’ face is the result of God’s unique intimacy with him as a chosen individual who serves the role of guiding God’s people; the proximity between the two is so great that Moses assumes this particular divine quality and reflects it to the Israelites. In Paul’s telling, the glory on Moses’ face is only temporary, and it is for this reason – not the Israelites’ fear – that he covers his face: “so that the sons of Israel might not gaze upon the end of that which is passing away” (2 Cor 3:13b). Paul proceeds in this Midrashic passage³⁹⁶ to claim that the minds of the sons of Israel were hardened and that “up to the present day, the same veil remains upon the reading of the old covenant, not being uncovered, for only in Christ is it put aside” (v. 14). The veil that lies upon the *reading* of the old covenant (not over the covenant itself) is located anew in v. 15 in the hearts of the hearers,³⁹⁷ and Paul claims in vv. 15–16 that the veil is removed “whenever [anyone] turns to the Lord.” Paul’s adjustment of Exod 34:34a (LXX),³⁹⁸ for as much as it seems to be a “violation” of the scriptural text,³⁹⁹ is instructive for understanding the rest of the passage. Whereas Moses, according to Exodus, tread before God and accordingly removed the veil from his face until his departure, Paul claims

of the two ministries is the distinction between γράμμα and πνεῦμα, as Paul’s aphorism in the immediately preceding clause in v. 6b makes clear: τὸ δὲ γράμμα ἀποκτέννει, τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ζωοποιεῖ.

³⁹⁶ Schalom Ben-Chorin, *Paulus: Der Völkerapostel in jüdischer Sicht*, Schalom Ben-Chorin Werke 5 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2006), 98; Vollenweider, *Freiheit als neue Schöpfung*, 248.

³⁹⁷ On this point, see Stefano De Feo, “A Critical Analysis of the Use of the Verb ἀναγινώσκω in the *Corpus Paulinum*: A Reappraisal of the Reading Practice in Early Christianity,” *ASR* 13 (2020): 297–335, 313–14, who also references a helpful *varia lectio* from Codex Bezae’s (D) reading of Luke 24:32.

³⁹⁸ ἦν ἵκα δ’ ἂν εἰσεπορεύετο Μωϋσῆς ἔναντι κυρίου λαλεῖν αὐτῷ, περιηρεῖτο τὸ κάλυμμα ἕως τοῦ ἐκπορεύεσθαι.

³⁹⁹ Thus Vollenweider, *Freiheit als neue Schöpfung*, 250–51: “V.16 wirkt wie eine Vergewaltigung des alttestamentlichen Textes [...] und geht entschieden über die für Midrasch und Targum charakteristische Exegese hinaus.”

that whenever someone turns to Christ, “the Lord,”⁴⁰⁰ the veil is removed and thus the “glory of the Lord” can be beheld in such a way as to induce a transformative encounter.

But we all, as we with unveiled face behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, namely from the Lord who is the Spirit.
 ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντες ἀνακεκαλυμμένῳ προσώπῳ τὴν δόξαν κυρίου κατοπτριζόμενοι τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφούμεθα ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν καθάπερ ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος.
 (2 Cor 3:18)

The clause καθάπερ ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος is exegetical, explaining the source of the transformation “from glory to glory”: those who behold the “glory of the Lord” are “transformed into the same image,” and just as Moses’ face was illumined in his encounter with God’s holiness, so too do those who turn to Christ see his luminous “glory” – the δόξα κυρίου in v. 18 is to be understood as δόξα τοῦ Χριστοῦ insofar as Christ’s face reflects God’s glory (cf. 4:6)⁴⁰¹ – and accordingly assume the same quality, which is effected in them through “the Lord, the Spirit.”⁴⁰² This interpretation rests on the connection of the metaphors of “mirror” and “image,” respectively, in the much-disputed middle form κατοπτριζόμενοι in v. 18 and the claim of 2 Cor 4:4 that Christ is the image of God. Whereas the debate concerning κατοπτριζόμενοι often consists in a rehearsal of the arguments for the two possible meanings – “to behold in a mirror” or “to reflect” – perhaps the strongest interpretation is the one that combines both meanings based on the associative background of

⁴⁰⁰ Though some may understand God the Father as the referent of κύριος, it seems to me that various reasons speak for understanding Christ to be the referent of κύριος: (1) this is the standard usage of κύριος in Paul’s letters, where the LXX trans. of the Tetragram is applied to Jesus Christ; (2) in contradistinction to the use of πνεῦμα as a predicate nominative for ὁ θεός in John 4:24, Paul’s diction in 1 Cor 15:45 and 2 Cor 3:17 (and Rom 8:2, 9; Phil 1:19) suggest that the distinction between “Christ” and “Spirit” is not always sharp; (3) the larger context of the passage suggests that Christ is the κύριος in 2 Cor 3:17, for it is his face in which the glory of God is reflected unto the illumination of the believers (2 Cor 4:6), and this coincides with the vitalizing and liberating function of πνεῦμα in 1 Cor 15:45/2 Cor 3:6 and Rom 8:2, respectively. On the interplay of the Spirit and Christ as κύριος in 2 Cor 3:17, cf. Hans-Josef Klauck, *2. Korintherbrief*, NEchtB, 3rd ed. (Würzburg: Echter, 1994), 40–41; Vollenweider, *Freiheit als neue Schöpfung*, 251; Christian Wolff, *Der zweite Brief des Paulus an die Korinther*, THKNT 8 (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1989), 76. Thomas Schmeller, *Der zweite Brief an die Korinther (2Kor 1,1–7,4)*, EKK7/1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn/Ostfildern: Neukirchener/Patmos, 2010), 222–23, considers the other options and draws a tentative conclusion that the κύριος is Christ.

⁴⁰¹ Schmeller, *Der zweite Brief an die Korinther (2Kor 1,1–7,4)*, 227.

⁴⁰² Similarly, Wolff, *Der zweite Brief an die Korinther*, 78: “Der Schlußteil ist also zu paraphrasieren: ‘so wie es sich ergibt, wenn der Herr durch den Geist an uns wirkt.’ – Durch das lebendigmachende Pneuma erfolgt die Herrlichkeitsverwandlung der Glaubenden ‘in dasselbe Bild.’”

2 Cor 3–4, namely Exod 34, where Moses' beholding of God's glory results in a transformation of his own face into a surface reflective of God's glory, and the idea that Christ, who *as* God's image reflects the glory of God in his own face (2 Cor 4:6),⁴⁰³ is the mirror in which the believers see the glory of God and are thus transformed "into the same image," namely the image of one who has encountered and been vivified by God's glory.⁴⁰⁴ The assimilation of the believers to the "image of God" – portrayed as an act of new creation through a cosmogonic motif in 4:6 – is mediated through Christ, for it is in him that they see, as though in a mirror, the glory of God and are "illuminated" (cf. φωτισμός in 4:4, 6) and thus, in their turn, reflect the divine glory.⁴⁰⁵

Whereas the counterpart in the comparison with Moses in 2 Cor 3:12–18 is first Paul and the apostles (vv. 12–13) and subsequently all Christians (v. 18), Christ assumes this role in 4:1–6.⁴⁰⁶ Because Paul has already claimed that he and his fellow ministers speak "with all openness" and do not conceal themselves as Moses had done (3:12–13), nor do they peddle the word of God shamefully and cunningly (4:1–2), he needs to find a reason why some hearers reject his message. Yet the problem cannot rest in Christ, either, for it is his "[uncovered] face" in which the glory of God is seen (2 Cor 4:6) and is reflected unto the illumination of the beholder. For Paul, those who do not behold this are those:

⁴⁰³ Samuel Vollenweider, "Der Menschgewordene als Ebenbild Gottes: Zum frühchristlichen Verständnis der Imago Dei," in *Ebenbild Gottes – Herrscher über die Welt: Studien zu Würde und Auftrag des Menschen*, Biblisch-theologische Studien 33, ed. Hans-Peter Mathys (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1998), 123–46, 134. "Jesus Christus ist das Bild Gottes, das von göttlicher Herrlichkeit umspielt ist. Auf seinem Angesicht glänzt der Kabod Gottes auf. Doxa und Eikon durchdringen sich, ohne miteinander identisch zu sein. Die Eikon scheint die Doxa zu reflektieren, sie wird zum Spiegel, welcher das göttliche Licht in die Welt hineinstrahlt."

⁴⁰⁴ For the argument that the middle form κατοπτριζόμενοι in 2 Cor 3:18 conveys both meanings – "behold in a mirror" and "reflect" – see Barbara Hirsch and Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, "'Von Angesicht zu Angesicht' (1Kor 13,12). Gott, Christus und Mensch im Spiegel," in *Über Gott: Festschrift für Reinhard Feldmeier zum 70. Geburtstag*, eds. Jan Dochhorn, Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, and Ilinca Tanaseanu-Döbler (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022), 299–333, esp. 312 and 328–329. Critical for their argument is the comparison with Plutarch, who notes how the moon reflects the sun's light and thus functions as the mirror in which humans can see that light (cf. Plutarch, *Pyth. orac.* 404c–d).

⁴⁰⁵ Similarly, Barbaglio, *La teologia di Paolo*, 256, who stresses the effect that Christ's luminous face has upon the believers: "Nessun occultamento, la gloria divina che avvolge il Signore Gesù si riflette sul volto dei cristiani, come quella di JHWH sul volto di Mosè. Soprattutto però Paolo insiste sull'effetto: i cristiani sono trasformati (*metamorphoumetha*) dallo splendore divino assumendo i tratti della stessa immagine divina che è Gesù."

⁴⁰⁶ Schmeller, *Der zweite Brief an die Korinther (2Kor 1,1–7,4)*, 234–35, notes of the connection of 4:1–6 with 3:4–18: "Die Bündelung von Begriffen, Themen und Motiven der vorangehenden Abschnitte legen es nahe, in 4,1–6 eine Art Resümee zu sehen."

among the people whose minds have been blinded by the god of this age so that they cannot see the illumination of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God [...].

ἐν οἷς ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου ἐτύφλωσεν τὰ νοήματα τῶν ἀπίστων εἰς τὸ μὴ αὐγάσαι τὸν φωτισμὸν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τῆς δόξης τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὃς ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ [...].

For the God who says, “Let the light shine forth” is the one who has shone forth in our hearts that we might see the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ὁ εἰπὼν· ἐκ σκότους φῶς λάμπει, ὅς ἐλάμψεν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν πρὸς φωτισμὸν τῆς γνώσεως τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν προσώπῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

(2 Cor 4:4, 6)

The point of the characterization of Jesus as the “image of God” in this passage is as follows: he is the image of God because he reflects the glory of God for all instead of concealing it, as Moses had done, and whoever sees “the face of Christ” experiences an “illumination” (φωτισμός) leading to assimilation to his “image.”⁴⁰⁷ “Christus ist der eigentliche Träger der Gottesebenbildlichkeit. Die Christen haben daran teil, weil sie in ‘Ähnlichkeit’ mit Ihm transformiert werden.”⁴⁰⁸ Just as Moses was the unique individual to whom God drew near in such a way that he participated, albeit temporarily, in God’s own being, Paul sees Jesus Christ as the one unique individual who has a proximity to God and a share in God’s being in a lasting manner,⁴⁰⁹ and beholding, as though in a mirror, the “glory” reflected in his face is a transformative act that is the prerogative of “all” (cf. ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντες in 3:18a) rather than only one person.⁴¹⁰ The interplay of the metaphors of “mirror” and “image,” which conveys how Christ surpasses Moses, is summarized nicely by Barbara Hirsch and Rainer Hirsch-Luipold:

“Bei Paulus hat sich dieses Abstrahlen des Glanzes, wie 2Kor 4,4–6 (im Gesamtzusammenhang von 2Kor 2,14–7,4) zeigt, mit der Idee des Bildes verbunden: nicht nur strahlt Christus als Bild Gottes (2Kor 4,4) – wie Mose, aber im Fall Christi als Bild und insofern dauerhaft – den Glanz der Herrlichkeit Gottes wieder, sondern er erleuchtet damit die Herzen der

⁴⁰⁷ On the point that the believers are assimilated to *Christ’s* image, for it is the image that they behold, cf. Vollenweider, *Freiheit als neue Schöpfung*, 263; Schmeller, *Der zweite Brief an die Korinther (2Kor 1,1–7,4)*, 227.

⁴⁰⁸ Edwin Larsson, *Christus als Vorbild*, ASNU 23 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1962), 113. Similarly, Barbaglio, *La teologia di Paolo*, 256: “È evidente la prospettiva cristologica: ripetiamo, Cristo è causa esemplare ed efficiente della glorificazione e metamorfosi di ‘tutti noi.’”

⁴⁰⁹ Cf. Schmeller, *Der zweite Brief an die Korinther (2Kor 1,1–7,4)*, 245, on this nuance of Paul’s εἰκὼν-concept.

⁴¹⁰ Cf. André Feuillet, *Le Christ sagesse de Dieu d’après les épîtres pauliniennes*, ÉBib (Paris: Gabalda, 1966), 135, who speaks of the “privilege exclusif de Moïse” becoming the “apanage constant de tous les chrétiens.” Similarly, Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI/Milton Keynes, UK: Eerdmans/Paternoster, 2005), 313).

Christen mit der Erkenntnis des Evangeliums. Dies bewirkt, so kann man 2Kor 3,18 verstehen, eine Verwandlung der Christen: sie werden selbst durch die Erleuchtung Christi zum Bild, das die Herrlichkeit Gottes widerspiegelt.”⁴¹¹

The last issue of note concerns the temporal location of this transformation. The passive indicative μεταμορφούμεθα is often taken, rightly, to indicate that the conformation of believers to Christ’s image commences in the present; this would mark a shift from 1 Cor 15. If one considers as well that an eschatological context is lacking, then one might go a step further and conclude that 2 Corinthians departs from Romans as well, for in Romans, as we have seen, the conformation to the image of the Son transpires in the tension between the salvific present and the eschatological future. Does 2 Corinthians, then, portray a ‘presentist’ view of the matter?

Two indications seem to argue against this. First, Paul suggests in 2 Cor 4:4 that the medium of the illumination given in Christ is the Gospel, and in 2 Cor 4:6, he states that God’s light shines in the “hearts” of the believers.⁴¹² Whereas Moses, in his service (cf. διακονία in 3:7), physically ascended the mountain and experienced a physical transformation, the service of Paul and the apostles transpires in the conveyance of the Gospel; this corresponds as well to the distinction between ‘materiality’ of the old and new covenants, according to Paul: the former was inscribed in stone, the latter operates in the power of the Spirit. Second, Paul insists in 2 Cor 4:7 on the ‘earthly’ nature of those who bear this divine “treasure.” He does not portray the Christians as participants in a current transfiguration akin to that portrayed in the Synoptic gospels.

This does not, therefore, contradict the portrayal of the matter in Romans. On the contrary, it is plausible to read 2 Cor 3–4 in the same way: through the Gospel and the vivification of the Spirit, the believers experience in their current life an assimilation to the Son’s image, a transformation that will be consummated in the eschaton.

IV. Summary

As we have seen, Paul’s use of εικόν is predominantly Christological. When he speaks of the “image” of the Son that believers shall bear in the eschatological future and in which they participate in the present by way of anticipation, he does so whenever the issue of God’s reconciliation of humanity to himself

⁴¹¹ Hirsch and Hirsch-Luipold, “‘Von Angesicht zu Angesicht,’” 312. Similarly, Schmeller, *Der zweite Brief an die Korinther (2Kor 1,1–7,4)*, 249, as well notes of the luminous glory of Christ’s face: “Die Manifestation göttlichen Glanzes auf dem Gesicht des Mose (3,7) wird hier überboten, denn das Gesicht Christi ist nicht verhüllt und der Glanz nicht vergänglich. Dieser Glanz ist es, der sich im Dienst des Paulus manifestiert (3,7–11) und der die Verwandlung aller Glaubenden bewirkt (3,18).”

⁴¹² Ernest-Bernard Allo, *Saint Paul: Seconde épître aux Corinthiens*, ÉBib, 2nd ed. (Paris: Gabalda, 1937), 103.

through Christ constitutes the broader context. Further, Paul applies εἰκών to Christ when he argues how Christ, in the history of God's dealings with Israel and humanity, surpasses two figures from the traditions of Israel: Adam and Moses. For Paul, Christ as the "last Adam" becomes the new human whose image will be bestowed upon others: because humans bear the εἰκών of the "earthly human" until the eschaton and thus cannot inherit the kingdom of God, they must bear the image of the "heavenly man" following the resurrection and in this way inherit the same kind of σῶμα πνευματικόν that Christ has.⁴¹³

As the central figure of the new covenant, he provides a mediation of the divine glory that surpasses the mediation of Moses. Here, he is the image of God because believers behold in his face the glory of God and they are illumined so as to know God through the Gospel. They are conformed to the same image and thus reflect, in their turn, the glory of God. Conformation to the image of the Son thus begins with Christ's mediation of God's new covenant.

In sum: Christ's status as "image" in the protopauline letters can be explicated as a twofold mediation in theology and anthropology, twofold precisely because the one cannot be separated from the other. As it concerns humanity's knowledge of God, Christ becomes the prism through which the identity of the God of Israel's scriptures is seen anew, and thus Christ as the εἰκὼν θεοῦ is an integral part of Paul's "Christological monotheism."⁴¹⁴ His mediation is not only epistemic, but also concerns God's transformative glory, for his mediation of God's presence transforms those who believe in him. Therefore, as it concerns the *conditio humana*, Christ as the "last Adam" replaces the "first Adam" and thus introduces a new mode of human existence.⁴¹⁵ Rather than being "earthly" and "psychical," it is "heavenly" and "spiritual," which in 1 Cor 15 underscores the imperishability of the new human, its capacity to enter God's kingdom, and the irrevocability of its proximity to God. The same point is made in Rom 5 and 8, insofar as the death-inducing disobedience of Adam is surpassed by the life-giving obedience of Christ, and God's predetermination of the conformation of believers to the image of the Son leads to their glorification, namely a state wherein nothing can separate these new humans from God. Finally, this conformation of believers to Christ's image – what Ernest-

⁴¹³ Similarly, Lorenzen, *Das paulinische Eikon-Konzept*, 258–59: "[Paulus bezieht] den Terminus [εἰκὼν] auf Jesus Christus als zweiten Adam, d.h. auf den Menschen, der Gottes Willen entspricht und daher den alten, sündigen Adam ablöst, um als neuer Prototyp eine neue Generation von gottebenbildlichen Menschen anzuführen."

⁴¹⁴ On the concept of "Christological monotheism," see Samuel Vollenweider, "Paulus," *RGG4* 6:1035–65, 1046.

⁴¹⁵ Cf. Biancalani, "Le lettere ai Corinti," 365, who understands "Adam" and "Christ" as two distinct manners of human existence, based on their correlation to σὰρξ and πνεῦμα, respectively.

Bernard Allo called the “great fundamental idea of ‘Paulinism’”⁴¹⁶ – commences in the present and shall be consummated in the eschatological future.

I. Image Discourses: Résumé

The image discourses we find in the Hebrew Bible (and its descendent traditions in Qumran) and in Plato are the antecedent image discourses for the image discourse of the early Roman imperial era. What they share and what distinguishes them will be outlined briefly here.

I. *The Hebrew Bible and Plato*

In both the Hebrew Bible and Plato, that which is considered divine (the God of Israel and the idea of the Good, or the Demiurge, respectively) cannot be seen, albeit for different reasons. Whereas Plato considered the realm of the ideas to be perceptible only by the mind, the narratives of the Hebrew Bible portray a God who can be seen, yet such an encounter would annihilate the human. To be more precise: the problem is not that God cannot be seen – merely hearing God’s voice would be fatal – but rather that in the revelation of God on Mount Sinai, no visible form was revealed to the Israelites. Otherwise, it might have been reasonable to expect plastic representations of a form sanctioned for cultic use.

A further common, ambivalent trait of both discourses is the thought that an image does not correspond in every regard to its model. In other terms, there is always some measure of proximity and distance in the relationship between model and image. The ambivalence of this trait is perhaps more readily apparent in Plato, but upon close consideration, we find that it is present in the Hebrew Bible as well. To begin with, Plato asserts that an image is a likeness, not a duplicate; were an image to reproduce all the qualities of its model, then it would no longer be an image. The perennial presence of a remainder of difference between model and image does of course open the door for images themselves to be misleading and for the abuse of images in the hands of those who seek to deceive others: a false image can be confused for the reality that it purports to represent. The inverse of this insight is that although an image will always lack this or that characteristic of the model, it may nevertheless be considered a truthful image if it bears the model’s “intrinsic quality.” Provided that this is so, an image may even have the power to “summon knowledge” and teach humans something of the realities in the “supra-heavenly realm” by

⁴¹⁶ Cf. Allo, *Seconde épître aux Corinthiens*, 97: “Cette assimilation du croyant au Christ est la grande idée fondamentale du ‘paulinisme’, cfr *Rom.* VIII, 18, *I Cor.* XV, 44-suivants, *Phil.* III, 21 et bien d’autres passages.”

whose observation the gods sustain their divine life. In this positive estimation of images, the lexeme εἰκών is Plato's term of choice.⁴¹⁷

As for the Hebrew Bible, one might say that we encounter the same figure of thought – simultaneous proximity of and distance between model and image – yet as though it has been poured into a different mold. In the aniconic discourse of the Hebrew Bible, Hosea recognizes, on the basis of a distinction between an uncreated God and created objects, that a crafted image cannot be considered divine. Here, the distance between model and image is so great that any similarity becomes inconceivable. This occurs again in Deutero-Isaiah: there exists a categorical difference between the God of Israel and hewn images, for only the former has the power to save. This entails a mirror image regarding human dependence: for Deutero-Isaiah, humanity is dependent upon God, but crafted images are dependent upon humans and thus in contrast to an image that must be “made” and “borne about,” it is YHWH alone who “made” and “bears” Israel.

The most significant difference between Plato and the iconic discourse of the Hebrew Bible concerns the notion that the human being is the “image of God.” A designation formerly reserved only for the king is applied to the human being as such, and thus we see in the universalization of the commission to rule a “royalization” of the human being that grounds its basic dignity. Such a notion is foreign to Plato and to the Hebrew Bible's aniconic discourse. As we see in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the descendants of those traditions that later assumed a canonical form in the Hebrew Bible, this conviction that the human being as such is the *imago dei* recedes progressively into the background. There are various possible reasons for this, and although an exact solution to the question might be unobtainable, one of the factors is surely the circumstance that the Hebrew Bible itself does not at all link the aniconic and the iconic discourses to one another: one discourse could persist while the other faded. That the importance of this aspect of the Hebrew Bible seemingly vanishes by the time of the early Roman imperial era is significant insofar as it helps us to understand why we find such a restrictive use of the designation “image of God” among such authors as Philo and Paul.

II. The Early Roman Imperial Era

Various discursive lines from both the Hebrew Bible and Plato converge in the image discourse of the early Roman imperial era.

1. The Restrictive Application of εἰκὼν θεοῦ

None of the figures of this era considered in this study apply the designation “image of God” to the human being *as such*. Whereas this is easily

⁴¹⁷ See above, n. 105.

understandable for a Platonist such as Plutarch, we find that even in figures and writings influenced by the traditions of the Hebrew Bible, there is little trace of the notion that the human being is the *imago dei*. Even in Philo, the human being is not the image, but is created “according to the Image.” In Wisdom, the human can, through virtue, become an “image of God’s eternity,” but not simply an “image of God.” In Paul – aside from a faint echo of Gen 1:27 in 1 Cor 11:7 – Jesus Christ is the one image of God, and new humanity is made possible only insofar as humans are conformed “to the image of his [sc. God’s] Son.”

2. Proximity and Distance in the Relation between Model and Image

We also find the notion of a simultaneous proximity and distance in the relation between a model and its image. Without exception, the writings under consideration presuppose that an image conveys something of its model without being identical with it. The relation between image and model can take a turn for the worst in two respects: (1) misinterpretation of the image, either by applying a false criterium to it or by confusing it for the model itself; (2) if the image lacks the intrinsic quality of the model, then the discrepancy between model and image is too significant for the image to be a valid image. For Dio Chrysostom, images contribute nothing reliable if they do not convey something of the nature of the divine as it is known through the innate conception of God. This echoes Plato’s concern that images do not provide the criteria for their own evaluation, but must be judged on the basis of a knowledge of the model. Although we have no indications the Hebrew Bible positively influenced Plutarch, his concern that Stoic philosophy confuses the sun as the image of Apollo for Apollo himself is reminiscent of one concern of the image prohibition in the Hebrew Bible’s aniconic discourse, namely that images of YHWH should be prohibited so that worshippers would not confuse a cultic image for the living God nor confuse YHWH with other deities.⁴¹⁸ As for the correspondence between model and image, we see in the Wisdom of Solomon and Plutarch that images lacking intrinsic qualities of their models are deficient. Just as Deutero-Isaiah criticized the lifelessness and impotence of images as objects that farcically lack the vitality and power of the God of Israel, so too does Wis 13 accost those who pray to a “lifeless” (ἄψυχος) object (v. 17). We find a similar thought in Plutarch’s writings as well. In *De Iside et Osiride* 382a–c, he appears sympathetic to the Egyptian practice of honoring animals as divine images because they mirror “the (divine) nature that lives and sees and has the principle of motion within itself and the knowledge of what is its own and what is foreign” (382b; cf. also *Tranq. an.* 477c–d), and he subsequently implies that they

⁴¹⁸ Similarly, Hirsch-Luipold, *Plutarchs Denken in Bildern*, 173–74, regarding this point and the subsequent one concerning *Is. Os.* 382a–c.

surpass lifeless (anthropomorphic) images carved in stone. Lastly, whereas Paul can speak of God as the one who calls things into being (cf. Rom 4:17), he refers to cultic images in 1 Cor 12:2 as “mute idols.”

3. *The Theological, Soteriological, and Ethical Value of Images*

The proximity of the image to its model can be put to positive use. Perhaps the most significant modulation of this insight vis-à-vis Plato and the Hebrew Bible is the increase in a positive *theological* value of images. In the Wisdom of Solomon and Philo, we find a transcendent entity that shares in God’s power in some manner and in order to express this correspondence, the term εἰκόν is used. Wisdom shares in God’s benevolent creative will, and therefore she can be said to be an “image of God’s goodness.” In Philo, we encounter the Image of God as a transcendent divine entity that is at one and the same time distinct from God and yet somehow coincident with God as the “rational faculty” active in the creation of the cosmos. The cosmos bears the impress of the Image and thus it is the Image through which God is portrayed to the cosmos.⁴¹⁹

Connected to this is the positive estimation of the ability of images to mediate knowledge of the divine to humans. In the Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom teaches God’s righteousness to the human and thus conveys the virtues necessary to become an “image of God’s eternity.” For Philo, God’s “invisible Image, the most holy Logos,” is the eldest of noetic realities and can convey knowledge of God – albeit imperfect knowledge – to the human. For Plutarch – in a greater measure than in Plato’s corpus⁴²⁰ – phenomena of the sense-perceptible cosmos can function as images of the divine, provided that they be interpreted “as befits the divine and philosophically.” A similar view is found in Dio, in that crafted images of deities can teach humanity something about the gods if the images correspond to the divine nature and if philosophers furnish proper interpretations of those images on the basis of humanity’s innate conception of the divine parent. For Paul, it is through Jesus Christ as the image of God that believers are “illuminated” and come to know God. Thus, the positive estimation of the possibility of images to convey transcendent, otherworldly realities to humanity that we find in Plato, but not in the Hebrew Bible, is widespread in the image discourse of the first century A.D.

Second, and dependent on the foregoing, is that images can have an *ethical* and even a *soteriological* significance. As previously mentioned, Wisdom teaches humanity the virtues, and this leads to life rather than death. For Philo,

⁴¹⁹ Cf. Prov. 8:22–25 as the antecedent tradition, for both the Wisdom of Solomon and Philo, concerning the presence of a divine entity with God at the beginning of creation.

⁴²⁰ Even though Plutarch stands in the tradition of Plato, where there is already an awareness of the positive potential of images, Rainer Hirsch-Luipold speaks of a “erkenntnistheoretische Aufwertung des Bildes” in Plutarch’s thought (“Plutarch,” *RAC* 27:1010–38, 1025).

the Image is the archetype according to which all things have been created, and this includes the human being. Those humans who live virtuous lives become “sons” of the Logos, who is the Image of God. For the Stoics, it is the task of the human being to mold itself according to the divine model. For Plutarch, the philosophically educated ruler who lives by divine reason and virtue is an image of God insofar as he concerns himself with the preservation of the state. And although Plutarch restricts the designation “image of God” to such a ruler, that ruler can, in this function as “image,” become the model for his subjects and conform them to himself. This is similar to Paul’s thought as well, although he embeds Christ’s significance for humanity in a broader context and makes it more fundamental to his anthropology: Christ as the “image” to whom believers are conformed in part now and in full at the eschaton is embedded in the context of God’s salvation-history, and further, conformation to the image of the Son does not entail merely a positive quantitative ethical difference for the human being, but rather ushers in an entirely different and new mode of human existence that is qualitatively distinct from and superior to Adamic humanity.

Although each of the image concepts of these figures have distinguishing characteristics, it is noteworthy that the Wisdom of Solomon, Philo, Plutarch, and Paul all think that images have a *theological, soteriological, and ethical significance*.

It must be pointed out in this connection that the Stoics stand on the periphery of the image discourse of the first century A.D. For the three Stoics Seneca, Musonius, and Epictetus, the notion of an image of God is a primarily ethical affair. That an “image of God” would play little to no role in Stoic epistemology is understandable when one considers that in their immanentist system, God is already known through the logical structure of the cosmos and thus there is no need for an image to convey divine reality from a transcendent realm to an immanent one.

Chapter 2

Exegetical Prolegomena for Colossians 1:15–20

“We now come to one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament, certainly the most difficult in this epistle. The difficulty lies not in making rough general sense of it – it is by no means unintelligible, not even obscure [...]. The difficulty lies in giving anything like precise answers to a series of related questions.”¹

Compared to the preceding examination of image discourses, the discussion of introductory critical questions concerning the genesis and character of Col 1:15–20 leads us into quite different terrain. Even if James Houlden overstates his case when he writes that “making rough general sense” of Col 1:15–20 is not difficult – is it really so easy? – he is surely correct in stating that it is difficult to provide precise answers to the questions that lay the foundation for the analysis and interpretation of Col 1:15–20. Nonetheless, an attempt to provide the most plausible answers to introductory questions is called for and will be conducted here.

A. Textual Criticism

On the whole, the conditions for a text-critical reconstruction of Colossians are fairly good. The most important majuscules (Sinaiticus, A, B, C, D⁰⁶ [Codex Claromontanus]) contain the entirety of Colossians, with the exception that C lacks Col 1:1–2. The letter is not present in D⁰⁵ (Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis), yet this is because the codex lacks the entire Corpus Paulinum. Colossians is also completely present in two weighty minuscules, namely 33 and 1739.² Colossians is incompletely preserved in \mathfrak{P}^{46} ,³ yet in 1:15–20, only the initial verse

¹ James Leslie Houlden, *Paul's Letters from Prison: Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians*, Westminster Pelican Commentaries (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 155–56.

² Both belong to Category I in Aland/Aland's typology of text-critical categories (see Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *Der Text des Neuen Testaments: Einführung in die wissenschaftlichen Ausgaben sowie in Theorie und Praxis der modernen Textkritik*, 2nd ed. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1989], 141, 152). See also Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York/Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 87–88, 91.

³ \mathfrak{P}^{46} contains: 1:1–2, 5–13, 16–24; 1:27–2:19; 2:23–3:11, 13–24; 4:3–12, 16–18.

is missing. This is most likely due to the general condition of \mathfrak{P}^{46} , for the absence of one to two verses at the bottom of a folio is a recurring pattern, and v. 15 would have occupied this space on the leaf.⁴ Internal considerations as well, such as the composition of Col 1:15–20 (see below, “The Christological Section: Col 1:15–20”), make an original absence of v. 15 unlikely. There has been much speculation about an *Urform* of the Colossian hymn,⁵ but it is hard to imagine an original version of the hymn that lacked v. 15 and, to my knowledge, no scholar has ever advanced such a hypothesis. It is therefore safe to assume that the version of v. 15 in \mathfrak{P}^{46} did not diverge significantly from other manuscripts.

In sum: the textual evidence for Col 1:15–20 is robust. That said, there are six text-critical issues in Col 1:15–20: three in v. 16, two in v. 18, and one in v. 20. The variants deserving of closer examination are found in v. 16.⁶

I. Verse 16

The first variant of the first text-critical issue is the presence of $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ before $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ $\tau\omicron\iota\varsigma$ in v. 16b and is attested by Sinaiticus’ second group of correctors (ca. seventh cent.), A, C, by D’s first correctors (seventh cent.), and by K, L, P, 075, 81, 104, 365, 630, 1175, 1881, the *Mehrheitstext*, individual Vulgate manuscripts, and by Eusebius († 339/340) and Lucifer of Cagliari († 371), thus reading: $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ $\tau\omicron\iota\varsigma$ $\omicron\upsilon\beta\alpha\nu\omicron\iota\varsigma$. The text of NA²⁸ ($\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ $\tau\omicron\iota\varsigma$ $\omicron\upsilon\beta\alpha\nu\omicron\iota\varsigma$) is attested by \mathfrak{P}^{46} , Sinaiticus’ original reading, B, D, F, G, Ψ , 6, 33, 1739, the Vulgate, and some of the Old Latin tradition. The first variant is quantitatively well attested due to the *Mehrheitstext*, a number of minuscules, patristic citations, and a small number of majuscules. Although it is attested in A and C, both of which belong to the Alexandrian text-type and stem from the fifth century, it is not qualitatively strong: the presence of this variant in \aleph and D stems from later corrections and the adduced patristic citations cannot be counted on to accurately reproduce a particular manuscript tradition. The second variant, which lacks $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ and thus presents $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ $\tau\omicron\iota\varsigma$ $\omicron\upsilon\beta\alpha\nu\omicron\iota\varsigma$, is quantitatively weak yet qualitatively quite strong, seeing that it is contained in \mathfrak{P}^{46} , the original readings of both \aleph and D, is present in B and in the minuscules 33 and 1739. The second

⁴ Source: Online “Manuscript Workspace” of the *Institut für neutestamentliche Textforschung* (<https://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/manuscript-workspace>). Col 1:14–15 is absent from the bottom of the *verso* of Folio 90, vv. 25–26 are absent from the bottom of the *recto* of Folio 91, more than half of 2:7 is missing from the *verso* of Folio 91, and so on throughout the letter.

⁵ See below, “Author of Colossians 1:15–20.”

⁶ Following the opinion of Alfio Marcello Buscemi that $\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\eta$ in v. 18b is a predicate nominative and therefore does not require a definite article, the presence of η in v. 18b will not be considered here (*Lettera ai Colossesi: Commentario esegetico*, ASBF 82 [Milan: Edizioni Terra Santa, 2015], 94).

variant is the shorter and more difficult reading, for it is easier to imagine the addition of $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ rather than its elimination. The first variant therefore likely entails an addition, motivated by stylistic or by theological considerations.⁷ Because some manuscripts preserve a lack of $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ at this point but attest $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ before $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota$ τῆς γῆς (see below), it stands to reason that $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ was added to the beginning of v. 16b in order to produce a rhetorically balanced statement: $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. The fact that C also adds the postpositive particle $\tau\epsilon$ to the first addition of $\tau\acute{\alpha}$, thereby creating a ‘ $\tau\epsilon$... καί’ construction connecting τοῖς οὐρανοῖς and τῆς γῆς suggests that there were stylistic considerations behind the adjustment, both for C’s ancestor and for C itself.⁸ It seems best to conclude that the second variant, ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, presents the original reading.

The second text-critical issue concerns the presence of $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ before $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota$ τῆς γῆς in v. 16b. This reading is attested by the second correctors of \aleph , by A, C, D F, G, K, L, P, 075, 81, 104, 365, 630, 1175, a supplement of 1241, also by 1505, 2464, the *Mehrheitstext*, individual Vulgate manuscripts, and by Eusebius and Lucifer of Cagliari. The second variant of this issue, which presents only $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota$ τῆς γῆς, is attested by \mathfrak{B}^{46} , the original reading of \aleph , by B, Ψ , 6, 33, 1739, 1881, the Vulgate, and some of the Old Latin tradition. The situation is similar to that of the first text-critical issue: the first variant is quantitatively strong – even including some manuscripts that do not attest the presence of $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ at the beginning of v. 16b, namely D, F, and G – while the second variant is qualitatively strong. Further, the second variant presents the shorter and more difficult reading in the sense that it is easier to imagine the addition of $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ rather than its elimination. The judgment here therefore falls along the same lines, with the conclusion that the second variant is the original reading.

The third issue concerns the presence of $\acute{\omicron}\tau\iota$ in place of $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ in v. 16f, a variant found only in \mathfrak{B}^{46} . Although \mathfrak{B}^{46} is a reliable witness, it stands alone on this point. This variant makes good sense: an exegetical $\acute{\omicron}\tau\iota$ would highlight the way in which v. 16f summarizes the rest of v. 16. Scribal error is unlikely to account for it, seeing that the words surrounding $\acute{\omicron}\tau\iota$ and the placement of $\acute{\omicron}\tau\iota$ on the folio prevent us from supposing the occurrence of a homoioarcton or

⁷ The reasons would be: (1) the addition is found in later corrections of \aleph and D; (2) it is attested in Eusebius and Lucifer of Cagliari, who would have likely supplied $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ to a seemingly incomplete grammatical construction (church fathers did not always cite precisely); (3) the text is perceived to be less intelligible without the addition; and (4) the addition of $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ serves to intensify the claim of 16a; i.e., *all* things without remainder or qualification were created in the Son.

⁸ That is, the ancestor of C likely contained both instances of $\tau\alpha$ ($\tau\acute{\alpha}$ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς), but no instance of $\tau\epsilon$. The scribe of C likely recognized that a ‘ $\tau\epsilon$... καί’ construction would be stylistically superior and therefore added $\tau\epsilon$, resulting in the reading: $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ $\tau\epsilon$ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. On the ‘ $\tau\epsilon$... καί’ construction, cf. CGCG 59.37.

homoioteleuton. It is more likely that \mathfrak{P}^{46} derives from a source that is unique regarding the presence of $\delta\tau\iota$ or that the scribe consciously changed it. The lack of the reading of \mathfrak{P}^{46} in later manuscripts suggests that later copyists were not convinced that this was the better reading. Of course, one could argue that \mathfrak{P}^{46} represents a *lectio difficilior* because adding a third $\delta\tau\iota$ would disrupt the structure of the passage, wherein there is only one explanatory $\delta\tau\iota$ -clause per strophe (see below “Anatomy of the Text”). Nevertheless, the quantitative singularity of this variant outweighs such a consideration. Therefore, it is more plausible that the use of $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ at the beginning of v. 16f represents the original reading.

We therefore have two main types of variants of v. 16 that diverge from NA²⁸, namely the presence of $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ before the prepositions $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ and $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota$ in v. 16b and the presence of $\delta\tau\iota$ in v. 16f. While neither of them is a likely candidate for the original text and therefore will not form the basis of our exegesis, they are thematically interesting insofar as they might reveal what early copyists of the text supposed the meaning of the text to be, perhaps even attempting to extend its line of thought. The first type of variant, attesting a double insertion of $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ in v. 16b,⁹ would allow the clause to be read as an explanation of the $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ $\acute{\pi}\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha$ of v. 16a. Instead of reading, “In him were created all things in the heavens and upon the earth,” one would read, “For in him were created *all things*: all things in the heavens and all things upon the earth [...]” The second type of variant – the insertion of $\delta\tau\iota$ in v. 16f, attested only by \mathfrak{P}^{46} – would read: “For in him were created all things in the heavens and upon the earth, the seen and the unseen, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, *for all things* were created through him and unto him.” The use of an epexegetical $\delta\tau\iota$ in place of $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ thus turns v. 16f into a summary of v. 16a–e. Seeing that the first instance of $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ $\acute{\pi}\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha$ in \mathfrak{P}^{46} is qualified by the phrase $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ $\tau\omicron\iota\varsigma$ $\omicron\upsilon\rho\alpha\nu\omicron\iota\varsigma$ $\kappa\alpha\iota$ $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota$ $\tau\eta\varsigma$ $\gamma\eta\varsigma$, the $\delta\tau\iota$ of v. 16f would serve to assert that *all things*, in the strictest sense of the word *all*, were truly created “in him.”

The impact of both alternative readings upon v. 16 as a whole would consist in affirming that nothing falls outside the scope of the Son’s role in the process of creation. That is, these variants represent, in their respective ways, the possibility of reading the substantive $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ $\acute{\pi}\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha$ in a sense unqualified by a domain restraint (e.g., $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ $\tau\omicron\iota\varsigma$ $\omicron\upsilon\rho\alpha\nu\omicron\iota\varsigma$), thus imbuing $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ $\acute{\pi}\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha$ with the sense of $\tau\acute{\omicron}$

⁹ This is found in A, C, K, L, P, 075, 81, 104, 365, 630, 1175, the *Mehrheitstext*, some individual Vulgate manuscripts, and in Eusebius and Lucifer of Cagliari. Another reason to doubt this as an original reading might be deduced from the presence of $\tau\epsilon$ in C. It stands to reason that C’s ancestor contained the double insertion of $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ in 16b. Yet one might ask that if *both* instances of $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ in 16b were truly original to Colossians, then why was there no ‘ $\tau\epsilon\dots$ $\kappa\alpha\iota$ ’ construction from the start? The presence of $\tau\epsilon$ in C might therefore indicate a process of accretion in three stages: (1) $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ $\tau\omicron\iota\varsigma$ $\omicron\upsilon\rho\alpha\nu\omicron\iota\varsigma$ $\kappa\alpha\iota$ $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota$ $\tau\eta\varsigma$ $\gamma\eta\varsigma$, (2) $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ $\tau\omicron\iota\varsigma$ $\omicron\upsilon\rho\alpha\nu\omicron\iota\varsigma$ $\kappa\alpha\iota$ $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota$ $\tau\eta\varsigma$ $\gamma\eta\varsigma$, and (3) $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ $\tau\epsilon$ $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ $\tau\omicron\iota\varsigma$ $\omicron\upsilon\rho\alpha\nu\omicron\iota\varsigma$ $\kappa\alpha\iota$ $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota$ $\tau\eta\varsigma$ $\gamma\eta\varsigma$.

πᾶν. The aim would be to impress more strongly upon the reader that the Son's role in creation extends to *all* things, without qualification.¹⁰

II. Text to be Used for Exegesis

The textual basis for the exegesis will therefore be:

ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς τὰ ὀρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἐκτισται καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχὴ πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτὸν εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ δι' αὐτοῦ εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

The question of the passage's structure will be dealt with under the heading "Anatomy of the Text."

B. Origin of the Text

I. Author of Colossians

1. External Evidence

The basic critical question regarding the Pauline authorship of certain writings is not an invention of modernity; it was also raised in the earliest centuries of the Christian Church. Already in the New Testament, the deuteropauline 2 Thessalonians warns the addressees to be on their guard against letters (falsely) circulating under the name of Paul and his co-workers (2 Thess 2:2). To take another example, the Muratorian Fragment refers to the letters to the Laodiceans and to the Alexandrians, both of which professed Pauline authorship but were rejected as inauthentic.¹¹ Other church figures, such as the three Alexandrians Clement, Origen, and Dionysius, applied the criteria for authenticity from traditional Alexandrian philology to the Corpus Paulinum, and there is no

¹⁰ Buscemi, *Lettera ai Colossesi*, 94, appears to make much the same point regarding the additions, although he states more tersely of the additions: "[Loro] precisano il senso del testo."

¹¹ "Fertur etiam ad Laodicenses, alia ad Alexandrinos, Pauli nomine finctae ad hæresim Marcionis, et alia plura quæ in catholicam ecclesiam recipi non potest: fel enim cum melle misceri non congruit" (cited in Brooke Foss Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament*, 7th ed. [London: Macmillan, 1896], 546; cf. Gregory A. Robbins, "Muratorian Fragment," *ABD* 4:928–29).

suggestion that they doubted the authenticity of Colossians.¹² No evidence suggests that Colossians was excluded from any collection of the Corpus Paulinum nor from any canon list in late antiquity. In comparison, Origen, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus rejected the Pauline authorship of Hebrews.¹³

The earliest piece of external evidence for the authorship of Colossians is the Marcionite Canon, which contains Colossians within a version of the Corpus Paulinum consisting of only ten letters common to later canons.¹⁴ P⁴⁶ (ca. A.D. 200), the earliest papyrological evidence for the Corpus Paulinum, also contains Colossians and places it between Philipians and 1 Thessalonians, two of the protopauline letters.¹⁵

The Muratorian Fragment also contains Colossians in its Corpus Paulinum.¹⁶ Athanasius also includes Colossians within the Corpus Paulinum, a body of work that he clearly views as a unity: “The epistles of Paul [are] 14, reckoned as one book.”¹⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem strings together quotes from various Pauline letters, placing Ephesians, Colossians, and Hebrews alongside Romans.¹⁸ John Chrysostom also names Paul as the author of Colossians at the outset of *Homilia* 1 in his work *In epistulam ad Colossenses*.

The composite authorship professed by seven of the thirteen writings of the Corpus Paulinum should be taken seriously as well.¹⁹ Five of the seven letters

¹² Wolfgang Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum: Ein Versuch ihrer Deutung* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1971), 181–82: “Das Erbe der griechischen Philologen Alexandriens haben zu einem Teil die dort oder in der Nähe lebenden christlichen Wissenschaftler, Klemens von Alexandrien, Origenes, Dionysios von Alexandrien, Sextus Julius Africanus und Eusebios übernommen. Das zeigt sich nicht zuletzt auf dem Gebiet der Echtheitskritik.”

¹³ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.25.11.4 (cited in Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum*, 182, n. 3).

¹⁴ Peter Arzt-Grabner, “Das Corpus Paulinum,” in *Paulus Handbuch*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Horn (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 6–16, 15. Cf. Udo Schnelle, “Bibel: III. Neues Testament (1–2),” *RGK4* 1:1417–24, 1419: Marcion retained Gal, 1 and 2 Cor, Rom (14 of 16 chapters), 1 and 2 Thess, Laodiceans (perhaps identical with Eph), Col, Phil, and Phlm. Compared with the modern Protestant canon, 1 Tim, 2 Tim, and Titus are lacking. If one considers that Hebrews was considered by some to have been authored by Paul (e.g., Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem), then the lack of Hebrews in Marcion’s Corpus Paulinum and in his NT generally should be noted.

¹⁵ Arzt-Grabner, “Das Corpus Paulinum,” 15.

¹⁶ Robbins, “Muratorian Fragment,” 929. For the text, see Westcott, *A General Survey*, Appendix C, esp. 545–46.

¹⁷ Παύλου ἀποστόλου ἐπιστολαὶ ἰδ’, εἰς ἓν ἀριθμούμεναι βιβλίον (*Synopsis scripturae sacrae*, PG 28: 292.44–45). The Catholic letters as well are considered as “one book” by Athanasius, and therefore the Corpus Paulinum is not unique in this regard. Yet this does nothing to detract from his opinion that Colossians is one of Paul’s letters.

¹⁸ *Catechesis* 14, ch. 29, 1.14 (*Catecheses ad illuminandos 1–18*, ed. Reischl and Rupp).

¹⁹ 1 Cor, 2 Cor, Phil, Col, 1 Thess, 2 Thess, Phlm.

universally considered protopauline profess a composite authorship.²⁰ Although this is a matter of internal evidence, it becomes an issue of external evidence when patristic theologians explicitly reference it without drawing the conclusion that this infringes upon ‘Pauline authenticity.’ Theodoretus, for example, says quite plainly that Paul made Timothy his partner (κοινωνός) in his letters.²¹

2. Internal Evidence

The letter to the Colossians professes to originate from Paul and Timothy (Col 1:1), although the concluding greeting (Col 4:18) suggests that ‘Paul’ did not pen the letter. Possible candidates for the *amanuensis* in the framework of the letter are Timothy, or perhaps Tychichus, Epaphras, or Onesimus. The former might be postulated on the grounds that Timothy was one of Paul’s closest co-workers.²² The latter two candidates might also be considered, for they are being sent by Paul to the Colossians (Col 4:7–9), and Onesimus’ former life as a slave (cf. Phlm 15–16) does not preclude the possibility that he could read and write.

In the opening greeting (Col 1:1), Paul introduces himself as “an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God,” thus asserting his rank, the focus of his commission, his commissioner, and the legitimation for his work; that is, the divine will. Timothy is referred to as “the brother” rather than “my brother,” perhaps signaling something about Timothy’s general disposition towards other believers rather than simply his nearness to Paul.²³ Paul understands himself to have “become a servant” of the Gospel that is preached in all creation (Col 1:23). He refers to himself in this verse by name (ἐγὼ Παῦλος); that is, outside of the greeting and conclusion of a letter. There is no clearly established usage across the protopauline and deuteropauline letters which might suggest that this is either unusual or common. Some Protopaulines lack such a self-reference,²⁴ while others employ it precisely in a key point of the

²⁰ 1 Cor, 2 Cor, Phil, 1 Thess, Phlm.

²¹ Cf. Theodoretus’ commentary on Colossians in his *Interpretatio in xiv epistulas sancti Pauli* (PG 82:592, lines 13–14).

²² Cf. Rom 16:21; Phil 2:19–24, 1 Thess 3:2. This circumstance is particularly apparent in 1 Cor 16:10, where Paul equates Timothy’s efforts for the sake of the Gospel with his own ([Τιμόθεος] τὸ γὰρ ἔργον τοῦ κυρίου ἐργάζεται ὡς καὶ ἐγώ), and in Phil 2:20, where he states he has no one else who is of “the same soul” when it comes to being concerned for the Philippians (οὐδένα γὰρ ἔχω ἰσόψυχον, ὅστις γνησίως τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν μεριμνήσει).

²³ “The brother” (ὁ ἀδελφός), is used absolutely of Timothy in 2 Cor 1:1 and Phlm 1:1 as well.

²⁴ Romans and Philippians contain a self-reference only in the greeting (Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1).

argumentation.²⁵ The Deuteropaulines, too, display the same lack of a consistent pattern.²⁶ Therefore, the suggestion that this self-reference were evidence of an attempt on the part of a Pauline disciple to project a Pauline identity in the letter is not credible.

The Paul of Colossians understands himself to be suffering for the sake of the Colossians and thereby “fulfilling what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (Col 1:24). This is unusual in the Corpus Paulinum and seems to be, for some scholars, the litmus test in the issue of Pauline authorship.²⁷ He understands his task to consist in admonishing and teaching “everyone” (πᾶς ἄνθρωπος) in “all wisdom,” for the sake of presenting “everyone” (πᾶς ἄνθρωπος) complete in Christ (Col 1:28), thereby echoing the task of Christ to “present [them] holy and blameless and beyond reproach” before God (Col 1:22). It seems that Paul has never met these believers (cf. Col 1:3–8, esp. 1:7, and 2:1b), and perhaps this is why he seems at pains to establish a connection between himself and them on the basis of his ministry (Col 1:24–2:1; cf. “how great a struggle I have for you” in 2:1). In the face of such an effort, it is conspicuous that Paul never expresses the wish to see this community, a wish he expresses when writing to other communities.²⁸ However, this could be explained by the fact that Paul is in chains (Col 4:3, 18). In contrast to Philippians, where Paul draws

²⁵ 2 Cor 10:1; Gal 5:2; 1 Thess 2:18; Phlm 9. The occurrences in 1 Corinthians of a self-referential Παῦλος outside of the greeting and conclusion of the letter (1 Cor 1:12, 13 [bis]; 3:4, 5, 22) are a part of Paul’s response to the specific situation in Corinth and thus have a different character than the occurrences previously listed.

²⁶ 1 Tim, 2 Tim, and Titus all contain a self-referential Παῦλος only in their greetings, whereas Col 1:23 and Eph 3:1 are instances of such usage outside of the greeting and conclusion.

²⁷ E.g., Michael Theobald, “Der Kolosserbrief,” in *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, KST 6, 3rd ed., eds. Martin Ebner and Stefan Schreiber (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2020), 429–44, 440. Theobald finds Col 1:24 to be indicative of a kind of hagiography: this is not something the apostle would have written about himself and it therefore likely stems from a disciple looking back on Paul’s life and offering theological reflection on his martyrdom. See also Andreas Dettwiler, “L’épître aux Colossiens: Un exemple de réception de la théologie paulinienne,” *FoiVie* 94, no. 4 (1995): 26–40, 31–32. For the contrary argument that Col 1:24 corresponds to Paul’s portrayal of himself in 2 Cor 5:18–6:4, cf. Bruce T. Clark, *Completing Christ’s Afflictions: Christ, Paul, and the Reconciliation of All Things*, WUNT 2/383 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014). Clark applies to Col 1:24 what he writes of 2 Cor 5:18–6:4: “In this way Paul’s διακονία, which he ‘commends in everything’ by his ‘afflictions, distresses,’ etc. (6.3ff), is presented as an integral component to the one divine act of reconciliation, in which Christ and his ambassador both fulfill unique, essential, though indubitably asymmetric roles in redemptive history. Christ having completed his own role, this divine act of reconciliation is thus coterminous with the fulfillment of Paul’s διακονία” (162). In a similar vein, Buscemi, *Lettera ai Colossesi*, 182–83, points out that “the sufferings of Christ” need not be understood as synecdochic (*ex parte totum*) for the redemptive sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

²⁸ Rom 1:9–13; 15:32; 2 Cor 13:1, 10; Phil 1:26; 1 Thess 2:17–20.

attention to his imprisonment (Phil 1:12–14) and nevertheless holds out hope that he will see the Philippians again (Phil 1:26), he does not do so here. There is no sure answer as to why this is the case, though perhaps this “Paul,” for one reason or another, senses that his end is near. It seems that the Paul of Colossians is imprisoned (Col 4:18), yet Timothy is not, for whereas Paul references directly his own imprisonment as well as his “fellow prisoner” Aristarchus (Col 4:10), he makes no such comment concerning Timothy. Further, whereas first-person plural pronouns and verbal forms are common in Colossians, a quick transition is made to first-person singular verbal forms and pronouns whenever Paul’s status as a prisoner is mentioned.²⁹

The non-Pauline authorship of Colossians has often been attested on the basis of a higher frequency of hapax legomena than is found in the Protopaulines. There are two reasons for being skeptical about this argument. First, the hapax legomena are concentrated in the hymn (Col 1:15–20) and the description of the opposing “philosophy” (Col 2:6–23).³⁰ The presence of hapax legomena in these sections is significant, seeing that the hymn, whether cited from another source or composed *ad hoc*,³¹ would introduce vocabulary likely to distinguish the passage from its context, and the same goes for 2:6–23, seeing that the terminology used to describe the opponent was likely derived from the situation itself and not directly from the author. Second, the protopauline letters themselves also display “numerous hapax legomena” and are therefore not distinct in this regard vis-à-vis the deuteropauline letters.³² In fact, Jermo van Nes has demonstrated in a recent study that Colossians evinces less divergence in this regard than do 1 Thessalonians and Philippians, two of the protopauline letters.³³

²⁹ Cf. Col 4:3, where the dative plural pronoun ἡμῖν is quickly replaced by δέδεμαι. Cf. also the first-person pronoun used in 4:10, συναιχμάλωτός μου, and in 4:18, μου τῶν δεσμῶν.

³⁰ Cf. Udo Schnelle, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 9th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 363.

³¹ If the hymn was composed *ad hoc*, then the sudden shift to a different literary style could explain the difference in vocabulary. On the possibility of *ad hoc* composition, cf. Charles H. Cosgrove, “The Syntax of Early Christian Hymns and Prayers,” in *EC* 9, no. 2 (2018): 158–80, 177–80.

³² Schnelle, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 363; Buscemi, *Lettera ai Colossesi*, xxix; Stefano Tarocchi, “Le lettere della prigionia,” in *Le lettere di San Paolo*, *Commentari biblici esegetico-teologici*, eds. Alessandro Biancalani and Benedetto Rossi (Siena/Rome: Cantagalli/Città Nuova, 2019), 2:1191–1359, 1248.

³³ Van Nes applied linear regression analysis to the hapax legomena of the Corpus Paulinum and found that “none of the disputed Paulines use significantly more *hapaxes* than the undisputed Paulines” (“Hapax Legomena in Disputed Pauline Letters: A Reassessment,” *ZNW* 109, no. 1 [2018]: 118–37, 137). An important factor in his approach is the exclusion of terms that might be considered hapax legomena due to a prepositional prefix (e.g., σύνδουλος in Col 1:7 and 4:7 vis-à-vis δοῦλος in the Protopaulines), seeing that

In a similar vein, the stylistic differences between Colossians and the Protopaulines has, ever since the publication in 1973 of Walter Bujard's seminal study *Stilanalytische Untersuchungen zum Kolosserbrief als Beitrag zur Methodik von Sprachvergleichen*, been a key component in the argument against Pauline authorship.³⁴ One countervailing argument is that the literary *amanuensis* – implied by Col 4:18 – corresponds to an historical secretary; seeing that there is evidence of the use of secretaries in the early Roman imperial period, it is conceivable that Paul might have engaged in this practice.³⁵ The counter to this argument is that the stylistic differences are so great that an *amanuensis* cannot account for them.³⁶ One could, however, question the viability of arguments based on style by raising the counter-question whether the length of the letter even provides enough material for such an analysis and by claiming that even in the undisputed Pauline letters, there is no such thing as a 'uniform Pauline style.'³⁷

Another possibility is that the theological exigencies of the letter led the historical Paul to employ a different style and vocabulary. According to this view, the need to underscore Christ's supremacy in creation and reconciliation would provide a sufficient cause for the differences in theological vocabulary

morphological productivity through the use of affixes is common in Indo-European languages (ibid., 134). On hapax legomena in Col vis-à-vis Phil and 1 Thess, see Van Nes, ibid., 128, fig. 3.

³⁴ Walter Bujard, *Stilanalytische Untersuchungen zum Kolosserbrief als Beitrag zur Methodik von Sprachvergleichen*, SUNT 11 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973). Bujard concludes on the basis of his various analyses that the sentence structure, train of thought, and rhetorical flourish (70–71, 129, 219) of Colossians are too different from the Protopaulines to allow the idea that the Apostle Paul had composed the letter; in each of the three cases, Bujard speaks of a "wesentlicher Unterschied" or a "wesentliche Unterschiedenheit" between the two (in one case, that the difference cannot be considered as "im Entscheidenden unwesentlich").

³⁵ A key representative of this viewpoint is E. Randolph Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, WUNT 2/42 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991). As it concerns Col, Richards concludes that it is one of the [proto-]Pauline letters composed with the aid of a secretary (189–98, 201).

³⁶ E.g., Peter Müller, *Kolosserbrief*, KEK9/2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022), 400–2.

³⁷ Cf. Buscemi, *Lettera ai Colossesi*, xxix–xxx, who, after asking whether one could realistically expect to find "all the particularities" of Pauline style in a letter consisting of only four chapters, denies that such a style even exists: "Né queste né altre particolarità lessicali e sintattiche sono determinanti per stabilire se la Lettera ai Colossesi sia autentica o non autentica. Anzi, il problema, se si vuole, è molto più complesso di quanto appare. Infatti, non esiste, nelle cosiddette lettere autentiche, uno 'stile paolino' uniforme né nel vocabolario né nella sintassi né nello stile. Infatti, riunire in un unico gruppo Galati, 1Corinti, 2Corinti e Romani è disconoscere la profonda differenza filologica che esiste in queste varie lettere."

and literary style between Colossians and other Pauline letters.³⁸ Presumably, opponents of Pauline authorship would advance an argument similar to the one used against the *amanuensis* hypothesis, namely that the differences are too significant for this latter hypothesis to be tenable.

Finally, the deuteropauline authorship of Colossians has been asserted on the basis of theological differences between it and the protopauline letters. Interestingly enough, although the Christology of Colossians has been one of the chief reasons for denying Pauline authorship from the time of Holtzmann³⁹ to the present,⁴⁰ the first scholar to question the Pauline authorship of Colossians, Ernst Theodor Mayerhoff, found its Christology to be the most minor theological change vis-à-vis the other Pauline letters and a “weitere Entwicklung der Lehre des Paulus von Christi Ursein.”⁴¹ For him, the most significant theological disparity between Colossians and the other Pauline letters was its understanding of the Law.⁴²

Even though exegetes can list the theological *topoi* wherein Colossians differs from the Protopaulines – as Schnelle does in his *Einleitung*⁴³ – there do not seem to be clear criteria with which we can determine just how much of a change must take place in order for Colossians to be no longer ‘authentically Pauline’ in the sense of deriving directly from Paul’s own hand or from a Pauline commission. In other words, no one can say exactly how we decide when a *critical threshold of difference* has been crossed. A similar conclusion is reached by Ulrich Luz, who points out that we are dealing here with a matter of subjective estimation rather than one of critical testing,⁴⁴ only the latter would enable intersubjective verification.

Luz’s phrasing ‘subjective estimation’ is instructive here, for interlocutors in the debates concerning the interpretation of the theological differences between the protopauline and the deuteropauline letters presuppose the decision

³⁸ Filippo Belli, *Lettera ai Colossesi: Introduzione, traduzione e commento*, NVBTA 48 (Milan: Edizioni San Paolo, 2015), 10, 16–17.

³⁹ Cf. Heinrich Julius Holtzmann, *Kritik der Epheser- und Kolosserbriefe: Auf Grund einer Analyse ihres Verwandtschaftsverhältnisses* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1872), 18–21.

⁴⁰ The opinion offered by Schnelle, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 365–66, can be considered representative for current scholarship. Of the seven theological *topoi* for which he registers a difference vis-à-vis the Protopaulines, Christology is the first on the list.

⁴¹ Ernst Theodor Mayerhoff, *Der Brief an die Colosser: Mit vornehmlicher Berücksichtigung der drei Pastoralbriefe kritisch geprüft* (Berlin: Schultze, 1838), 64, 69, respectively.

⁴² Mayerhoff, *ibid.*, 60–61.

⁴³ Schnelle, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 363–67. In Schnelle’s estimation, Col diverges from the Protopaulines in the following topics: Christology, eschatology, ecclesiology, function of the apostle, the concept of faith, pneumatology, and the topic of Israel.

⁴⁴ “Wie weit dieses [theologische] Profil [des Kol] ‘unpaulinisch’ ist, ist natürlich eine Ermessensfrage” (Jürgen Becker and Ulrich Luz, *Die Briefe an die Galater, Epheser und Kolosser*, NTD 8/1 [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998], 187).

of a question that is of a philosophical rather than an exegetical character, namely, how should we interpret the diversity of style and content in a corpus that supposedly stems from a ‘great thinker’? (It is no secret that biblical theologians desire to apply this category to Paul.) Should that difference be chided as a ‘lack of systematic character’ or should it be greeted as a particular ‘dynamism of thought’? The first alternative would ground suspicion concerning the Pauline authorship of Colossians, whereas the second alternative would greet such difference as a positive sign of Paul’s ability to adapt his thought to address new circumstances.⁴⁵ The different concepts of the ‘great thinker’ that are operative in exegetical works and applied to questions of authorship are rarely, if ever, made explicit, and as long as a direct scholarly confrontation with the issue remains a *desideratum*, then we should be little surprised if judgments concerning the authorship of a work like Colossians continue to fall along cultural, linguistic, and institutional lines.

In light of the tentativeness of the foregoing arguments, the proposal that the Pauline authorship of Colossians is “the most plausible and least hypothetical”⁴⁶ should, at the very least, not be discarded out of hand.

3. Evaluation

The identity of the historical author is not ascertainable. Attempts by scholars to identify the author with precision have not created wide consensus; to generalize broadly, Anglophone (and some Italophone) exegetes tend to ascribe the letter to the historical Paul, whereas Germanophone scholarship tends to identify Colossians as deuteropauline.⁴⁷ Although the specific attribution to the historical Paul is the minority viewpoint, the latter alternative is not necessarily more helpful: the conclusion reached by proponents of deuteropauline

⁴⁵ Cf. Buscemi, *Lettera ai Colossesi*, xxxi–xxxvi, for this stance as well as an examination of the theology, Christology, ecclesiology, and eschatology of Col with the undisputed Pauline letters; Buscemi finds Col to be largely commensurate with the Protopaulines as far as these *topoi* are concerned.

⁴⁶ Belli, *Lettera ai Colossesi*, 17.

⁴⁷ That this *communis opinio* has, however, become weaker in recent decades is affirmed by Andreas Dettwiler: “Den Kolosserbrief als Zeugen des Deuteropaulinismus, d.h. als Zeugen des Rezeptionsprozesses paulinischer Theologie zu verstehen, stellt heute kein exegetische *fait accompli* mehr dar. Der Wind, der vormals klar den deuteropaulinischen Charakter des Kol unterstützte, scheint sich sogar in der deutschsprachigen Exegese langsam zu drehen, sei es, dass man den Brief als Zeugen eines genuin paulinischen Denkens interpretiert, sei es, dass man in Bezug auf die Verfasserfrage für ein zaghaftes *ignoramus votum*” (“Das Verständnis des Kreuzes Jesu im Kolosserbrief,” in *Kreuzestheologien im Neuen Testament*, WUNT 151, eds. Dettwiler and Jean Zumstein [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002], 81–105, 81). Dettwiler himself advocates the view that Colossians is “clearly to be classified as deuteropauline” and that it represents the reception and further development of Pauline thought on the part of a Pauline disciple (82).

authorship has, in the end, reached no other conclusion than ‘not-the-historical-Paul.’⁴⁸ Offering a more specific answer with any certainty seems unattainable.⁴⁹ Of the various proposals, however, the proposal of Eduard Schweizer to see Colossians as “neither Pauline nor post-Pauline” seems to make the most sense.⁵⁰ Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr concurs, noting the difficulty posed by the concluding greetings, which are similar to the references in Philemon.⁵¹ According to Niebuhr, holding Colossians for a literary fiction would mean proposing that the author writing with a significant temporal distance from Paul would have chosen to mimic Philemon in order to grant Colossians an air of authenticity, and it is unlikely that the author would have chosen “precisely the most insignificant” Pauline letter for that purpose.⁵² Further, it would mean supposing that the author chose for his addressees a fictive community with which Paul had no personal connection, another strategically questionable move. Whereas Niebuhr’s pronouncement on the “insignificance” of Philemon is tenuous,⁵³ his second objection is more convincing. Following Schweizer, Niebuhr, and Stettler, it seems reasonable to suggest that if Colossians was not authored by the historical Paul, then it was likely authored by one of his closest co-workers, such as Timothy.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ For a fivefold typology of the possible situations for the composition of Colossians, see M. Eugene Boring, *An Introduction to the New Testament: History, Literature, Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 329–31. It seems to me, however, that the distinction between the fourth type, “A Paulinist to the Church Universal,” and the fifth type, “A Paulinist to the Pauline Churches in Asia Minor,” as Boring explains it, is a distinction without a difference, for it assumes that Christians outside of Asia Minor would have been so limited by their own situation as to be incapable of applying to their own situation some theological insight addressed to another one.

⁴⁹ Albert Schweitzer pointed in this direction already in 1930: “[Die Briefe an die Kolosser und Epheser] unterscheiden sich in eigentümlicher Weise von denen an die Römer, Korinther, Galater und Philipper. Zugleich aber haben sie mit ihnen so viel gemeinsam, daß der Annahme der Unechtheit fast ebenso viele Bedenken entgegensteht wie der der Echtheit” (*Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus*, 2nd ed. [Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1954], 43).

⁵⁰ See Eduard Schweizer, “Der Kolosserbrief – weder paulinisch noch nachpaulinisch?,” chap. 7 in Schweizer, *Neues Testament und Christologie im Werden* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 150–63.

⁵¹ Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, “Die Paulusbriefsammlung,” in *Grundinformation Neues Testament*, 5th ed., ed. Niebuhr (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), 193–287, 260–61.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 260.

⁵³ Is it insignificant due to its brevity? Length is no sure indicator of significance. Is it insignificant if it is not quoted often by patristic theologians? Even if that were the case, this would only prove that the letter was not significant for *those* thinkers, but not that it was insignificant for the mid to late first cent. A.D. recipients of the letter in Asia Minor.

⁵⁴ Cf. Christian Stettler, *Der Kolosserhymnus: Untersuchungen zu Form, traditionsge-
schichtlichem Hintergrund und Aussage von Kol 1, 15–20*, WUNT 2/131 (Tübingen: Mohr

Further, the question regarding the historical author can itself be questioned: some scholars leave the question open, which suggests that they do not find a specific determination of the historical author to be necessary for their interpretive work.⁵⁵

In light of these factors, I would argue that leaving the question of the historical author of the letter open is a prudent path to take.⁵⁶ We simply do not have the tools nor the evidence necessary to determine the author with any satisfying grade of specificity.⁵⁷ The most that one could say is that Colossians is an authentic document of Pauline theology, provided that the results of one's exegetical study demonstrate conceptual affinities between Colossians and the protopauline letters. Although the question of composite authorship also remains open, we will refer to an 'author' for the sake of ease when the historical author is in view and refer to 'authors' when discussing the letter's literary figures.

II. Author of Colossians 1:15–20

The notion that Col 1:15–20 was not penned by the author of the letter would be inconceivable without Eduard Norden's monograph *Agnostos Theos*, which

Siebeck, 2000), 44. See also Vincent A. Pizzuto, *A Cosmic Leap of Faith: An Authorial, Structural, and Theological Investigation of the Cosmic Christology in Col 1:15–20*, CBET 41 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 73–76, who concludes that although Colossians is pseudepigraphal, the author both "remained faithful to his master's theology" and yet "was also a creative writer motivated by his intention to respond adequately to the new situation that confronted him" (75). Michael Gese, *Der Kolosserbrief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), 186–88, adopts the "neither Pauline nor post-Pauline" hypothesis, but with a twist: if Paul signed the letter (Col 4:18), then this entailed an approval of the letter's content and the letter may thus be reckoned to the authentic Pauline letters.

⁵⁵ This is the approach of James D.G. Dunn: "In what follows I leave the issue fairly fluid, sometimes referring to the author as Paul or Timothy, sometimes simply as Paul to avoid tedious repetition" (*The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996], 39). A similar approach is taken by Stettler in his study of Col 1:15–20 (see previous n.).

⁵⁶ Cf. Stettler, *Der Kolosserhymnus*, 44: "Für die vorliegende Arbeit können wir die Frage nach der Verfasserschaft des Kol[osserbriefes] offen lassen; wenn der Kol[osserbrief] nicht von Paulus selbst abgefasst sein sollte, so ist er doch von einem seiner engsten Schüler und Mitarbeiter geschrieben worden."

⁵⁷ Noting that the all-too-ready acceptance of the pseudonymity of Col in contemporary scholarship runs the risk of slyly transforming a hypothesis into a certitude, Luz writes: "So scheint mir vor allem das ehrliche Eingeständnis wichtig, daß die Frage offen ist und nur durch Vermutungen ohne einen sehr hohen Wahrscheinlichkeitsgrad zu entscheiden ist" (Becker and Luz, *Galater, Epheser, Kolosser*, 190). Luz does proceed to offer a decision, albeit under an imagined hypothetical necessity of doing so ("Muß-Entscheidung"), and he even goes so far as to request that this conclusion not be cited too much!

first appeared in 1913.⁵⁸ There, he applied the results of his examination of the forms of religious speech in the Greco-Roman tradition to an analysis of Col 1:12–20. In his estimate, the passage “undoubtedly” contains traditional material incorporated by the author of Colossians.⁵⁹ His work was so influential, in fact, that in 1997, Ralph Brucker remarked that for the twentieth-century exegetes who researched the “Christ-hymns” of the New Testament, a mere reference to Norden’s work had the power to replace the task of reading other ancient hymns, which otherwise would be a necessary task for any comparative study.⁶⁰

If the author had cited the passage, then whence did it originate? Although an assessment of the religious-historical background of the hymn’s motifs depends on a thorough analysis of the hymn itself and the subsequent attempt to set it in relation to its contemporary religious-philosophical environment – such as will be done in the third and fourth chapters of this study – a brief survey of formerly proposed answers to this question is called for. Norden had treated Rom 11:36, 1 Cor 8:6, and Col 1:12–20 as modifications of a Stoic doxology.⁶¹ Ernst Käsemann, for his part, proposed that the religious-historical background of Col 1:15–18a was a Gnostic “myth of the Archetypal Man/Redeemer” which had been adapted and applied to Christ.⁶² Concerning Col

⁵⁸ Eduard Norden, *Agnostos Theos: Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte religiöser Rede*, 4th ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1956).

⁵⁹ Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 253: “Wie in der Form, so ist auch im Inhalte unzweifelhaft älteres traditionelles Gut bewahrt worden. Denn daß hier eine Doxologie Gottes auf Vater und Sohn verteilt worden ist, ergibt sich aus meinen bisherigen Darlegungen mit Notwendigkeit, ebenso aber auch das Weitere, daß diese Doxologie aus den Kreisen des hellenisierten Judentums stammt.”

⁶⁰ Ralph Brucker, “Christushymnen” oder “epideiktische Passagen”? *Studien zum Stilwechsel im Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt*, FRLANT 176 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 7. Similarly, Cosgrove, “The Syntax of Early Christian Hymns and Prayers,” 158: “Norden’s observations became a standard part of stylistic criteria for identifying unmarked hymns in early Christian writings, but it is not clear that those who have appealed to him have always read him closely, examined his examples, and tested his conclusions for breadth of applicability. There are no scholarly discussions of Norden’s analysis, only very brief references to his work (usually confined to footnotes).”

⁶¹ Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 240–54. The title of the chapter in question is programmatic: “Eine stoische Doxologie bei Paulus. Geschichte einer Allmachtsformel.” Norden writes, “[Diese] vom stoischen Pantheismus geprägte eindrucksvolle Allmachtsformel [ist] eine Art von Bindungsmittel der synkretistischen Religionen, einschließlich des Christentums, geworden” (250). Norden also cites Ps.-Aristotle, *De Mundo* 6 (397b13–15), where the thought expressed in the formula – which can also be reduced to two members instead of three – is referred to as a common conception: “There is indeed an ancient account, native to all people (πάτριός ἐστι πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις), that all things have come into existence from god and hold together through god [...]” (ἐκ θεοῦ πάντα καὶ διὰ θεὸν συνέστηκεν; trans. Thom, rev.).

⁶² Ernst Käsemann, “Eine urchristliche Tauf liturgie,” in *Festschrift Rudolf Bultmann zum 65. Geburtstag überreicht*, ed. Ernst Wolf (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1949), 133–48, 138.

1:18a, Käsemann also proposed that τῆς ἐκκλησίας was a Christian gloss and that σῶμα should not be understood in a soteriological-ecclesiological sense, but rather cosmologically. The view that not only the cosmological τὰ πάντα and prepositional formulations of v. 16 and v. 17, but also the term σῶμα in v. 18a could be understood against a Stoic background established itself in later research and is almost ubiquitous in critical scholarship. Norden's study and Käsemann's proposal to conjoin literary criticism with *Motivgeschichte* in the analysis of Col 1:15–18a therefore proved strongly influential and still finds adherents, in one form or another, in more recent research.⁶³

In his 2005 monograph, however, Michael Dübbers pointed out how this exegetical tradition rests on circular reasoning, for it uses the arguments of literary criticism and *Religionsgeschichte* in such a way that they mutually ground and reinforce one another.⁶⁴ On the one hand, it is assumed that τῆς ἐκκλησίας is incommensurate with the unqualified cosmic reach of v. 18a in an original hymn, a characteristic which would be explained by a Stoic background; on the other hand, it is precisely the literary-critical argument of removing τῆς ἐκκλησίας from v. 18a that allows one to arrive at that form of the “original hymn” which is said to be Stoic in nature. Beyond the question of the logical coherence of this thesis, there are three other, more basic reasons to be skeptical of it: (1) such formulae were not the exclusive property of the Stoics and the author of Colossians could have been influenced by other sources;⁶⁵

⁶³ A particularly strong example is the 2003 monograph by George van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology in Paul and the Pauline School: Colossians and Ephesians in the Context of Graeco-Roman Cosmology, with a New Synopsis of the Greek Texts*, WUNT 2/171 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). Indeed, Van Kooten is not interested in the literary-critical analysis of Col 1:15–18a, but rather in the influence of Stoic thought upon it (19, 24).

⁶⁴ Michael Dübbers, *Christologie und Existenz im Kolosserbrief: Exegetische und semantische Untersuchungen zur Intention des Kolosserbriefes*, WUNT 2/191 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 18–20.

⁶⁵ Although Norden is correct to imply that Rom 11:36a would have been perfectly at home in other monotheizing philosophies of Paul's day, the notion that Paul appropriated Rom 11:36a directly from a Stoic source cannot be proven. Norden cites the similar and well-known phrase from Marcus Aurelius regarding Nature (ἐκ σοῦ πάντα, ἐν σοὶ πάντα, εἰς σὲ πάντα [*Med.* 4.23]), to suggest that Paul appropriated a Stoic formula praising divine omnipotence (Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 240–50). On the belief that Marcus Aurelius was not an original thinker and therefore must have inherited a significantly older phrase, he argues that Paul must have appropriated a tripartite phrase similar to the one appropriated by Marcus. This argument, which does not seem very convincing, can be found in philological and New Testament research of the latter half of the twentieth century. The attempt to read *Med.* 4.23 as a citation from a “lost hymn εἰς Φύσιν” (Miroslav Marcovich, “Marcus Aurelius 4.23 and Orphic Hymn 10,” *AJP* 96, no. 1 [1975]: 28–29, referenced in the apparatus of Dalfer's ed. of Marcus Aurelius, *ad loc.*), does not deliver what it promises. Joseph A. Fitzmyer modified the argument slightly, arguing that Paul did not cite a pre-existing hymn in Rom 11:33–36 but rather “composed it himself after the manner of contemporary hymns of praise” and yet, following Norden, proceeds to claim that it “has a Stoic formulation, similar

(2) though the Stoics could speak of the cosmos as a body, there is no sure record indicating that they would have spoken of a cosmic “head”;⁶⁶ and (3) even though Stoicism had been influenced before and during the Imperial era by Platonism,⁶⁷ it is a stretch to import Platonic concepts – such as the importance of the “head” as one finds it in the *Timaeus* – into Stoicism when there is no textual evidence for it.

As regards the first point, the attempt to identify direct lines of dependence – akin to drafting a manuscript stemma – from Stoics to Paul to Colossians, or from Hellenistic Judaism to Paul to Colossians,⁶⁸ is not the most promising approach. It seems more prudent to suppose that the presence of similar formulations in such an array of sources indicates that we are dealing here with elements of what had become a philosophical koine. On these grounds, one might safely conclude that Paul himself would have been perfectly capable of constructing Rom 11:36a.⁶⁹ If this is valid for Paul as the author of Romans, then it would also be valid for the author of Colossians.

As for the second strophe (Col 1:18b–20), the question of authorship is not as complicated, for its content argues against its attribution to any non-Christian hymn. Verses 18b–20 clearly refer, scant as the reference is, to the

to that found in Marcus Aurelius, *Meditation* 4.23” (*Romans*, AB 33 [New York: Doubleday, 1993], 633).

⁶⁶ See T.R. Niles, “Does the Stoic Body Have a Head? On Stoicism as an Interpretive Background for Colossians 1:18a,” *NovT* 63, no. 3 (2021): 390–407.

⁶⁷ On the complicated relationship between the two schools in that era, see the contributions in *Platonic Stoicism – Stoic Platonism: The Dialogue between Platonism and Stoicism in Antiquity*, Ancient and Medieval Philosophy 1/39, eds. Mauro Bonazzi and Christoph Helmig (Leuven: Leuven Univ. Press, 2007).

⁶⁸ For an attempt to “bring Norden’s phenomenal study on ‘Christiana’ somewhat more up to date” (85) and to find the sources for the prepositional expansions of the Greek phrase ἐν τῷ πατρὶ in Egypt as the “home base” of Philo, the Hermetic, and the alchemistic literature in which such prepositional expansions are found (121), see Vincent van Zutphen, *Studies on the Hymn in Romans 11, 33–36: With Special Emphasis on the History of the Prepositional Formula* (Würzburg: Dissertationsdruck Schmitt & Meyer, 1972). Van Zutphen, too, is critical of the anachronistic citation of Marcus Aurelius, *Med.* 4.23, as proof of a Stoic formula in Col (ibid., 151–52).

⁶⁹ Cf. James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, WBC 38B (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), who states that the style of Rom 11:33–36 “is Jewish through and through (even 36a)” (698) and that although the elements of the formulation of v. 36a are “typically Stoic” (701), such manner of speech was “appropriate to a variety of theistic beliefs, and had already been domesticated within Jewish monotheism, as the use of it by Philo demonstrates” (702). Douglas J. Moo follows Dunn, staking the claim that while v. 36a bears a similarity to Stoic thought, it was also common to Hellenistic Judaism and it is likely the Hellenistic Synagogue which mediated such language to Paul (*The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996], 743). Similarly, Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer*, EKK 6/2 (Zürich/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger/Neukirchener, 1978), 273, and Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 429, n. 149.

crucifixion and resurrection. As Dunn has pointed out, the phrase *πρωτόκοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν* is “inescapably Christian” and cannot stem from a non-Christian poet.⁷⁰ The same can be said of *διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ* in v. 20b. Therefore, whoever would like to maintain the thesis of an originally Stoic hymn – or an originally Jewish hymn to Sophia – would have to be content with analyzing only vv. 15–18a.

Yet regardless of whether the real author of Colossians authored the hymn⁷¹ or incorporated it as a piece of tradition,⁷² the fact remains that the author would have done so only if it suited his purposes and theology.⁷³ This holds true even when one notes the discrepancy between the relation of Christ to the “powers” as expressed in the hymn (a relation of peace through reconciliation) and the viewpoint of Col 2:15 (a relation of triumph and humiliation). Although it has been suggested that this discrepancy might be the best thematic indicator that Col 1:15–20 is a piece of tradition incorporated by the author, it is worth considering that the author did not sense that the discrepancy was significant enough to refrain from employing the hymn.⁷⁴

Like the choice to leave the question of the historical author open, I will also leave the question of the historical author of Col 1:15–20 open. Whether the real author of the letter incorporated a piece of tradition – either *in toto* or with adjustments – or composed the passage autonomously is a secondary issue. Of

⁷⁰ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 97.

⁷¹ Charles Cosgrove has advanced the thesis that the hymn was penned spontaneously using common liturgical conventions. “[It] is unlikely on its face that early Christian writers quoted from prayers or hymns, especially in the era of Paul and the immediate post-Pauline mission. But Christians of that era were perfectly used to improvising individual prayers in community worship. Hence, the conclusion that the author of Colossians improvised a prayer using a traditional thanksgiving style and that the author of Ephesians did the same [...] is perfectly consistent with what we know of the socio-liturgical conditions of the early church” (“The Syntax of Early Christian Hymns and Prayers,” 180).

⁷² The question of a possible redaction on the part of the author is immaterial in this regard. Further, if we do assume that vv. 15–20 represent a *citation* of an existing hymn, we have no way of knowing whether this citation represents the whole of the original or just a part. We have an analogous case in the Homeric Hymns: the first *Hymn to the Dioscuri* (*Hom. hymn 17*) might be an excerpt from the longer *Hymn to the Dioscuri* (*Hom. hymn 33*), and more of the Homeric Hymns may be excerpts of longer, lost hymns (Robert Böhme, *Das Proimion: Eine Form sakraler Dichtung der Griechen*, BVR 15 [Bühl: Konkordia, 1937], 10).

⁷³ Houlden, *Paul's Letters from Prison*, 156. Similarly, Belli, *Lettera ai Colossesi*, 19.

⁷⁴ Cf. Samuel Vollenweider, “Hymnus, Enkomion oder Psalm? Schattengefächte in der neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft,” *NTS* 56, no. 2 (2010): 208–31, 210: “Das Argument von Spannungen auf der theologischen Ebene, die eine Unterscheidung von überkommener Überlieferung und vorfindlichem Text nahelegen, ist tendenziell der Gefahr von Überbelichtung ausgesetzt. Die Wahrnehmung mangelnder gedanklicher Kohärenz und Inkonsistenz entspringt oft eher dem Herantragen neuerzeitlicher Kategorien an die antiken Texte, als dass sie deren Dekonstruktion erlauben könnte.”

primary significance is the fact that the author utilized it for his purposes. For this reason, it seems more profitable to attempt to understand the text *in situ*; that is, whether the text in its final form aids us the most in understanding its line of thought and its function in and significance for the letter as a whole.⁷⁵

III. Addressees

1. External Indications

Tacitus reports that an earthquake destroyed Laodicea, a neighboring town of Colossae, in ca. A.D. 60 (*Ann.* 14.27). This has been used to suggest the pseud-epigraphy of Colossians, seeing that Colossae would have been destroyed and that there is little evidence of any reconstruction.⁷⁶ On this count, there would have been no community in Colossae and therefore “Colossae” would be a fictive address, used precisely because there would have been no Colossian Christians left who might dispute the authenticity of the letter.

Yet the crucial premise that Colossae was utterly destroyed along with Laodicea and not rebuilt rests, as Alan H. Cadwallader puts it, “on very slim evidence.”⁷⁷ It might be that literary and material evidence for Colossae diminishes in number after A.D. 61, but this does not mean that “there was nothing else than ruins left there in the latter first century.”⁷⁸ The dearth of material evidence from Colossae derives in part from the lack of interest in Colossae for aesthetic and political reasons during the nineteenth century,⁷⁹ and whereas

⁷⁵ Buscemi, *Lettera ai Colossesi*, 102: “Per quanto interessante possa essere tale ricerca [redazionale], io credo che nello stabilire la struttura letteraria di Col 1,15–20, il testo vada trattato nella sua formazione definitiva e compreso attraverso tutti gli elementi strutturali che possono aiutarci a capire meglio la sua linea di pensiero.”

⁷⁶ Peter Pilhofer, *Das Neue Testament und seine Welt* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 219.

⁷⁷ Alan H. Cadwallader, “A Chronology of Colossae/Chonai,” in *Colossae in Time and Space: Linking to an Ancient City*, NTOA 94, eds. Cadwallader and Michael Trainor (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 299–315, 299. Cadwallader also insightfully points out that the mere repetition of a thesis does not grant it more authority: “The reading of nineteenth and early twentieth century reports of Colossae is more characterised by inventiveness in recycling than contribution of anything new” (299).

⁷⁸ Ingo Broer, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 2 vols. (Würzburg: Echter, 1998–2001), 2:492. Cf. Becker and Luz, *Galater, Epheser, Kolosser*, 184: “Die Stadt hat aber [mit dem Erdbeben] nicht aufgehört zu existieren, auch wenn sie in späterer Zeit nicht mehr literarisch bezeugt ist und auch wenn aus der Zeit nach 61 nur noch verhältnismäßig wenige Münzen und Inschriften gefunden worden sind. Es lassen sich also aus diesem Erdbeben keine zwingenden Folgerungen für die Frage der Echtheit des Briefs ziehen.”

⁷⁹ Cadwallader, “A Chronology of Colossae/Chonai,” 299, points out that: (1) sites preserving remains of monumental classical artwork simply drew more interest among nineteenth century European scholars, and (2) the way in which the *aga* (i.e., a tribal chieftain under the Ottoman empire) of Honaz province jockeyed for power seems to have

the basic outline of Colossae has been reproduced, the site still has not been the subject of extensive excavations.⁸⁰ Further, new epigraphical evidence has surfaced which suggests that reparative work was indeed conducted in Colossae in the latter half of the first century A.D., an undertaking that would have required “significant outlays of resources”⁸¹ provided by inhabitants of the area.

In fact, one theme of the letter might make sense precisely in light of the earthquake. If Colossae had been a large, prosperous city since at least the latter fifth century B.C. (cf. Xenophon, *Anab.* 1.2.6), then the destruction of the city through an earthquake might have been interpreted as divine punishment and might have subsequently sparked interest in religious views which focused on appeasing divine forces through ascetic practice (cf. Col 2:20–23).

At any rate, fresh evidence undermines the argument that a Christian community in Colossae could not be the intended recipient of the letter due to the supposed non-existence of the city after A.D. 61.⁸²

One last item to be noted is the seeming importance placed on Greek cultural heritage. Alan H. Cadwallader points out that the Korumbos inscription⁸³ lists only Greek names – with one exception possibly indicating allegiance to the lunar god Mēn – and that this might indicate the community’s interest in Hellenic identity.⁸⁴ Of course, this would have ramifications for the interpretation of Col 3:11.

discouraged European travel to the area so much that “when the British-funded Ottoman railway went through the area towards the end of the nineteenth century, the discouragement was sealed: Honaz was by-passed.”

⁸⁰ Pilhofer, *Das Neue Testament und seine Welt*, 219.

⁸¹ Alan H. Cadwallader, “Refuting an Axiom of Scholarship on Colossae: Fresh Insights from New and Old Inscriptions,” in Cadwallader and Trainor, *Colossae in Space and Time*, 151–79, 174. Cadwallader refers here specifically to the Korumbos bomos, a monument expressing gratitude to a certain Korumbos who financed the repair of the baths of Colossae. This would have had critical cultural significance for the city, seeing that baths and gymnasia in Asia Minor “had begun to coalesce into one entity” by the first cent. A.D.

⁸² Alan H. Cadwallader notes that based on the material evidence: “The picture emerges of a city that, even with the ebb and flow of its influence over time, can lay claim to a continuous presence in the landscape of south-west Turkey for millennia [*sic*]. The possible hint of a hiatus comes not with an exaggerated claim of terminal damage cause by earthquake in the first century CE but with the collapse of the Hittite empire around 1200 BCE” (“The Historical Sweep of the Life of Kolossai,” in *Epigraphical Evidence Illustrating Paul’s Letter to the Colossians*, WUNT 411, eds. Joseph Verheyden, Markus Öhler, and Thomas Corsen [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018], 25–67, 67). Theobald, “Der Kolosserbrief,” 433, follows Cadwallader’s studies and concludes of the traditional view of the non-existence of Colossae: “Diese Darstellung ist nicht mehr zu halten.” Similarly, Müller, *Kolosserbrief*, 80.

⁸³ Cadwallader, “Refuting an Axiom,” 74.

⁸⁴ Alan H. Cadwallader, “Honouring the Repairer of the Baths at Colossae,” in *A Review of the Greek and Other Inscriptions and Papyri Published between 1988 and 1992*,

2. Internal Indications

The addressees are “the holy and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae” (Col 1:2). The link between the authors and the addressees is Epaphras, who has reported on the status of the Colossian church (1:7) and might not be returning soon, perhaps because he will first visit Hierapolis and Laodicea (cf. 4:12–13). The tone of Col 1:3–8 is warm – in contrast to the bristly tone of Gal 1:1–10 – suggesting that the authors hold the Colossians in high esteem. At 2:5, the authors rejoice at the order (τάξις) and steadfastness (στερέωμα) of the Colossians’ faith in Christ. The addressees are likely Gentile Christians who have an awareness of Jewish traditions, for they are told explicitly that they were once “dead in [their] trespasses and in the uncircumcision of [their] flesh” (Col 2:13). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that Col 1:21 states that the addressees were formerly excluded from the community of God “by way of [their] understanding by their evil works,” but not because they were Gentiles. Further indications of a primarily Gentile audience include the mention of a seemingly distinct group of Christians called “the circumcision” (Col 4:11) – that is, Jewish Christians⁸⁵ – and the reference to the proclamation of God’s mystery “among the nations” in 1:27, which is embedded in a passage where the authors explain how the Colossians fit into the authors’ understanding of their ministry (1:24–29).

3. Evaluation

Based on the lack of compelling external evidence to the contrary, it seems reasonable to maintain the possibility that the address of Col 1:2 is *not* fictive. The historical, predominantly Gentile Christian community of Colossae might very well have been the intended recipient of the letter.

IV. Place and Time of Composition

If Colossians is ‘neither Pauline nor post-Pauline,’ then there is a chance that the fictive, literary figure of an imprisoned Paul corresponds to an historical Paul imprisoned at the time of the letter’s composition. As for the location, it would likely be similar, if not identical, to the place of composition of Philemon, seeing that the similarity between the greetings of both letters might suggest that the letters either were intended to be sent together or that Onesimus

NewDocs 10, eds. S.R. Llewelyn and James R. Harrison (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 110–13, 112.

⁸⁵ See Jerome D. Quinn, *Titus*, AB 35 (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 98. Quinn points out that in the Corpus Paulinum, περιτομή signifies “Jews” (Rom 4:12; Gal 2:7), while οἱ ἐκ [τῆς] περιτομῆς signifies “Jewish Christians” (cf. Rom 4:2; Gal 2:12). If Col 4:11 follows this pattern, then the author refers here to the latter group.

delivered Paul's letter to Philemon, then returned to Paul, on which occasion Paul or his co-worker composed Colossians.⁸⁶

Because Paul designates himself as a prisoner in Phlm 1 (cf. Col 4:3, 4:10), some scholars propose Rome or Caesarea Maritima as the location of composition for Philemon, for Paul was imprisoned in both places.⁸⁷ Yet if both imprisonments occurred ca. A.D. 56–64, and Paul had already authored his Letter to the Romans ca. A.D. 56, in which he announces his plans to visit Rome and then to continue on to Spain (Rom 15:24, 28), then it does not seem plausible that he would cancel his plans to go to Spain in order to visit Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus (cf. Phlm 22) after gaining his freedom. The third and more plausible option for the location of composition of Philemon, and thus for Colossians, is Ephesus.⁸⁸ The geographical proximity of Ephesus to the triad Laodicea-Hieropolis-Colossae would have made both the initial encounter between Paul and Onesimus and the exchange of further letters between the two areas, and thus possibly the exchange of Colossians, more feasible.

The weakness of this proposal lies in the need to posit an Ephesian imprisonment, of which we have no evidence. Yet an imprisonment following the uprising in Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:21–41) is conceivable, even though Luke does not report any such imprisonment. It is well-known that the Lukan depiction of Paul diverges from Paul's own account of his ministry in other places (cf. Gal 1–2 with Acts 9:26, 11:27–30),⁸⁹ and there is no need to suppose that the author of Luke-Acts was compelled to include all the events of Paul's life in his own account.⁹⁰ An imprisonment in Ephesus could also explain the presence of Aristarchus as Paul's "fellow captive (Col 4:10, συναϊχμάλωτός μου), for a certain Aristarchus, a companion of Paul, was present during the Ephesian revolt (Acts 19:29). There are, further, no indications in the protopauline letters which contradict the hypothesis of an Ephesian imprisonment, and one cannot say this of the hypothesis that Paul authored Philemon during the Caesarean or Roman imprisonments. This proposal, however, has significant ramifications for estimating the date of the composition of Colossians. If the letter was authored in Ephesus at the same time or shortly after the composition of Philemon, then one could possibly date Colossians as early as A.D. 53.

⁸⁶ Eduard Schweizer, *Der Brief an die Kolosser*, EKK 12, 4th ed. (Zürich: Benziger, 1997), 27.

⁸⁷ Udo Schnelle, *Paulus: Leben und Denken*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 407. Cf. the list of scholars and their corresponding proposals in n. 82.

⁸⁸ Schweizer, *Der Brief an die Kolosser*, 27–28; Schweizer, "Der Kolosserbrief – weder paulinisch noch nachpaulinisch?," 162; Eduard Lohse, *Die Briefe an die Kolosser und an Philemon*, KEK 9/2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 264; Becker and Luz, *Galater, Epheser, Kolosser*, 185; Tarocchi, "Le lettere della prigionia," 1248, "inclines" towards identifying Ephesus as the location.

⁸⁹ Schnelle, *Paulus*, 33–35.

⁹⁰ On the final point, cf. Schweizer, *Der Brief an die Kolosser*, 28.

If Colossians is ‘neither Pauline nor post-Pauline,’ then the latest possible *terminus ante quem* would coincide with Paul’s death circa A.D. 64/65. Because the estimation of the date of composition is influenced by considerations of the place of composition, one must say that if the historical Paul was imprisoned, perhaps in Ephesus, and commissioned the letter from there, then the *terminus post quem* would fall around A.D. 52/53. Accordingly, we are dealing with an early Christian document of the latter half of the first century A.D., composed between A.D. 52 and A.D. 65.⁹¹

V. Target Location

The letter intended for Colossae (Col 1:2) and – indirectly – for Laodicea (4:16) is addressed to communities in Asia Minor. The religious history of Asia Minor, which can be ascertained even into the prehistoric period, was characterized throughout the centuries by processes of mixture and stratification.⁹² Following the conquest of Alexander the Great, the region incorporated all aspects of Hellenistic culture, a trait that persisted during the time of the Roman Empire.⁹³

Greek deities were worshipped, but this was somewhat of a surface phenomenon under which local, pre-Hellenistic cults were further fostered.⁹⁴ The region flourished economically and culturally in the first century A.D., which was due in part to the stability provided by the Pax Augusta. Concomitant with this was a fervent support for the Roman emperor cult, driven in part by gratitude for conditions of peace and material well-being, but also by the ambition of cities to lay claim to prestige on the basis of the presence and sophistication of their own instantiation of the emperor cult.⁹⁵ By the end of the first century

⁹¹ Belli, *Lettera ai Colossesi*, 21, advocates a narrower timeframe: A.D. 58–62.

⁹² Wolfgang Orth, “Religiöses Leben,” in *Neues Testament und Antike Kultur*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena, Quellen, Geschichte*, eds. Kurt Erlemann et al. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2011), 173–74, 173. Cf. also Christian Marek, *Geschichte Kleinasiens in der Antike*, 3rd ed. (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2017), 631: “Es ist das Land des Synkretismus schlechthin; in dem dichten, vielfarbigen Gewebe hellenistisch-kaiserzeitlicher Religion in Kleinasien einzelne Fäden bis auf ihre Ursprünge zurückzuverfolgen, gelingt nur unvollkommen [...]. Die religiöse Landschaft Kleinasiens ist zu keiner Zeit eine Einheit.”

⁹³ Wolfgang Orth, “Geographische, historische und politische Gegebenheiten,” in *Neues Testament und Antike Kultur*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena, Quellen, Geschichte*, 169–72, 170.

⁹⁴ Orth, “Religiöses Leben,” 173.

⁹⁵ Orth, *ibid.*, 173, referencing Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.55: “To divert criticism, the Caesar attended the senate with frequency, and for several days listened to the deputies from Asia debating which of their communities was to erect his temple” (Jackson, LCL). There is inscriptional evidence of the decree of the proconsul Paulus Fabius Maximus and the provincial council of Asia to institute Augustus’ birthday as the beginning of the calendar year in Asia (Thomas Wagner, *Neues Testament und Antike Kultur*, vol. 5, *Texte und Urkunden* [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2011], 58). His birth is seen as the gift of Providence (πρόνοια), who has filled him with virtue for the well-being of humanity (ὄν εἰς

A.D., there were at least thirty imperial temples and sanctuaries in Asia Minor,⁹⁶ and there was a greater readiness in the eastern provinces of the empire to sacrifice to a living emperor, whereas it was more common in the West to sacrifice only to deceased emperors.⁹⁷ Other noteworthy cults in Asia Minor were the cults of Jupiter Dolichenus, the mystery rites of Mithras, and the cult of the lunar god Mēn.⁹⁸ A general syncretistic trend was common, and Jewish communities were not excepted from this.⁹⁹ Yet to conceive of Asia Minor as a place of syncretized popular religion and nothing else would be mistaken: the people of Tarsus, the ostensible home of the Apostle Paul, had a reputation for

εὐεργεσίαν ἀνθρώ[πων] ἐπλή[ρωσεν ἀρετῆς] and sent him as a savior (σωτήρ), and his birthday is therefore the beginning of “good tidings” (ἤρξεν δὲ τῷ κόσμῳ τῶν δι’ αὐτὸν εὐαγγελί[ων ἢ γενέθλιος] | τοῦ θεοῦ) (OGIS 458).

⁹⁶ Simon R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), 59. The imperial cult was present throughout the triad Hieropolis-Laodicea-Colossae, with an altar in Colossae, a temple in Laodicea, and an altar, temple, and established priest in Hieropolis (cf. maps II–IV [xxii–xxiv] in Price’s monograph). Yet such official centers were not the sole place of conducting cultic activity in honor of the emperor: “The imperial cult was, however, celebrated not just in sanctuaries but in all the major civic centres,” such as theaters, the central square, and the council house of a city (109). Although there is evidence for the private practice of the imperial cult, such as maintaining an imperial image in the household or even taking it with oneself into the grave, the primary orientation of the cult was public: “Ancient religions were primarily public religions. It was in the public arena that cities decided to establish cults and that individuals manifested their civic virtues by serving as priests. The city also expected participation in festivals by its members and made prescriptions for their attendance” (120–21).

⁹⁷ Konrad Hitzl, “Praxis, Semantik, Diffusion römischen Herrscherkults,” in *Antike Religionsgeschichte in räumlicher Perspektive: Abschlussbericht zum Schwerpunktprogramm 1080 der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft “Römische Reichsreligion und Provinzialreligion,”* ed. Jörg Rüpke (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 13–15, 13: “Im Osten des Reiches bereiteten Opfer für den regierenden Kaiser als Theos keine Probleme, im Westen wurden zunächst nur divinisierte Kaiser göttlich verehrt.”

⁹⁸ Engelbert Winter, “Die religiöse Vielfalt Kleinasiens,” in *Neues Testament und Antike Kultur*, vol. 3, *Weltauffassung, Kult, Ethos*, eds. Kurt Erlemann et al. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2011), 58–65, 61–65. The astral nature of the latter cult might have been called to mind associatively for the reader by the mention of a religiously significant νεομηνία in Col 2:16. On the lunar god Mēn, see Eugene N. Lane, “Men: A Neglected Cult of Roman Asia Minor,” *ANRW* 18.3:2161–74. There were no cultic sites for Mēn in the triad Hieropolis-Laodicea-Colossae, but his image could be seen on a widespread imperial coinage; corresponding artefacts have been found in the aforementioned cities (cf. the maps provided by Lane). Further, participants of this cult included prominent Roman aristocratic families (ibid., 2165). Cf. also the presence of a name possibly connected to Mēn on the Colossian Korumbos bomos, which dates from the latter first cent. A.D. (Cadwallader, “Honouring the Repairer of the Baths at Colossae,” 113).

⁹⁹ Jewish inhabitants were generally well-integrated into society and this is part of the reason why the “inclination to syncretism” common in Asia Minor is “relatively often demonstrable” for local Jewish communities (Orth, “Religiöses Leben,” 173).

an intense passion for philosophy and general learning.¹⁰⁰ Because it was a thoroughly Hellenized metropolis,¹⁰¹ it is quite conceivable that the leader of the Gentile mission had, at the very least, a basic familiarity with Greek and Roman philosophical traditions and that he would have found it natural to incorporate co-workers into his mission who also had such a basic familiarity. Whether the historical author of Colossians was Paul or one of his co-workers, there is a high likelihood that the author was familiar with philosophical traditions and that this could have influenced the drafting of the letter.

Asia Minor was therefore a region of strong cultural, religious, and philosophical cross-pollination. As Udo Schnelle has pointed out, the success of the Pauline mission in Asia Minor cannot be explained unless it had a significant ability for engaging in the religious and philosophical debates of its day and, in so doing, displaying a certain degree of compatibility with existing Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions.¹⁰²

VI. Situation: The Question of the ‘Opponent’

Col 2:8–23 indicates that some kind of problematic “philosophy” is present in the community. What exactly this philosophy is and who might be responsible for it, however, cannot be said with certainty. The term φιλοσοφία is a hapax legomenon in the NT, so we have no other occurrences of the term in the Corpus Paulinum nor in other NT writings that might shed light on how it is employed here. Further, the references in Colossians itself are too vague to allow the identification of the “philosophy” with one particular school of thought.¹⁰³ Eduard Schweizer argues for the presence of a strain of Neo-Pythagoreanism, and while his argument is compelling, the lack of specificity in the references of the letter simply do not allow us to draw any firm conclusions.¹⁰⁴ Although Ulrich Luz hypothesizes that the ‘opponents’ in Colossae are ascetic Jewish Christians, he states that on the whole, the image of the ‘opponents’ that one might glean from the letter remains blurry and he implicitly warns against

¹⁰⁰ Strabo, *Geogr.* 14.5.13 (Jones, LCL): “The people at Tarsus have devoted themselves so eagerly, not only to philosophy, but also to the whole round of education in general (σπουδῆ πρὸς τε φιλοσοφίαν καὶ τὴν ἄλλην παιδείαν ἐγκύκλιον ἅπασαν γέγονεν), that they have surpassed Athens, Alexandria, or any other place that can be named where there have been schools and lectures of philosophers” (cf. Wagner, *Neues Testament und Antike Kultur*, vol. 5, *Texte und Urkunden*, 62–63).

¹⁰¹ Arzt-Grabner, “Das Corpus Paulinum,” 6.

¹⁰² See above, pg. 114, n. 353.

¹⁰³ For a typology of the proposals identifying the “philosophy” (cf. 2:8) threatening the community, cf. Ingrid Maisch, *Der Brief an die Gemeinde in Kolossä*, ThKNT 12 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003), 152–53.

¹⁰⁴ Eduard Schweizer, “Slaves of the Elements and Worshipers of Angels: Gal 4:3, 9 and Col 2:8, 19, 20,” *JBL* 107, no. 3 (1988): 455–68, esp. 457–58.

placing too high a premium on concrete reconstructions of the opposing group or philosophy.¹⁰⁵

Alternatively, one might argue that there is no concrete ‘opponent’ and thus no acute problem at all, and that the polemics of the letter are therefore a “warning” against unsound teaching rather than a “correction” aimed at an internal or external group.¹⁰⁶ Alan H. Cadwallader takes such an approach, pointing out that there is no archaeological evidence of an enduring Jewish presence in Colossae until the twelfth century A.D. As he argues, this would support the idea that the polemics of the letter that seem to refer to practices with a Jewish background are unlikely to refer to a historical group of Colossian Jewish Christians or Jewish Christian itinerant preachers, and thus the statements of Col 2 would likely serve the rhetorical purpose of solidifying group identity in the community of Colossae rather than addressing a current problem.¹⁰⁷ In other words, the ‘opponents’ of Col 2 would be fictive and the polemics we find in that chapter would have only a limited value for staking historically descriptive claims concerning an ‘opponent’ or ‘opposing philosophy.’

This solution might go one step too far. While a robust historical reconstruction of the ‘opponents’ or ‘error’ might be out of reach, this does not exclude the possibility that the author of Colossians perceived a real threat within it. The polemics of the letter might very well be intended as a correction of an error.¹⁰⁸ Further, addressing a real issue does not exclude the possibility that the author also seeks to solidify group identity through the theology of his letter; the polemical section of the letter could indeed serve two distinct yet related rhetorical purposes.

If this is so, then it seems prudent to allow the possibility that it is not a single, unified group that is responsible for this “philosophy,” but rather that the “philosophy” is an amalgam of various strains of religious and philosophical thought that runs counter to the Pauline conception of the Gospel which the Colossians have received and which they should not abandon (cf. Col 1:23). The aforementioned syncretism in Asia Minor lends support to this idea. Another piece of corroborating evidence is the way in which the author addresses “human traditions,” which might be understood as an attempt to translate the Pauline understanding of the Mosaic Law so as to apply it to any and all humanly instituted religious rules which hinder faith in Christ alone (Col 2:8, 16–

¹⁰⁵ Becker and Luz, *Galater, Epheser, Kolosser*, 219. Theobald, “Der Kolosserbrief,” 439, accepts the proposal that ascetic Jewish Christians are in view, but warns that presuming a “‘pure’ type” would be unrealistic.

¹⁰⁶ Buscemi, *Lettera ai Colossesi*, xxiv; Belli, *Lettera ai Colossesi*, 18.

¹⁰⁷ Cadwallader, “Life of Kolossai,” 58–59.

¹⁰⁸ Müller, *Kolosserbrief*, 266, 270, 272, admits that the references in the letter are vague, but concludes that the ‘opponents’ must have understood themselves somehow as Christian, for otherwise the author’s critique would have no target. Nevertheless, they superadded some rites and behaviors perceived as necessary supplements to faith in Christ.

23).¹⁰⁹ In the end, the polemical section might very well be aimed at the Colossians themselves, anonymized in order to prevent a rupture in the community and to allow the adherents of the ‘error’ to return, quietly, to the Pauline conception of the Gospel.¹¹⁰

This approach to interpreting the φιλοσοφία of Colossians would be undergirded further if one were to grant the possibility that in Colossians, the distinction between a negatively connotated φιλοσοφία on the one hand and a positively connotated σοφία on the other represents a translation of the two kinds of σοφία in 1 Cor 1–2.¹¹¹ In the latter, Paul can speak of the “wisdom (σοφία) of God” that confounds the “wisdom (σοφία) of the world” (1 Cor 1:20–21), a kind of wisdom that runs counter to the message of the cross: “For Christ did not send me to baptize but rather to preach the good news, not in eloquent wisdom (οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου), so that the cross of Christ might not be nullified” (1 Cor 1:17). As Paul sees it, God has destroyed the wisdom of the wise (1:19, γέγραπται γάρ· ἀπολῶ τὴν σοφίαν τῶν σοφῶν), choosing the foolish things of the world in order to shame the wise (ἵνα καταισχύνη τοὺς σοφούς, 1:27–28; cf. 3:19) and has thus, through the cross, made Christ to “become for us wisdom (σοφία) from God” (1:30, cf. 1:24), a “wisdom (σοφία) not of this world” (2:6) but rather the “wisdom of God (θεοῦ σοφία) concealed in a mystery, [a wisdom] which God preordained before the ages for our glory [...]” (2:7). In Col 2:8, the NT hapax legomenon φιλοσοφία is negatively connotated, for it is the means by which someone might “take you [sc. the addressees] captive” (συλαγωγῶ) and it is associated with “empty deception” (κενὴ ἀπάτη). The term σοφία, on the other hand, is always connotated positively. Christ is the locus of “all wisdom (σοφία) and knowledge” (2:3), and on this basis, the addressees may reject all such religious stipulations that “have the appearance of wisdom” (ἄτινά ἐστιν λόγον μὲν ἔχοντα σοφίας) and yet only serve the gratification of the flesh (1:23). For their part, the authors seek to “instruct everyone in all wisdom” (1:28, διδάσκοντες πάντα ἄνθρωπον ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ), and they pray that the addressees might be “filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all wisdom” (1:9, ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ) so that they, too, may also

¹⁰⁹ We might add that John Chrysostom found that the purpose of the letter was to reject Jewish and Greek errors; i.e., he accepted the notion that the opponent was not necessarily one person or group of persons, but rather various ways of thinking which ran counter to the Gospel through the practice of religious observances. Addressing the ὑποθέσις, Chrysostom writes: “What is it? Being led to God through angels, [and] observing many Jewish and Greek observances. Therefore, he [sc. Paul] set these things straight” (*Hom. Col.* [PG 62:301, lines 3–5]: Τίς οὖν αὕτη; Δι’ ἀγγέλων προσήγοντο τῷ θεῷ, παρατηρήσεις εἶχον πολλὰς καὶ Ἰουδαϊκὰς καὶ Ἑλληνικὰς. Ταῦτ’ οὖν διορθοῦται).

¹¹⁰ Müller, *Kolossierbrief*, 270–72.

¹¹¹ For this insight, I am indebted to discussions with Prof. Dr. Reinhard Feldmeier and the doctoral and postdoctoral colleagues of his *Oberseminar*.

“teach in all wisdom” (3:16, ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ) and “live in wisdom (ἐν σοφίᾳ) towards those on the outside” (4:5).

In sum: in the face of a φιλοσοφία that runs counter to the σοφία of God in Christ, the author employs the hymnic passage (Col 1:15–20) to call the addressees back to the Gospel they had once accepted (see below, “Function of Colossians 1:15–20”).

C. Anatomy of the Text

I. Introduction: The Colometric Printing of Colossians 1:15–20

Colossians 1:15–20 is printed colometrically in NA²⁸. The optics of the page signal to the reader that this section of text is somehow different from what surrounds it. This would possibly suggest to the reader that the text is somehow poetic: regardless of meter, poetry is the one of the few things which modern readers often see printed colometrically. Further, the reader might assume that this block of verses constitutes a thematic unity; otherwise, why would be the typography be different from what surrounds it? If it *is* a unity, then the reader might assume that this passage is an individual link in the chain of the letter’s reasoning and might then ask what this part contributes to the logic of the whole. The reader interested in textual criticism might ask whether the unity of Col 1:15–20 is reflected in any of the manuscript traditions.¹¹² Who knows? The reader might even select the passage as a focal point for a dissertation.

The problem, however, is the following: the colometric printing of ancient texts, documented as early as the third century B.C.,¹¹³ was not intended to identify ‘blocks of material,’ as we would say, nor to delineate the text’s genre nor suggest metrical structuring of individual clauses, but rather to identify

¹¹² Cf. the text of *The Greek New Testament* (ed. Jongkind). The edition aims, among other things, to reproduce paragraph divisions as found in the earliest manuscripts. The outline of Col 1 is as follows: vv. 1–2, 3–8, 9–21, 23, 24–29. The text uses a justified typographic alignment, aside from the *ekthesis* marking a new paragraph, and vv. 15–20 are not printed colometrically. “Paragraphs are informed by manuscripts, in particular by those from the fifth century or earlier. We have not included every paragraph mark from these early manuscripts: we have included only divisions that occur in two such manuscripts [...]. These paragraph marks often differ from that most widely followed today, but we have found that those that at first glance appear eccentric often display an inner logic when studied more closely. Paragraphs are marked by *ekthesis* according to the ancient custom [...]” (*Introduction*, 512). For the sake of comparison, Phil 2:6–11, which is printed colometrically in NA²⁸, is part of the paragraph Phil 2:1–11 in the Tyndale House edition and is not printed colometrically.

¹¹³ Martin L. West, “Kolometrie,” *DNP* 6:642–43.

units of meaning on the level of the individual line¹¹⁴ with the practical goal of aiding the act of reading aloud in a public setting.¹¹⁵ Therefore, we have no reason to suspect that we should find the typography of NA²⁸ – colometric printing of Col 1:15–20 and *scriptio continua* of the rest – in ancient manuscripts. Nevertheless, it is a possibility which, for the sake of thoroughness, ought to be considered briefly.

What does the manuscript evidence show us? Seven early witnesses may serve as a small sample. In \mathfrak{P}^{46} , the entirety of Colossians is printed à la *scriptio continua*. In \mathfrak{P}^{61} , the other constantly cited papyrus witness for the reconstruction of the NA²⁸ text of Colossians (cf. NA²⁸, 21*), Col 1:15–20 is lost, but the remainder of the text is printed in the same manner as \mathfrak{P}^{46} . In \aleph , A, B, and C, the text of Colossians is printed in columns, but not colometrically, and unlike NA²⁸, individual clauses are not printed whole but are rather broken up in order to accommodate the width of the column. A similar yet more erratic practice is followed by D⁰⁶, where even the occasional line is populated merely by a single word, and the occasional clause that might have fit on a single line is broken up into two lines. We may therefore draw the following conclusion: there is no indication that Col 1:15–20 was printed colometrically in the earliest manuscripts, neither to identify clauses as individual units of meanings nor to identify the entirety of vv. 15–20 as a textual unit.

Of course, NA²⁸ is an eclectic edition, and the editors of any eclectic edition must make decisions regarding typesetting. Whereas NA²⁵ (1963) printed the entirety of Col 1:15–20 in plain type, the text of NA²⁶ (1979) introduced the colometric printing of vv. 15–18a. This changed with the arrival of the 27th edition in 1993, in which the entire block was printed colometrically; NA²⁸ followed suit.

Each successive stage of development reflects the judgement of the various editing teams regarding the unity of this text. Although the 2017 *Lutherbibel* follows the NA²⁸ printing, the decision of the Nestle-Aland team has not found universal agreement: the fourth revised edition of the UBS *Greek New Testament*, which is based on NA²⁶, does not use colometric printing at all.¹¹⁶ The *New Revised Standard Version* (1989) does not print Col 1:15–20 colometrically, although it does so for another “Christ hymn,” namely Phil 2:6–11, with v. 5 serving as an introductory line. The 2007 *Zürcher Bible* follows the typesetting of NA²⁶, a practice from which the Nestle-Aland team had departed fourteen years earlier in 1993. The text of the *Nova Vulgata Bibliorum*

¹¹⁴ “Sinneinheiten,” in the words of Roland Schütz (“Die Bedeutung der Kolometrie für das Neue Testament,” *ZNW* 21 [1922]: 161–84).

¹¹⁵ Jerome, for example, prints the *Vulgata per cola et commata* not in the fashion of the poets, but rather the orators Demosthenes and Cicero.

¹¹⁶ This is constant throughout the edition, however. Cf. the UBS text of Phil 2:5–11.

Sacrorum Editio also prints colometrically,¹¹⁷ but it adds three lines to the passage (vv. 12–14), printing two colometrically (vv. 13–14), and signaling the inclusion of the third through a paragraph heading. The resulting textual unit is Col 1:12–20,¹¹⁸ preceded by the inscription *Hymnus in Christum Dei invisibilis imaginem*.

This last example is telling, for the increasing grade of the colometric printing of Col 1:15–20 across the various Nestle-Aland editions might be explained as a consequence of twentieth-century exegetical research: the first (partial) colometric printing in NA²⁶ (1979) appeared at the end of a period that had witnessed increased scholarly interest in the “Christ-hymns” of the New Testament.¹¹⁹ To the extent that passages such as Phil 2:5–11 and Col 1:15–20 came to be regarded as hymns sung in the earliest Christian worship services and/or as material cited but not composed by the respective letter’s author, it became easier to print such texts colometrically, just as the modern reader might expect from poetry – to which the genre “hymn” belongs according to modern sensibilities. One may therefore be forgiven the impression that the choice of the Nestle-Aland teams to print Col 1:15–20 colometrically represents the imposition of modern conventions onto an ancient text.

Yet what of thematic coherence? Because there are no certain criteria for the division of a larger textual unit into smaller units of meaning and the ensuing colometric printing of one of the sections of the larger text, colometry will ever remain a subjective exercise,¹²⁰ but ‘subjective’ need not be equated with ‘senseless.’ There could be good reason to print Col 1:15–20 colometrically to distinguish it from its surrounding context, but this – and any concomitant decisions regarding its thematic unity and or its importance for the letter as a whole – must be made on the basis of reliable criteria, such as syntactical structure and thematic coherence, not reconstructions of a *Sitz im Leben* nor modern typographic conventions. In the end, the decision of the Nestle-Aland editors to print colometrically might not be wrong; as with any editorial decision, however, this too needs to be examined critically by the reader.

¹¹⁷ *Nota bene*: this edition does not follow the practice of the *Biblia Vulgata* in printing the entirety of the New Testament *per cola et commata*.

¹¹⁸ This is similar to the decision made by Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 251–52, who analyzed Col 1:12–20 as a textual unit.

¹¹⁹ The following examples may be adduced: Gottfried Schille, *Frühchristliche Hymnen* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1965); Reinhard Deichgräber, *Gottes hymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit: Untersuchungen zu Form, Sprache und Stil der frühchristlichen Hymnen*, SUNT 5 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967); Klaus Wengst, *Christologische Formeln und Lieder des Urchristentums*, SNT 7 (Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1972).

¹²⁰ Albert DeBrunner, “Grundsätzliches über Kolometrie im Neuen Testament,” *TBI* 5, no. 9 (1926): 231–33, 231.

In order to propose an answer to the question of the nature of Col 1:15–20 and whether it constitutes a block of material, we turn to an analysis of its place in the architecture of Colossians, its function, and its genre.

II. Outline: The Place of Colossians 1:15–20 in the Letter as a Whole

The nature and function of Col 1:15–20 cannot be separated from its place in the architecture of the letter and for this reason, an outline of the whole is offered here. The outline may be presented as follows:

1. The Supremacy and Relevance of Christ (1:1–3:17)
 - 1.1. The ‘Out and Back’ (1:1–23)
 - 1.1.1. The Ascent (1:1–11)
 - 1.1.1.1. Greetings (1:1–2)
 - 1.1.1.2. Thanksgiving (1:3–11)
 - 1.1.2. The Turn Towards God (1:12–14)
 - 1.1.3. The Christological Section (1:15–20)
 - 1.1.4. The ‘Return’ to the Addressees (1:21–23)
 - 1.2. The Interconnection of the Christ-Event and Ethics (1:24–3:17)
 - 1.2.1. The Ministry of the Apostle for the Edification of the Colossians (1:24–2:5)
 - 1.2.2. “For You Have Died and Your Life Is Hidden with Christ in God” (2:6–3:4)
 - 1.2.3. Out with the Old, In with the New (3:5–3:17)
2. The *Haustafel* and Further Admonition (3:18–4:6)
3. Concluding Greetings (4:7–4:18)

1. The Supremacy and Relevance of Christ: Colossians 1:1–3:17

If one considers the introduction to the passage (Col 1:3–14), the passage itself (1:15–20), and the following section of the letter that addresses the situation of the community and offers ethical instruction, all the while recurring to motifs from the hymn, we find that this entire block of material (Col 1:3–3:17) begins and ends with thanksgiving to the Father (cf. 1:3 and 3:17), either for something which he did through the Son (1:13) or for the ability to live life “in the name of the Son” (3:17, καὶ πᾶν ὃ τι ἐὰν ποιῆτε, ἐν λόγῳ ἢ ἐν ἔργῳ, πάντα ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου Χριστοῦ), a possibility offered only thanks to the Father’s initiative (cf. 1:13). The main body of the letter (1:3–3:17) is followed by the *Haustafel* (3:18–4:1), the request for intercession, some further admonition (4:2–6), and the concluding greetings (4:7–18). With the possible exception of 4:12 (ἵνα σταθῆτε τέλειοι καὶ πεπληροφορημένοι), which describes an effect of the reconciliation wrought in Christ as described elsewhere in the letter (cf. 1:9, 28; 2:10), none of the motifs of the hymn occur in 3:18–4:18. Even the mention of the κύριος ἐν οὐρανῷ in 4:1 uses the singular of οὐρανός rather than the plural, as in 1:16 and 1:20. In 4:11, the author refers to the βασιλεία

τοῦ θεοῦ, although this is worded differently than βασιλεία τοῦ υἱοῦ in 1:13. The only possible reminiscences of the hymn's motifs in 3:18–4:18 would be the imagery of “fullness” or “being filled” or “completing” in 4:12 and 4:17. Yet 4:17 refers to the completion of Archippus' ministry, not to the community.

Both (1) the *inclusio* of 1:3–3:17, formed on either end by the act of giving thanks to the Father for the new life made possible through the Son, and (2) the manner in which the hymn's motifs are employed throughout Col 1:21–3:17 and yet are lacking afterwards suggest that the block of material Col 1:3–3:17 forms a unit. A preamble (1:12–14) introduces the Christological section (1:15–20) which is then used to address the community's situation. The material in Col 3:18–4:6 might very well have been written to any other community and there is no suggestion that there is some intrinsic connection between the content specific to Col 1:15–20 and the content of Col 3:18–4:6.

2. The Unity of Colossians 1:1–23 – An ‘Out and Back’

The passage Col 1:1–23 presents a unified whole consisting in a thematic periodical progression, namely in the spatial sense of *περίοδος*, “going round in a circle” or “coming round to the starting point.”¹²¹ In the same way that an alpine expedition might chart an ‘out and back’ route, setting off from the base camp in order to progress to the summit and subsequently return to the base camp by the same route, the author of Colossians completes here a thematic circuit.

a) The Ascent: Colossians 1:1–11

The letter begins in the same manner as the other members of the Corpus Paulinum, namely with a formulaic greeting in Col 1:1–2 that introduces the apostle and his co-worker as the authors, names the addressees, and wishes them peace.

Following the formulaic greeting, the author begins by thanking God for the faith, hope, and love of the addressees in vv. 3–8. Here, the focus lies on the addressees and the efficacy of the Gospel among them. In vv. 9–11, the passage

¹²¹ *LSJ*, “*περίοδος*” IV. Here, I do not intend the rhetorical definition of *περίοδος* as found in Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1409a.27–1409b.25 (3.9.1–4). Although Aristotle does employ the metaphor of runners completing a double course, his purpose is to explain that in the same way that a runner is spurred on when glimpsing the finish line, listeners continue to pay attention if they can discern that the end of sentence is in sight. Instead of intending a thematic circuit, he uses *περίοδος* to describe the reasonable length of a sentence. For Cicero (*De or.* 221–222 [1.51–52]) and Quintilian (*Inst.* 9.4.124–125) as well, the rhetorical *περίοδος* is concerned more with *quantitative* rather than *thematic* structure; thematically, the *περίοδος* does not create a circuit but rather a *concise* whole (cf. Gerson Schade, “Periode,” *DNP* 9:575–76).

begins to gain altitude, becoming more festive as the author mentions intercessory prayer for the sake of an increase in spiritual insight and upright living. Although v. 9 is not the first mention of prayer (cf. v. 3), the sentiment is heightened through the claim that their prayer for them is unceasing (ὁ παρούμεθα) and through the addition of the middle form αἰτεῖσθαι, to “beg” on someone’s behalf.¹²² The request is that the addressees be filled with spiritual insight so that they might live lives worthy of the Lord. A twofold ‘turn’ therefore takes place: (1) a turn from the present to the (petitioned) future, and (2) a turn towards the epistemological. We might say, further, that vv. 9–10 demonstrate the interconnection of theology and ethics in miniature: it is assumed that a deeper knowledge of God will have an impact on one’s ethical conduct.¹²³

b) The Turn towards God: Colossians 1:12–14

In Col 1:12–14, the author resumes his thanksgiving (εὐχαριστέω; cf. v. 3), turning his focus entirely to God and the action of God vis-à-vis humanity. Although the author is the grammatical subject in v. 12, the truly acting subject of the passage is God the Father. The action of the Father is described using the participial style of predication¹²⁴ and is the reason for the author’s thanksgiving. Verse 13 uses the relative style of predication to acclaim the Father’s deliverance of believers by “transferring them into the kingdom of the Son of his love.”¹²⁵ This last component prepares the transition to v. 14, which is itself a kind of bridge from vv. 12–13 to the Christological section in vv. 15–20. In v. 14, which serves to turn one’s attention more fully to the Son, the community of faith is the grammatical subject (ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν), just as it had been in v. 12, but the focus remains fixed on a divine agent through another instance of the relative style of predication (ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν).

The effect of this ‘turn’ is as follows: what had begun as a communicative act between two parties slowly assumes a different character. Insofar as the author begins to direct his and his addressees’ attention to God, it is as though a new space emerges between the author and the addressees, a space inhabited

¹²² *LSJ*, s.v. αἰτέω. The phrase καὶ αἰτούμενοι is lacking in B, K, and some Vulgate mss. K is quite late, dating to the 9th cent., and the nature and number of the Vulgate mss. that lack the phrase must have been insignificant enough for the editors of the *Vulgata Editio Quinta* to disregard it, seeing that the edition does present the reading *pro vobis orantes et postulantes*. Although B is an early and weighty ms., the reading that includes καὶ αἰτούμενοι is attested in other early mss., including \aleph and \mathfrak{B}^{46} . It stands to reason that the decision of the NA²⁸ editorial team in this regard is sound.

¹²³ This anticipates the structure of the letter and the function of Col 1:15–20 within it.

¹²⁴ Regarding this technique, see Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 253.

¹²⁵ On the transition into the “Herrschaftsbereich des Sohnes,” see Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *Menschwerdung*, TOBITH 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 309–10.

by a third party. One might say, metaphorically, that God is the ‘space’ in which the communicative act is embedded. To put it another way: the author introduces a new plateau upon which the conversation can continue to unfold and a horizon against which it can be understood. This naturally has implications for the further course of the letter, for example in the transition from the Christological section (1:15–20) to the following section (1:24–3:17), which concerns the interconnection of the Christ-event and ethics.

c) *The Christological Section: Colossians 1:15–20*

In this section, the passage not only reaches its peak but also provides the centerpiece of the first block of material in the letter. Its status as a textual unit rests upon its syntax, a significant stylistic feature, and its thematic coherence.

Col 1:15–20 may be divided into two parts, each introduced by the relative pronoun ὅς followed by two predicates which are then explained by a series of subordinate clauses.¹²⁶ Each strophe focuses on a particular work: the work of creation and the work of reconciliation. Common to both parts are the term πρωτότοκος (vv. 15b, 18c), an explanatory ὅτι-clause (ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ in vv. 16a, 19),¹²⁷ the paratactic use of καί to connect additional clauses to the explanation of the two predicates following the use of ὅς, a series of universal predications indicated by some form of πᾶς, and universal quantifications indicated by finite domain restraints that cancel one another (e.g., ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς / ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς).

Without a doubt, one of the strongest unifying elements of Col 1:15–20 is the use of some form of πᾶς,¹²⁸ whether it is used as an adjective or as a substantival adjective. There are five such instances in the first strophe and three in the second. There are some uses of πᾶς in 1:3–11, 23 as well, yet these instances reflect a common usage in the introductory sections of the Corpus Paulinum,¹²⁹ with phrases such as “to all the saints,” “remembering all of you in our prayers,” etc. Furthermore, the frequency of πᾶς in those sections is nowhere near as high as it is in 1:15–20.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Concerning the possibility of a tripartite structure (vv. 15–16; 17–18a; 18b–20), see Buscemi, *Lettera ai Colossesi*, 103–6.

¹²⁷ Although ἴνα in v. 18b introduces the first subordinate clause in the second strophe, appearing between the predicates and the explanatory ὅτι.

¹²⁸ Wolfgang Pöhlmann noted long ago the significance of the “clustering” (*Häufung*) of various forms of πᾶς in Col. 1:15–20 (“Die hymnischen All-Prädikationen,” *ZNW* 64, no. 1 [1973]: 53–74, esp. 57, 66).

¹²⁹ E.g., 1 Thess 1:2, 7, 8; 1 Cor 1:2, 5; 2 Cor 1:1, 3, 4; Phil 1:1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9; Phlm 5, 6; Rom 1:5, 7, 8, 16; Gal 1:2. This stylistic feature therefore holds true from the earliest undisputed Pauline letter until the latest.

¹³⁰ Some form of πᾶς is found in vv. 1:3, 6, 9, and twice in both vv. 10 and 11.

As for the theme of the passage, the focus on Christ in Col 1:15–20 is undeniable.¹³¹ The antecedent of ὅς in v. 15 is undoubtedly the Son of vv. 13 and 14. The first part serves to expound the Son as the image of the invisible God by reference to his participation in creating and sustaining the cosmos. In the second part, another grammatical subject appears: τὸ πλήρωμα. Yet although Christ is not the proper grammatical subject throughout the entire passage, he surely is its proper subject matter. Although τὸ πλήρωμα is the grammatical subject of vv. 19–20, the purpose of these verses is to convey how the “fullness” (τὸ πλήρωμα) acted in and through Christ: v. 19 stresses how Christ is its bodily *locus* and v. 20 references Christ, not as the grammatical subject, but as a *causa mediatoris*. The appellation “firstborn of the dead” in v. 18c and the reference to “the blood of his cross” in v. 20b allude to the crucifixion and resurrection and are therefore references to Christ.

The passage may be divided as follows:

- 15a ὅς ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου,
 15b πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως,
 16a ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα
 16b ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,
 16c τὰ ὄρατα καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα,
 16d εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες
 16e εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι•
 16f τὰ πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται.
 17a καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων
 17b καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν,
 18a καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας·
- 18b ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχή,
 18c πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν,
 18d ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων,
 19 ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι
 20a καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτὸν,
 20b εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ,
 20c δι’ αὐτοῦ εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,
 20d εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

¹³¹ It might be pointed out that long before it became commonplace to designate the passage as a hymn, Holtzmann saw fit to label it a “Christological excursus” (*Kritik der Epheser- und Kolosserbriefe*, 150).

d) *The 'Return' to the Addressees: Colossians 1:21–23*

“And you, [you who] once had been excluded and [been] hostile in mind by evil deeds,¹³² he has now however reconciled in the body of his flesh through [his] death [...]” (Col 1:21–22a). The focus returns to the addressees without leaving the ‘space’ in which this conversation is possible. That is, the divine agent does not vanish into the background: the Son, properly speaking, is the grammatical subject of vv. 21–22, but the focus shifts back to the addressees and their inclusion in God’s salvation history.

In the continuation of the sentence in the subordinate clause of v. 23, the addressees become the grammatical subject when the author admonishes them to remain steadfast in faith and not to be moved away from the Gospel they have received. After this, the periodic progression draws to a close: Col 1:1–23 begins with “Paul,” proceeds to the community and their reception of the Gospel, turns to the praise of the Father and the Son, then returns to the community and the admonition that they stand fast in the Gospel, and the passage concludes with a reference to the one who has become a servant of that Gospel, namely Paul. With that, the ‘out and back’ is complete.

III. *Function of Colossians 1:15–20*

Like other letters in the Corpus Paulinum, Colossians is written to address a specific situation, which means that the theological content was likely chosen based on its potential for addressing the specific situation of the community. This kind of theological pragmatism is not to be confused with opportunism nor with insincerity; instead, it suggests that the author considers the statements of Col 1:15–20 to be relevant to the situation of the community, which he addresses in chapters 2 and 3. Even though we cannot obtain sure historical knowledge about the situation, this does not prevent the attempt of ascertaining how the author sought to address the situation; indications internal to the letter can provide us relevant hints. What function, therefore, does Col 1:15–20 serve in addressing the situation of the addressees and therefore in the letter as a whole?

1. *Laudatory Function*

In the Corpus Paulinum, doxology is the proper beginning of theological speech: with the exception of *1 Timothy* and Paul’s defensive assertion of his apostolate in Gal 1:1–5, every member of this corpus begins with doxology,

¹³² ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς πνηροῖς. The use of ἐν in this sense is common in the New Testament writings as a “reproduction of the Hebrew construction with ׀” which often replaces the *dativus instrumentalis* (BDR §219).

praising or thanking God before addressing the needs of the community.¹³³ According to the *Corpus Paulinum*, one might say that the element of praise and thus the orientation of the speaker toward God must precede considerations of the social *utility* of theological content.

In the section leading up to Col 1:15–20 (i.e., Col 1:3–14), semantic markers indicate an act of praise, such as εὐχαριστοῦμεν (v. 3), the mention of God’s δόξα (v. 11), and μετὰ χαρᾶς εὐχαριστοῦντες (vv. 11b–12). This is followed by the acclamation of the Father in 1:13 (ὃς ἐρρῶσατο ἡμᾶς) and also of the Son in 1:14 (ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν). Col 1:15–20, then, may be considered a declarative act of praise, honoring the Son and the creation and redemption wrought in him.

A passage as theologically dense as Col 1:15–20 might suggest that the author has lost himself in a moment of ecstatic praise, having forgotten all concern for practical matters. Yet the further course of the letter demonstrates that this is not the case, for later sections continually harken back to the content of Col 1:15–20 when addressing the community’s situation.

2. Didactic-Paraenetic Function

Colossians 1:15–20 is not written like a treatise or dialogue in which the author argues discursively for the truth of his premises. That is, the author does not argue to establish the basic tenets of the passage, such as claiming that the Son is the image of the invisible God, or that the act of reconciliation was achieved through “the blood of his cross” and served to “establish peace.” Even if the addressees had not yet been familiar with the peculiar formulations of the passage, or at least this specific configuration of those formulations, there is no indication that the author presupposed that the addressees would be actively opposed to it. Instead, he assumes that they will not find it problematic. If the function of the passage is not to convince the addressees of the basic legitimacy of the passage’s theological claims, then what is it?

The passage Col 1:15–20 serves a didactic-paraenetic function operating in two modes: (1) recollection,¹³⁴ and (2) a retrospective identification that serves the stabilization of religious identity.¹³⁵ To begin with, although the author uses

¹³³ Rom 1:1–7; 1 Cor 1:1–9; 2 Cor 1:1–4; Eph 1:1–14; Phil 1:1–3; Col 1:1–3; 1 Thess 1:1–3; 2 Thess 1:1–3; 2 Tim 1:1–3; Titus 1:1–4; Phlm 1–5. Of course, doxology does play a role in Gal 1:1–5, but it is unmistakable that Paul also uses the introduction of the letter to lay down a crucial building-block of his argument defending his apostolate and his understanding of the Gospel.

¹³⁴ Andreas Dettwiler, “Erinnerung und Identität: Erwägungen zur Pragmatik und Theologie des Kolosser- und Epheserbriefes,” in *Memory and Memories in Early Christianity*, WUNT 398, eds. Simon Buttica and Enrico Norelli (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 285–311, 291. Theobald, “Der Kolosserbrief,” 437, speaks of “anamnetische Theologie.”

¹³⁵ The concept of “retrospective identification” is taken from Andreas Grünshloß, *Der eigene und der fremde Glaube: Studien zur interreligiösen Fremdwahrnehmungen in Islam*,

the passage to teach, he does not present the addressees a novelty, but rather leads them to recall what they had already been taught (cf. Col 2:7, καθὼς ἐδιδάχθητε). Further, the author uses it to teach with a specific goal in mind, for the passage provides the theological framework in which the author can address the situation.¹³⁶ In brief: the passage serves to assert the Son's "absolute supremacy over [all] existing reality," a necessary counter to the theological errors that shimmer through the lines of Col 2:16–23.¹³⁷ It presents the Son as the highest authority – next to the Father, a view expressed through Col 1:13 and the *sessio ad dexteram* motif in 3:1 – whose epistemic significance is implied through the term εἰκόν and through the assertion of his participation in the creation of all things, even "the unseen" realities, a significance that is stated more clearly in Col 2:2–3, whose "blood of the cross" has reconciled all things to himself and established peace, and whose significance for the life of the church is conveyed through the metaphor of a κεφαλή (Col 1:18a; cf. 2:19). Part of the didactic function is that the passage is used in such a way as to motivate the addressees to act (cf. 3:5–17), rather than motivating God to act, as was often the case with the hymns of Greek antiquity.¹³⁸

It is not immediately clear whether the author would have considered Col 1:15–20 to fit any of the three liturgical categories of 3:16,¹³⁹ for no explicit statements are made to this effect. However, the indications that 1:15–20 fit the genre of a hymn (see below "Genre of Colossians 1:15–20") suggest

Hinduismus, Buddhismus und Christentum, HUT 37 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 237–39. The maneuver of retrospectively identifying one's own religious system with a primeval revelation or state of affairs (Ur-Offenbarung, Ur-Altes) in order to situate it hierarchically above other religious systems which precede it historically and, in so doing, to stabilize one's own religious identity may be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to the author's use of Col 1:15–20.

¹³⁶ Similarly, Dettwiler, "Erinnerung und Identität," 294: "Der *Christushymnus* in Kol 1,15–20 ist die dominante theologische Matrix des gesamten Briefes." Similarly, Müller, *Kolossenerbrief*, 63, 74, and Belli, *Lettera ai Colossesi*, 13.

¹³⁷ Andreas Dettwiler, "Le Christ comme pensée de la création: Un exercice en théologie interculturelle (Col 1,15–20)," *FoiVie* 54, no. 3 (2015): 37–52, 44: "Elles ont pour fonction de mettre en avant la souveraineté absolue du Christ sur la réalité existante – une souveraineté qui pourtant s'inscrit dans un projet de vie ("réconciliation"!)." Formulé de manière quelque peu comprimée: *la cosmologie est une fonction de la christologie, et non l'inverse.*" Cf. also Angela Standhartinger, *Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte und Intention des Kolossenerbriefes*, NovTSup 94 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 217: "Zielpunkt der christologischen Reflexionen ist nicht, die impliziten Adressatinnen und Adressaten von *einer* Deutung des Christusgeschehens zu überzeugen, sondern von dem grundsätzlichen Umschwung, der durch das Christusereignis vollzogen ist und in den die Adressatinnen und Adressaten einbezogen sind."

¹³⁸ Jan M. Bremer, "Greek Hymns," in *Faith, Hope and Worship: Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World*, SGRR 2, ed. Hendrik S. Versnel (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 193–215, 193–97; cf. William D. Furley, "Praise and Persuasion in Greek Hymns," *JHS* 115 (1995): 29–46, 32.

¹³⁹ ψαλμός, ὕμνος, ᾠδή πνευματικῆ.

strongly that the author would have understood the passage within this framework. The designation of Col 1:15–20 as a hymnic passage depends in part upon its didactic function, and this latter aspect can only be discerned through reading Colossians as a whole and noticing how the content of the passage is used to inform the faith and practice of the community.¹⁴⁰ Specifically, it presents the author a way of combating what he perceives to be false theological norms and practices. Colossians 1:21–3:17 is redolent with references to the content of Col 1:15–20 and these references are structured in such a way that it becomes clear how critical the hymnic passage is for the letter as a whole. The three aspects of the “image of God” concept (see below, “The Image Concept of Colossians”) and the other motifs of the hymn are so tightly interwoven with the paraenetic statements of 1:21–3:17 that any attempt to treat them in isolation from each other cannot help but convey an impression of artificiality.¹⁴¹

As for the second mode, namely retrospective identification, the use of the passage’s theological content aims to strengthen the addressees’ trust in the sufficiency of Christ for their salvation and also to reject religious norms and practices which run counter to any such understanding of Christ (cf. Col 2:16–23) through asserting Christ’s supremacy via an affirmation of his primeval existence and role in creation (cf. Col 1:16–17). Crucial in this regard is the affirmation that the “mystery of God which had been hidden [...] but now has been revealed” (Col 1:26) is “Christ in you” (Col 1:27; 2:2). This not only identifies Christ as the mystery of God, but also divides the history of human knowledge of God into two periods, one prior to revelation and one following it, and any attempt to supplement the “mystery of God” by way of “human traditions” (cf. Col 2:16–23) would be, in the author’s eyes, nothing short of a failure to realize the truth of union with Christ in baptism.¹⁴² On this basis, the author can cast doubt upon the teaching and praxis which some in the community had begun to accept (cf. 2:16, 18, 20–23). From the author’s viewpoint, the theology displayed in Col 1:15–20 should be prized above the theology of any competing party in Colossae,¹⁴³ whether it be derived from: (1) sophistic

¹⁴⁰ Gese, *Der Kolosserbrief*, 185, maintains that the letter, as a whole, serves the purpose of instruction.

¹⁴¹ Gese, *ibid.*, 184, makes a similar remark concerning the style of the letter generally, noting, “Themen werden nicht scharf voneinander getrennt.”

¹⁴² Tarocchi, “Le lettere della prigionia,” 1249: “Esso indica il riferimento a due periodi della storia, nel passaggio dal tempo in cui non si è ancora compiuta la rivelazione, al periodo in cui è stata svelata. Coloro che, anziché accettare la logica del mistero, si affidassero alle tradizioni umane e non a Cristo [...] si oppongono alla stessa realtà battesimale nella quale sono stati immersi e che costituisce la loro essenza più profonda.”

¹⁴³ It is not necessary to decide whether the ‘false teachers’ active in Colossae are members of a religious out-group or come from within the in-group itself in order to establish that the author employs retrospective identification in order to stabilize the religious identity of the addressees. First, as Grünschloß explains, retrospective identification can be applied

arguments (2:4),¹⁴⁴ (2), “philosophy,” “empty deception,” and human traditions (2:8–10), or (3) initiation into mystery rites (3:18). All of this is to be rejected in favor of teaching that “grasps the head,” which is Christ (2:19). For the author, teaching grounded in Christ is the precondition for “building up the body,” as it is Christ in whom the body is held together and from whom it derives its growth (2:19). In effect, this is precisely the goal the author pursues for the Colossians: if one notices how the passage is situated in that part of the letter which greets and commends the addresses for their faith (*exordium*), one might conclude that the theology of Col 1:15–20 is not employed in order to rebuke the addresses, but to remind them of the foundations of their faith and to build upon this basis, stabilizing their religious identity.¹⁴⁵

IV. Genre of Colossians 1:15–20

As previously mentioned, the designation of Col 1:15–20 as a “Christ hymn” became a commonplace in twentieth-century exegesis (see above, “Author of Colossians 1:15–20”). This was due in large part to the two presuppositions that the passage, based on its Christology, could not have been authored by Paul and that the stylistic analysis of the passage suggests that traditional material had been cited in the composition of the letter. The results of our analysis of the authorship show that neither of these presuppositions can be taken for granted: (1) no scholar can name criteria for discerning the critical mass of difference that must be attained for the theology of the passage to no longer be considered ‘Pauline,’ and (2) it is possible that the passage was composed *ad hoc* by the author of Colossians.¹⁴⁶ If these presuppositions no longer offer a sure basis for the estimation of the passage’s genre, then on what basis should a decision be made? In our estimation, the question must be decided by deliberating how much weight to assign to the *function* and to the *form* of the passage.

Confusion about the nature and function of ancient hymns is not merely a modern phenomenon but reaches back into at least the classical period of

in either direction: “Der hohe Verbreitungsgrad dieses Argumentationstyps dürfte in seiner unmittelbaren Brauchbarkeit und Evidenz sowohl für (a) *binnenperspektivische Diskurse* (Systemstabilisierung, Identitätsbegründung und -sicherung) als auch für (b) *alle Gattungen interreligiöser Bezugnahme* (Anknüpfung, Apologetik, Werbung, Mission, etc.) begründet liegen” (Grünschloß, *Der eigene und der fremde Glaube*, 237). Second, the evidence is not sufficiently clear for a decision concerning the question whether the author is writing against an out-group or, instead, against particular members of the in-group. What is clear is that certain impulses which the author considers incompatible with the Gospel have entered into the community and also that the author considers his own theological vantagepoint to be commensurate with a primeval reality and therefore superior.

¹⁴⁴ See below, pg. 245, n. 10 concerning the term *πιθανολογία* in Col 2:4.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Dettwiler, “Erinnerung und Identität,” 294.

¹⁴⁶ Cosgrove, “The Syntax of Early Christian Hymns and Prayers,” 180.

Greece. Two early passages (Homer, *Od.* 8.429; Aeschylus, *Agam.* 709) “suggest that the word ὕμνος itself does not convey more than the notion of ‘sung text.’”¹⁴⁷ Pindar uses the term for songs in which mortals are praised (*Ol.* 3.2; *Pyth.* 6.7),¹⁴⁸ which is clearly distinct from the definition laid out by Plato. When Plato discusses poetry in Book 10 of the *Republic*, he states that only “hymns to the gods and encomia [addressed] to good men” are to be allowed into the ideal state (*Resp.* 10.607a). This distinction gained wide acceptance in the following centuries, although difficulties surfaced as to whether ὕμνος represented a *genus* or a *species*.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the two-pronged definition implied in Plato’s proviso is clear enough for our purposes: a ὕμνος is an act of praise that takes a divine agent as its object.¹⁵⁰ While hymns can have other functions as well – e.g., etiology – the focus on the function of praise in modern scholarship corresponds accurately to the practice of composing and performing hymnody in ancient Greece.¹⁵¹ If “hymn” is to be defined primarily by this

¹⁴⁷ Bremer, “Greek Hymns,” 193–94.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Walter Burkert, “Griechische Hymnoi,” in *Hymnen der Alten Welt im Kulturvergleich*, OBO 131 (Fribourg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 9–17, 10. The problem lies in the fact of providing a definition to inherited materials: there were already collections of hymns categorized with reference to their addressee and provided with a specific label, e.g., the dithyramb for Dionysus and the paeon for Apollo. “Sind sie und ihresgleichen nun Untergruppen des *Hymnos* qua Götterlied, oder besteht der *Hymnos* als Sonderform neben ihnen?” (*ibid.*). Burkert mentions the example of Aristophanes of Byzantium (ca. 257–180 B.C.), who edited a collection of Pindar’s works in which the collections of hymns, paeans, and dithyrambs each constituted a separate book in the collection (*ibid.*). Cf. Vollenweider, “Hymnus, Enkomion oder Psalm?,” 212, n. 13. Vollenweider also points out that Plato was not consistent in distinguishing between hymns, encomia, and prayers (212, n. 12).

¹⁵⁰ Vollenweider, “Hymnus, Enkomion oder Psalm?,” 212–13: “Epideiktisches Reden, also das Lob, wird im Hinblick auf das Objekt differenziert; gilt das Lob den Göttern, handelt es sich um einen Hymnus; die übrigen Arten des Lobs richten sich auf Sterbliches.”

¹⁵¹ “Important determinants in our modern classification of texts as hymns are a divine addressee [...] and content which praises or defines the deity addressed” (Andrew Faulkner and Owen Hodkinson, “Introduction,” in *Hymnic Narrative and the Narratology of Greek Hymns*, MNS 384, eds. Faulkner and Hodkinson [Leiden: Brill, 2015], 1–16, 8). “Die homerischen Hymnen sind Götterpreisungen” (Lutz H. Lenz, *Der homerische Aphroditehymnus und die Aristie des Aineias in der Ilias*, Habelts Dissertationsdrucke. Reihe Klassische Philologie 19 [Bonn: Habelt, 1975], 9). “Each of [the Homeric Hymns] celebrates a divinity through a story in which the god is a protagonist” (Jenny S. Clay, *The Politics of Olympus: Form and Meaning in the Major Homeric Hymns* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989], 5). “Es gibt einige allgemeine Belege, im Sinne von ‘Gesang’ und ‘singen’ überhaupt, doch vorzugsweise ist *hymnos* ein Gesang, der sich Götter als Inhalt und Gegenüber setzt” (Burkert, “Griechische Hymnoi,” 9). Furlley also emphasizes the function while connecting it with the act of petition: “The entire strategy behind hymn-composition and performance was to attract the attention of the divinity addressed in a favourable way [...] [and] to flatter, woo, charm and persuade a single god or group of gods that the worshipper(s) was deserving

intersection of function and object, then the choice made by multiple New Testament scholars to classify Col 1:15–20 as a hymn makes good sense.¹⁵² The choice to designate Col 1:15–20 as a hymn rather than an encomium rests, albeit, on an interpretive choice: is the object of the praise a divine or a human agent?¹⁵³ I would argue for the former – without necessarily implying a two-natures doctrine as constructed at a later period of the church’s history by patristic theologians – merely for the fact that the Son is praised for having participated in the creation of the world, something that early Christian communities would not have attributed to a mere human.

Another function often displayed by Greek hymns is etiological: in narrating the actions of a particular god, a hymn explains and justifies the structure of the audience’s world.¹⁵⁴ This etiological function of Greek hymns provides another point of similarity with Col 1:15–20, for the passage has a narrative character – insofar as it contains hints of an underlying story; cf. ἵνα γένηται in 1:18d, εἰρηνοποιήσας in 1:20b – and it is used in the letter to portray a particular vision of the world, a ‘counter-narrative’ to the story told by the opposing “philosophy” (Col 2:8) in Colossae concerning God and how humans are to live and act in order to enter into communion with God.¹⁵⁵

of sympathy and aid” (“Praise and Persuasion in Greek Hymns,” 32). This is maintained in Furley and Bremer’s edition of Greek hymns, even though they directly state: “Of course, there is considerable overlap between hymns and other forms of literature in terms of form, content, and function” (William D. Furley and Jan M. Bremer, *Greek Hymns: A Selection of Greek Religious Poetry from the Archaic to the Hellenistic Period*, STAC 9 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001], 2).

¹⁵² Cf. Schweizer, *Der Brief an die Kolosser*, 51, n. 106: “Hymnus ist im weiten Sinn des Wortes gemeint und kann dogmatische, konfessionelle, liturgische, polemische, oder (am ehesten, mit Gabathuler, Jesus Christus 23f) doxologische Abzweckung einschließen (Benoit, hymne 230f).”

¹⁵³ Vollenweider “Hymnus, Enkomion oder Psalm?,” 213. Though Vollenweider correctly points out the relevance of the fluid boundary between divine and human being in ancient thought for questions of classification, it is nevertheless important to note that the distinction between divine and human was crucial issue in the composition and reception of hymns. Aristotle’s *Hymn to Aretē*, for example, is indeed about virtue, but it is ostensibly about the man Hermias. In his *Lives* 5.5–6, Diogenes Laertius reports two accounts of the death of Aristotle, and in one of them, Demophilus brings charges against Aristotle for composing a hymn to Hermias. Although Diogenes offers no further comment, a possible explanation for Demophilus’ indictment of Aristotle is that he found it impious to compose a hymn to a human.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Clay, *The Politics of Olympus*. In describing the *Homeric Hymns*, she writes that each hymn “recounts a critical chapter in the mythological history of the Olympians. Herein lies their generic unity. Each can be said to take place in the time of origins that [Mircea] Eliade has called *illud tempus*. Those actions and events that occurred *then* among the gods have permanent and irreversible consequences *now* and explain why the world is the way it is” (*ibid.*, 11).

¹⁵⁵ Similarly, Müller, *Kolosserbrief*, 366–69.

One might say that the corollary of the etiological function of hymns is the *didactic* function of hymns. An etiology provides an explanation for how something became what it is and therefore overlaps with the process of teaching a particular *Rezipientenkreis*. The didactic function is not entirely congruent with the etiological, for one can describe the current state of affairs in some measure even if one does not entertain the question of how such a state originated. A didactic hymn seeks, secondly, not only to make declarative statements about the world, but to do so in a form that can be handed on. The hymn was a favored mode of philosophical reflection among philosophers in the first century A.D., and it is therefore no far stretch to assume that a text like Col 1:15–20 can be associated with this practice.¹⁵⁶ Col 3:16, for instance, contains a direct encouragement to “teach and admonish one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual odes.”¹⁵⁷

Yet ancient hymns can be characterized not only by their function, but also by their formal characteristics. A point of similarity between Col. 1:15–20 and ancient hymnody – Greek, Hellenistic Jewish, early Christian, and Hermetic – is the presence of ‘universal predications’ via the use of some form of *πᾶς*.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ “Hymnus (ὕμνος, προοίμιον, ᾠδή, ᾠσμα, ψαλμός / hymnus, carmen, canticum): Die alte, formal über die Jahrhunderte hinweg kaum strikt zu fixierende, kultisch wie literarisch weit verbreitete Gattung des Hymnus erfreut sich auch in Kaiserzeit und Spätantike großer Beliebtheit” (Irmgard Männlein-Robert and Christoph Riedweg, “Hauptsächliche literarische Gattungen philosophischer Wissensvermittlung,” in *Philosophie der Kaiserzeit und der Spätantike*, vol. 5.1 of *Die Philosophie der Antike*, Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie, eds. Christoph Riedweg, Christoph Horn, and Dietmar Wyrwa [Basel: Schwabe, 2018], 64–86, 74). This was no invention of that period, however: already in the classical period, following Plato’s approval of hymns (*Resp.* 10.607a; *Phaed.* 60c–61b) and the Aristotelian *Hymn to Aretē* (Diogenes Laertius 5.5–6), the genre “scheint [...] eine für Philosophen besonders reizvolle poetische Form religiöser Betätigung geworden zu sein,” one which had a particular “philosophische Eignung” (*ibid.*, 75).

¹⁵⁷ ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ διδάσκοντες καὶ νοουθετοῦντες ἑαυτοὺς ψαλμοῖς ὕμνοις ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς [...]. As Martin Hengel points out: “Gegen die Interpunktion des Nestle-Textes, mit Westcott/Hort, Lightfoot, Lohmeyer, Percy und Deichgräber ist das ψαλμοῖς ὕμνοις ᾠδαῖς | πνευματικαῖς mit den vorausgehenden Partizipien διδάσκοντες καὶ νοουθετοῦντες zu verbinden” (“Das Christuslied im frühesten Gottesdienst,” chap. 7 in Hengel, *Studien zur Christologie. Kleine Schriften IV*, WUNT 201, ed. Claus-Jürgen Thornton [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck,] 205–58, 243). Hengel maintains that Col. 1:15–20 and the other “Christ psalms” of the NT have a didactic function: “Diese ‘Christuspsalmen’ haben [...] ausgesprochenen Lehr- und Bekenntnischarakter. Sie sind ‘geistgewirkte, gesungene Dogmatik’” (253).

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Karl Keyssner, *Gottesvorstellung und Lebensauffassung im griechischen Hymnus*, WSA 2 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1932), 28–31. Cf. also Pöhlmann, “Die hymnischen All-Prädikationen,” 66: “Auch zur Häufung der All-Prädikationen bieten griechische Hymnen und von den späteren Teilen des Alten Testaments an auch die biblisch-jüdische Hymnen- und Gebetsüberlieferung eine Fülle von Belegen. Das vorliegende Material ist zu umfangreich, als daß es im Rahmen dieser Studie auch nur annähernd gesichtet werden könnte. Es kommt ja auch nur darauf an, zu zeigen, daß der Kolosserhymnus stilistisch fest in der

Seeing that the object of a hymn is a deity, it is not unusual to find statements in hymns that exalt the deity above all beings and/or extend the scope of that deity's power and influence to encompass the whole cosmos. One major dissimilarity between Col 1:15–20 and ancient hymns concerns metrical composition. More often than not, Greek hymns were metrical,¹⁵⁹ and the lack of any recognizable meter in Col 1:15–20 would speak against designating it as a hymn.

That a robust argument can be made against the designation of Col 1:15–20 as a hymn on the basis of formal characteristics can be seen in the example of Ralph Brucker's 1997 monograph "*Christushymnen*" oder "*epideiktische Passagen*"? *Studien zum Stilwechsel im Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt*. In his study, he concludes on the basis of a rhetorical analysis that the "Christ-hymns" of the New Testament fail to meet ancient standards for the composition of a hymn. Brucker is by no means the only scholar to have expressed doubt concerning the appropriateness of characterizing Col 1:15–20 straightforwardly as a hymn.¹⁶⁰ Martin Hengel proposed the designation "Christuspsalm," albeit only for Col 1:15–18.¹⁶¹ Samuel Vollenweider takes a similar approach, proposing the categorization "hymnischer Christuslob."¹⁶² Both Hengel and Vollenweider also note the similarity of this and other New Testament "hymns" with prayer.¹⁶³

The similarity of Col 1:15–20 with Jewish literary prayers was pursued further by Charles Cosgrove. In distinction from many of his predecessors, he

hymnischen Tradition gegründet ist, wenn er Christus mit wiederholten Prädikationen als den Schöpfer und Herrn des Alls rühmt" (66).

¹⁵⁹ This was, at the very least, for Aristotle the fundamental characteristic of poetry that distinguishes it from a speech (*Rhet.* 1408b.21–31 [3.8.1–3]).

¹⁶⁰ He himself points to Berger's contribution to the series *ANRW*, "Hellenistische Gattungen im NT," in which Berger proposes the genre "encomium" (Brucker, "*Christushymnen*" oder "*epideiktische Passagen*"?, 11). He also mentions (*ibid.*, 10, n. 51): Harald Riesenfeld, "Unpoetische Hymnen im Neuen Testament?," in *Glaube und Gerechtigkeit*, eds. Jarmo Kiilinen et al. (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 1983); Janusz Frankowski, "Early Christian Hymns Recorded in the New Testament: A Reconsideration of the Question in Light of Heb 1,3" *BZ* 27 (1983): 183–94; A.G. Soeting, "Hat Paulus in seinen Briefen aus existierenden Briefen zitiert?," 1991 *Bulletin of the Internationaler Arbeitskreis für Hymnologie* (Groningen 1991), 123–29.

¹⁶¹ Hengel, "Das Christuslied," 253.

¹⁶² Vollenweider, "Hymnus, Enkomion oder Psalm?," 226.

¹⁶³ "Sowohl bei einzelnen bekenntnisartigen Formeln wie bei größeren Gebetsstücken, vor allem wenn sie im Er-Stil abgefaßt sind und doxologischen Charakter haben, ist es manchmal schwer zu entscheiden, ob sie bloße Gebete waren, gar ad hoc vom Autor abgefaßt, oder ob sie als ψαλμός bzw. ὕμνος gesungen wurden" (Hengel, "Das Christuslied," 248). Cf. Vollenweider, "Hymnus, Enkomion oder Psalm?," 220, 230, who points out the proximity of hymns and prayers generally, even outside the NT tradition. George van Kooten characterizes the entirety of Col 1:9–23 as an "introductory prayer" (*Cosmic Christology in Paul and the Pauline School*, 111–21).

begins by critically assessing Eduard Norden's claims concerning predication-styles rather than simply quoting him.¹⁶⁴ The result is a fourfold typology of syntactic organizing principles, only two of which draw on relative pronouns.¹⁶⁵ He claims, further, that the use of relative pronouns – alone or in conjunction with participles – is not an organizing principle in any undisputed Greek, Jewish, or early Christian hymns, but that it *is* reflective of the idiom of Jewish prayer,¹⁶⁶ and he concludes that Col 1:15–20 is an “epistolary prayer.”¹⁶⁷

The critiques offered by Brucker and Cosgrove present a necessary corrective to anyone who would all-too casually characterize Col 1:15–20 as a hymn, especially if it means relying on an uncritical reading of Norden's *Agnostos Theos*. It should be noted, however, that Brucker and Cosgrove view the issue of the genre of Col 1:15–20 chiefly through the lens of a rhetorical and syntactical analysis, respectively, thus prioritizing form over function.

1. Prioritizing Function over Form: One Modern and Three Ancient Examples

Perhaps it is not the precise fixation of a genre in formal terms, but rather the theologically constructive function of the passage under consideration that should command our attention, for focusing too narrowly on formal criteria might obscure our view for whatever the passage might contribute to early Christology.¹⁶⁸

For example, it is a commonplace in classical philology that the Homeric Hymns, strictly speaking, are proems (cf. προοίμιον) that preceded epic works. It was not until the Byzantine period that they were characterized as “hymns” and incorporated into a collection that also included the hymns of Callimachus,

¹⁶⁴ Critical reservations concerning Norden's work can be observed in current research in classical philology; cf. Männlein-Robert and Riedweg, “Hauptsächliche literarische Gattungen philosophischer Wissensvermittlung,” 74, who point out that although the “basic building blocks” of hymns as presented by Norden in *Agnostos Theos* are heuristically useful, the question of their binding character has been the subject of much debate.

¹⁶⁵ See Cosgrove, “The Syntax of Early Christian Hymns and Prayers,” 165, for the typology and summary of his findings.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 173–74.

¹⁶⁸ One could also raise the question whether the syntactical structures of hymns preserved in literary sources encompass the full range of compositional possibilities for hymns. As Angela Standhartinger has recently argued, Greek hymns preserved in inscriptions display a richer variety and complexity of meter than those preserved in written sources (“Der Kolosserhymnus im Lichte epigraphischer Zeugnisse,” in *Epigraphical Evidence Illustrating Paul's Letter to the Colossians*, WUNT 411, eds. Joseph Verheyden, Markus Öhler, and Thomas Corsen [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018], 69–91).

Proclus, and the Orphic hymns.¹⁶⁹ Twentieth-century research in classics – similar to the *Formgeschichte* of twentieth-century New Testament studies – sought to delineate the nature of proems and the relation of the proem to the “main song” (οἶμν); that is, to the epic.¹⁷⁰ There is much of interest to be found in this discussion, especially regarding the relation between the proem and main song and the performance of oral poetry.

In her 1989 monograph, *The Politics of Olympus: Form and Meaning in the Major Homeric Hymns*, Jenny Strauss Clay chose to take a different approach. Instead of asking whether the longer Homeric Hymns are proems, she focused on their theologically constructive function and content. In her estimation, the fixation on proem as a genre in philological research “stripped [the major hymns] of their autonomy as works of literary art and significant religious thought” because the proem as a genre was relegated to a subordinate status vis-à-vis epic poetry.¹⁷¹ In other words: if one becomes too fixated on the question of what exactly a προοίμιον is, generically, in comparison with the “great epics” they serve to introduce, one might overlook that the Homeric Hymns are the vehicle “containing some of the most sustained and systematic theological speculation of the archaic period.”¹⁷² The question of genre – whether these longer hymns should be designated as proems or not – is secondary.¹⁷³

That this is not merely a concern of the modern researcher may be demonstrated by way of three examples from antiquity. Plato, for example, seemed more concerned with the nature and effects of poetry than with its form. The

¹⁶⁹ Martin L. West, “Introduction,” in *Homeric Hymns. Homeric Apocrypha. Lives of Homer*, LCL 496, ed. West (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2003), 3–22, 20–21.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Böhme, *Das Proömion*, 10–11, 36–44, and Ansgar Lenz, *Das Proöm des frühen griechischen Epos: Ein Beitrag zum poetischen Selbstverständnis*, Habelts Dissertationsdrucke. Reihe Klassische Philologie 31 (Bonn: Habelt, 1980), 21–26, 83–109.

¹⁷¹ Clay, *The Politics of Olympus*, 4.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 267. In Clay’s estimation, the longer hymns: (1) fill the gap between theogonic poetry on the one hand and epic poetry on the other, and (2) they do so by narrating the redistribution of the spheres of influence (τιμαί) of the Olympians. The common theme of the major hymns is a crisis that leads to the readjustment of political power in Olympus and thus they serve to narrate the genesis of the state of affairs in Olympus that is presupposed by the great epics, such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (*ibid.*, 15).

¹⁷³ Another example from a slightly later period might be taken from the *Callimachean Hymns*. In the *Hymn to Delos* 86–98, we read that Apollo is able to speak and prophesy while in utero, which is a novum in the Greek mythological tradition. Regardless of whether this Callimachean piece should be titled a proem or a hymn, we are dealing with a significant development in terms of theological conception, and we ought first to take stock of it in this regard. For a possible explanation of the history of this motif, cf. Susan A. Stephens, *Seeing Double: Intercultural Poetics in Ptolemaic Alexandria*, HCS 37 (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2003), 120–21. Stephens points out that the ability of a deity to speak in utero coincides with Egyptian royal ideology, citing a hymn to Osiris and one to the Pharaoh Piye, the founder of the twenty-fifth Dynasty.

Ion dialogue deals with the nature of poetry as an act resulting from divine inspiration, and it is clearly *this* aspect of poetry that excites Plato's concern and interest more than any formal considerations. For him, the poetic experience is comparable to a magnetic stone: the magnetic stone not only attracts an iron ring, but also imparts to it the power to attract yet another ring. In the same way, the Muses inspire and thus move the poet, and the poet in his turn moves his audience (*Ion* 533d–e). Good poets therefore do not compose based on an art (τέχνη), but as people who are inspired and possessed (533e: οὐκ ἐκ τέχνης ἀλλ' ἔνθεοι ὄντες καὶ κατεχόμενοι). Like the Corybantes who are not in their right mind (οὐκ ἔμφορες ὄντες) when they dance (534a), so too is a human unable to compose poetry “until he has been inspired and put out of his senses, and his mind is no longer in him” (534b: πρὶν ἂν ἔνθεός τε γένηται καὶ ἔκφρων καὶ ὁ νοῦς μηκέτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐνῆ [Lamb, LCL]).¹⁷⁴ Even when Plato considers such elements as meter and rhythm in other writings (*Resp.* 3.399e–400e), it is clear that he is not interested in a purely quantitative, formal analysis of poetry, but rather wants to suggest that some meters and rhythms are “orderly” (κόσμιος) and “manly” (ἀνδρεῖος), and others are not (3.400a), and he considers this to be significant for the moral formation of the youth of the city (3.400e).

A similar concern for prioritizing function over form can also be found in the work of Pseudo-Longinus, a figure of the first century A.D. and thus a contemporary with the author of *Colossians*.¹⁷⁵ For Ps.-Longinus, poetry – and oratory as well – is not reduceable to formal characteristics such as meter. For example, he claims that oratory and poetry differ in the kind of imagination (φαντασία) that is proper to them, the former requiring one kind of imagination for the sake of clarity, the latter needing one for the sake of fascination (*Subl.* 15.2). As for poetry, there is one fundamental characteristic that distinguishes good poetry from bad poetry: sublimity. Any piece of poetry might comply with the rules of grammarians and rhetoricians, yet truly good poetry springs from a revelatory moment in the act of composition that bestows a divine character upon the work, thus making it to be sublime and also enduring in its significance (cf. *Subl.* 16.1–2; 33.5; 35; 36.1). In one example, he expresses his view of how a poetic composition birthed by a revelatory moment exceeds pedantically executed poetry:

“And what of Eratosthenes in his *Erigone*? Wholly blameless as the little poem is, do you therefore think him a greater poet than Archilocus with all his disorganized flood and that

¹⁷⁴ See further *Ion* 534b–e, 535e–536a, and 536b.

¹⁷⁵ On the dating of *De sublimitate* to the first cent. A.D., see Donald A. Russell, “Introduction,” in *Aristotle, Longinus, Demetrius: Poetics. On the Sublime. On Style*, LCL 199, eds. Stephen Halliwell et al.; rev. Russell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 145–48.

outburst of divine inspiration (κάκεινης τῆς ἐκβολῆς τοῦ δαιμονίου πνεύματος), which are so troublesome to bring under any rule?”¹⁷⁶

One last example to illustrate the point: Diogenes Laertius offers his own typology of Plato’s dialogues, dividing them into those aimed at instruction and those serving inquiry, dividing each branch again into subcategories. The instructive dialogues might be theoretical, dealing with physics or logic, or they might be practical, dealing with ethics or politics. The dialogues serving inquiry might intend to train the mind, being either maieutic or tentative, or they might aim towards victory in controversy, either by raising critical objections to one’s interlocutor or by subverting the main position of the interlocutor. Diogenes concludes by saying:

It does not escape us that others address the matter differently when distinguishing the dialogues, for they say that some of them are dramatic, some are narrative, and some are mixed; such people, however, label the difference of the dialogues in accordance with theater rather than philosophy. (Diogenes Laertius 3.49–50)¹⁷⁷

οὐ λανθάνει δ’ ἡμᾶς ὅτι τινὲς ἄλλως διαφέρειν τοὺς διαλόγους φασί (λέγουσι γὰρ αὐτῶν τοὺς μὲν δραματικούς, τοὺς δὲ διηγηματικούς, τοὺς δὲ μικτούς), ἀλλ’ ἐκεῖνοι μὲν τραγικῶς μᾶλλον ἢ φιλοσόφως τὴν διαφορὰν τῶν διαλόγων προσωνόμασαν.

Diogenes’ words – as well as the considerations of Plato and Ps.-Longinus – may be instructive for us in considering how we might analyze Col 1:15–20. Rather than allowing notions of genre to place limits on the parameters of theological interpretation, we might simply ask what kind of predications are being made of Jesus Christ and what function they serve in the letter as a whole. With this approach, we can gain a better idea of the theologically constructive function of Col 1:15–20 and what it contributes to early Christology.

Excursus: A Note on Generic Hybridity and Formgeschichte

One might ask whether we are dealing with a case of generic hybridity. The impasse in the discussion concerning the genre of Col 1:15–20 rests in part on the preference of one aspect of analysis to the neglect of others, such as focusing on syntax to the neglect of function. Depending on precisely which aspect drives the analysis, researchers are likely to arrive at different conclusions. To a certain extent, this problem accompanies any discussion of genre, for theoretical conceptions of genre exist in a dynamic tension between the “outer

¹⁷⁶ *Subl.* 33.5 (Fyfe/Russell, LCL, rev.).

¹⁷⁷ In a recent book, the religious studies scholar Ulrich Berner has made a similar suggestion: one ought not to allow the generic designation “dialogue” in the case of Plato’s writings to obscure the instructive function which some of them possess. Though the *Euthyphro*, for example, ultimately passes no judgment on the question at hand, it is unmistakable that other dialogues aim to instruct the interlocutor and lead him to the truth (*Religionsswissenschaft: historisch orientiert* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020], 324–25).

characteristics of the literature, its semantic structures, and its intentional functions.”¹⁷⁸ The problem of how exactly to conceive of a genre is “one of the oldest and, even today, most heatedly debated problems of literary studies, with which not least of all the question as to the scientific character of [literary studies] is touched upon.”¹⁷⁹

What seems widely accepted today is the reasonable claim that genres are not metaphysical entities sitting on some cosmic shelf.¹⁸⁰ Yet they *are* real as mental constructs that readers, ancient and modern, use to order disparate phenomena. According to this model, genres are cognitive schemata that are activated in the process of reading and thus do not exist for themselves outside of this process.¹⁸¹ They are culturally conditioned, are acquired through “literary socialization,”¹⁸² arise out of a particular time and place, and are subject to an ongoing process of intersubjective negotiation concerning what they are.¹⁸³ Klaudia Seibel notes:

¹⁷⁸ Günther Schweikle, “Gattungen,” in *Metzler Literatur Lexikon: Begriffe und Definitionen*, eds. Günther and Irmgard Schweikle, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1990), 167–68, 168. After a short list of twentieth-century approaches that attempted to go beyond the theoretical discussions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we read: “Alle diese Vorschläge offenbaren die Problematik theoret[ischen] Gattungskonzepte. Sie bewegen sich in unterschiedl[icher] Stringenz in dem sachgegebenen Spannungsfeld zwischen äußeren Merkmalen der Literatur, ihren semant[ischen] Strukturen und intentionalen Funktionen. Die Theorie der Gattungen kann letztl[ich], will sie sachorientiert bleiben, nicht mehr sein als ein statist[isches], phänomenolog[isches] Ordnungsgefüge, besser noch eine Orientierungshilfe in der Fülle literar[ischer] Manifestationen nach erkenn- und benennbaren typ[ischen] und ont[ischen] Merkmalen und Präsentationsformen. Dabei ergeben sich naturgemäß Grenzfälle, Mischformen, welche die Grundstrukturen in Frage zu stellen scheinen” (168).

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Klaus Müller-Dyes, “Gattungsfragen,” in *Grundzüge der Literaturwissenschaft*, 8th ed., eds. Heinz L. Arnold and Heinrich Detering (Munich: dtv, 2008), 323–48, 323: “Das Gattungsproblem ist eines der ältesten und bis heute am heftigsten umstrittenen Probleme der Literaturwissenschaft, mit dem nicht zuletzt auch die Frage nach ihrer Wissenschaftlichkeit berührt wird. Seine klassische Formulierung hat das Problem in der Auseinandersetzung zwischen Nominalisten und Realisten um das Verhältnis von Allgemeinen (‘universale’) und Besonderem (‘res’) im Universalienstreit des Mittelalters gefunden.” Müller-Dyes goes on to note that the reason this problem did not make an impact in discussions of literary genre until the twentieth century can be explained by the way that the discussions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries oriented themselves on real generic categories of classical antiquity, using these historical genres in such a normative way that the fundamental epistemological question could never emerge.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Müller-Dyes, *ibid.*, 325.

¹⁸¹ Wolfgang Hallet, “Gattungen als kognitive Schemata: Die multigenerische Interpretation literarischer Texte,” in *Gattungstheorie und Gattungsgeschichte*, ELCH 28, eds. Marion Gymnich, Birgit Neumann, and Ansgar Nünning (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2007), 53–71, 57.

¹⁸² Klaudia Seibel, “Mixing Genres: Levels of Contamination and the Formation of Generic Hybrids,” in *Gattungstheorie und Gattungsgeschichte*, 137–50, 139.

¹⁸³ Commenting on the attempt of traditional generic classification of literature to mimic the distinction between *genus* and *species* as one practices it in the natural sciences, Peter Wenzel writes: “Solche Versuche waren jedoch zum Scheitern verurteilt, weil literar[ische] anders als biologische G[attung]en nicht an einen genetisch fixierten, die Replizierung der Einzelform bestimmenden Code gebunden, sondern intentional gestaltbare, sehr flexible

“With the aid of a cognitive approach it is possible to formulate a better description of what happens when we talk about generic contamination: a literary text triggers more than one cognitive schema that can be related to the elements found in the text. Thus, hybridization or the bringing together of different generic concepts is above all part of the act of reading and cannot be regarded without bearing this fact in mind while focusing on the text.”¹⁸⁴

This approach could offer a way of overcoming the impasse inherent in discussions of the genre of Col 1:15–20 by readjusting the terms of the argument.

Of course, the possibility of a generic hybridity cuts against the grain of a major trend in the New Testament exegesis of the twentieth century: the axiom of a ‘pure form’ or ‘pure genre’ with which classical form-critical research (*Formgeschichte*) operated. I name both ‘form’ and ‘genre’ together here because their identity with or distinction from one another is a subject on which, practically speaking, there was no agreement in the twentieth century.¹⁸⁵ Following a survey of form-critical research in his book *Formen und Gattungen im Neuen Testament*, Klaus Berger notes:

“Der Begriff Formgeschichte wird für höchst Unterschiedliches gebraucht. Die extremen Pole sind einerseits die Erforschung allein der mündlichen kleinen Einheiten (H. Köster) und andererseits Gattungsbestimmung und Gattungsgeschichte (H. Barth/O.H. Steck) ohne besondere soziologische Fragestellung, anhand des vorliegenden Textes.”¹⁸⁶

Nevertheless, if one operates under the ‘axiom of the pure form,’ then the suggestion of generic hybridity can only be considered non-sensical. The temptation to uphold the axiom is understandable: once one admits the premise that “every linguistic statement has a form that is inseparable from its content,”¹⁸⁷ then it becomes difficult to justify allowing mixed forms and genres because the precision with which one could specify a statement’s content – based on its form – would be diminished. The desire to have a scientific method capable of leading to sure results is attractive, of course, and it seems that this axiom promises just that. That promise, however, is an empty one.

The critique of the ‘axiom of the pure form’ of form criticism goes back at least to the 1981 monograph *Analyse und Kritik der formgeschichtlichen Arbeiten von Martin Dibelius und Rudolf Bultmann*, by Reiner Blank. He concludes:

“daß Dibelius und Bultmann stets versuchten, aus der vorliegenden Form eine Reinform zu gewinnen, um anhand der vorgegeben und der neugewonnenen sogenannten ‘ursprünglichen Form’ eine Entwicklung und eine Geschichte darzustellen. Diese Reinform war ein

Gebilde sind. Aufgrund ihrer Flexibilität sind literar[ische] G[attung]en in bes[onderem] Maße den Einflüssen der Lit[eratur]-, Geistes- und Sozialgeschichte unterworfen und somit historisch äußerst wandelbar” (“Literarische Gattung,” in *Metzler Lexikon Literatur- und Kulturtheorie: Ansätze, Personen, Grundbegriffe*, 5th ed., ed. Ansgar Nünning [Stuttgart/Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 2013], 244–45, 244).

¹⁸⁴ Seibel, “Mixing Genres,” 138.

¹⁸⁵ Wilhelm Egger and Peter Wick, *Methodenlehre zum Neuen Testament: Biblische Texte selbstständig auslegen*, 6th ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 2011), 208.

¹⁸⁶ Klaus Berger, *Formen und Gattungen im Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Francke, 2005), 5.

¹⁸⁷ Udo Schnelle, *Einführung in die neutestamentliche Exegese*, 8th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 105.

geschichtsloses Abstraktum, eine geistige Konstruktion, für die es literarisch und im Blick auf die Tradition der Formen nicht den geringsten Anhalt gab.”¹⁸⁸

Although it seems that later form critical work operated under this assumption – as Berger, Egger and Wick, and Finnern and Rüggeheimer point out – it is unclear to me whether Bultmann himself saw it this way. In his seminal form-critical work, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, first published in 1921, Bultmann admitted that a piece of tradition – extant literature – might evince a mixture of genres and thus it might not be easy to assign it to one category; however, he distinguishes the fact of mixed genres from the idea of a pure form or genre, thus maintaining the notion that pure forms and genres exist. Things are complicated by the fact that Bultmann understood *Gattung* and *Form* in the form-critical sense not as aesthetic concepts, but as sociological ones, which distinguishes his use of form and genre from the way in which the terms were typically used in later exegetical literature. It seems that the later form-critical work that attempted to take up Bultmann’s mantle omitted this distinction and thus took his understanding of the pure form, in a sociological sense, and applied it to literary works and thus imbued it with a different meaning than his.¹⁸⁹

Yet regardless of the extent to which later form-critical exegesis corresponded to Bultmann’s program, the *modus operandi* of supposing the ‘axiom of the pure form’ simply seems to have less heuristic value for the ancient texts we study than a conception of genres as cognitive schemata.

2. Conclusion

The most we can say is that Col 1:15–20 contains a hymnic praise of Christ. It evinces the laudatory and didactic functions of a hymn, contains a series of universal predications characteristic of some hymns, it echoes the syntax of a Jewish prayer, it is embedded in an epistle, and the assumption that the author is quoting a piece of tradition is no more likely than the assumption that he formulated it *ad hoc*, using his own formulations or perhaps formulations familiar from a liturgical setting.¹⁹⁰ For the sake of ease – and because I prioritize function over form – I will refer to Col 1:15–20 as a “hymn” for the remainder of this study.

¹⁸⁸ Reiner Blank, *Analyse und Kritik der formgeschichtlichen Arbeiten von Martin Dibelius und Rudolf Bultmann*, Theologische Dissertationen 16 (Basel: Reinhardt, 1981), 201. This interpretation is echoed, faintly, in Sönke Finnern and Jan Rüggeheimer, *Methoden der neutestamentlichen Exegese: Ein Lehr- und Arbeitsbuch* (Tübingen: Francke, 2016), 90.

¹⁸⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition: Mit einem Nachwort von Gerd Theißen*, 10th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 4–5.

¹⁹⁰ Concerning the attempt of some researchers to use the generic designation “hymn” for Col 1:15–20 in their attempt to recover something of the earliest Christian worship services, cf. the cautionary remark offered by Vollenweider, “Hymnus, Enkomion oder Psalm?,” 210: “Stilistische Beobachtungen sind als solche kein hinreichender Grund, diachrone Überlieferungsprozesse zu postulieren; möglicherweise lassen sie sich methodisch anspruchsloser lediglich als Indizien für einen Stilwechsel auf der Ebene des vorliegenden Textes deuten.”

Chapter 3

Exegesis of Colossians 1:15–20

Having laid the groundwork for an exegetical analysis of Col 1:15–20 by examining relevant image discourses and by considering the textual basis for the exegesis, the circumstances of the text’s origination, and the anatomy of the text – its place in the letter’s architecture, its function, and its genre – we now turn our attention to the passage in question and especially to its characterization of Jesus Christ as the εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, the “image of the invisible God.”

The examination of image discourses above has shown that εἰκὼν can be used in various settings with different meanings. Though the basic meaning of εἰκὼν is “image” in the sense of a material figural representation, other meanings derive from this and εἰκὼν can therefore also signify mental and linguistic representations such as a “similitude,” “simile,” “metaphor,” or “allegory.” In short, an “image” is any entity which conveys in some way the likeness of its model. In this sense, an εἰκὼν can be the referential sign of an intelligible, transcendent reality and thus have an epistemic importance. It can be used to “summon understanding” (cf. Plato, *Resp.* 7.524d), it can be applied to the cosmos as a sense-perceptible image of the intelligible world (Plato, *Tim.* 92c; Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 372e–f) and can signify the mental image which the artisan has of the divine during the construction of a material figural representation, namely one enduring form that encompasses and conveys the totality of the divine being’s “nature and power” (Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 12.70).

In the LXX, εἰκὼν is used in Gen 1:26–27 to translate עִצְבָּן, which in the Priestly Document conveyed that the human being was created as God’s deputy or mandatary, receiving a designation, status, and dignity that had previously been applied only to pharaohs and kings. Further, the wording of the LXX introduced a shift in meaning: rather than ἐν εἰκόνι θεοῦ or ὡς εἰκόνα [θεοῦ],¹ we read that the human was created κατ’ εἰκόνα θεοῦ, “according to the image of God.” This opened the door to the consideration, as we find it in Philo, that there exists some “Image of God” distinct both from the Creator God and from the human. And lastly, common to both Philo and the Wisdom of Solomon is

¹ These formulations are found in the later translations of Aquila (ca. A.D. 130), Symmachus (second/third cent. A.D.), and Theodotion (second cent. A.D.); cf. the critical apparatus in John William Wever’s edition: *Genesis*, Septuaginta 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), 80–81.

the notion that the Logos as the “Image of God” or Sophia as the “image of God’s goodness” was involved in the creation of the cosmos. In order to see which of the aforementioned interpretive possibilities might play a role in the use of εἰκών in Col 1:15, we now turn to an exegetical analysis of Col 1:15–20.

A. Verses 15–16: What is the “Image of the Invisible God”?

After introducing the Son as the locus of redemption in Col 1:14, the author proceeds to call him the “image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” What exactly this means is explained by the ὅτι-clause that constitutes the entirety of v. 16. Both formulations, εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου and πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως, are novel, having no exact parallel in the LXX, the New Testament, nor any other Jewish nor Greco-Roman literature. Any analysis of the constituent motifs of v. 15, fruitful as the endeavor certainly is, will not be sufficient if one forebear elucidating the connection both between the predications of v. 15 and between the statements of v. 15 and v. 16; both verses must be read synthetically. To that end, we begin with the examination of v. 15 and proceed thereafter to the elaboration of that content which is provided by v. 16.

I. 15a: Image of the Invisible God

Of the 23 occurrences of εἰκών in the New Testament,² eleven concern idols: one instance in Rom 1:23 and ten in Revelation.³ These latter ten refer exclusively to the Beast and the image of the Beast; the term εἰκών is never applied to humanity nor to Jesus Christ. If we omit the material from Revelation, a different statistical picture emerges. Of the remaining 13 occurrences, only one instance of the term εἰκών refers explicitly to idols (Rom 1:23), and three other occurrences are found in the Synoptic Gospels, in a reference to Caesar’s imprint on a coin (Matt 22:20; par. Mark 12:16, Luke 20:24). In this pericope, the notion that humanity bears God’s image is implicit and necessary for the logic of Jesus’ statement that just as one should render the coin bearing Caesar’s image to Caesar, one ought to render to God what is God’s; that is, one may give money to Caesar, but oneself to God.⁴ If we consider the remaining nine

² Matt 22:20 (par. Mark 12:16; Luke 20:24); Rom 1:23, 8:29; 1 Cor 11:7, 15:49 (*bis*); 2 Cor 3:18, 4:4; Col 1:15, 3:10; Heb 10:1; Rev 13:14, 13:15 (*ter*), 14:9, 11, 15:2, 16:2, 19:20, 20:4.

³ Rev 13:14, 13:15 (*ter*), 14:9, 11, 15:2, 16:2, 19:20, 20:4.

⁴ See Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *Menschwerdung*, TOBITH 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 229, n. 49: “[Die] Argumentation Jesu [beruht darauf], dass,

occurrences of εἰκόν in the New Testament,⁵ we find that eight of them bear, in some manner, on Christology.⁶ Further, seven of these eight occur in the Corpus Paulinum. In short: with the exception of 1 Cor 11:7 and Rom 1:23, εἰκόν is a Christological term in the Corpus Paulinum.

Before proceeding to the explanation of v. 15b in order to provide more contour to the use of εἰκόν in v. 15a, one more crucial element of v. 15a must be noted. The substantive εἰκόν is modified by the adjective ἀόρατος, “unseen,” “invisible,” which suggests that this εἰκόν has an epistemological dimension. In speaking of the invisible God, the author takes a conceptual step away from the OT tradition. Indeed, the OT tradition affirmed that God cannot be seen, but this was grounded in the notion of the human’s inability to withstand a direct confrontation with God’s holiness and power (e.g., Exod 33:20, Isa 6:5) rather than the notion that God were a noetic entity, such as one might find in the Socratic, Platonic, and Pythagorean traditions, or, as in the case of the Stoic tradition, a cosmological principle which, while material, cannot be directly perceived by the senses.⁷ As Plutarch puts it in summarizing the view of Pythagoras: “[The] first principle [is] beyond sense or feeling, [is] invisible (ἀόρατος) and uncreated, and discernible only by the mind.”⁸

Further, ἀόρατος not only conveys that something cannot be grasped by sense perception, but also that it is either not known or not capable of being known directly. The use of “sight” or “beholding” as a metaphor for knowledge was a component of Greek philosophical traditions; one need only think of such terms as θεωρία, “a beholding,”⁹ or οἶδα, “I know,” which is the perfect tense of εἶδω, “I see.” Or one could think of the interplay of light, sight, and knowledge in Plato’s images of the sun and the cave in the *Republic*, which we

wie der Denar das Bild des Kaisers trägt und deshalb ‘des Kaisers ist’, so der Mensch das Bild Gottes und deshalb ‘Gottes’ ist.”

⁵ 1 Cor 11:7; 15:49 (*bis*); 2 Cor 3:18; 4:4; Rom 8:29; Col 1:15; 3:11; Heb 10:1. Although “Christ” does not occur in 2 Cor 3:18, Rom 8:29, or 1 Cor 15:49, the context suggests that Christ is the point of reference. Of course, this presumes that 2 Cor 3:18 can be interpreted in light of Rom 8:29 and therefore the “image” to which Christians are being conformed is the “image of [God’s] Son.”

⁶ 1 Cor 15:49 (*bis*); 2 Cor 3:18; 4:4; Rom 8:29; Col 1:15; 3:11; Heb 10:1. I except here 1 Cor 11:7, but include Heb 10:1, for there the αὐτὴ ἢ εἰκόν τῶν πραγμάτων can be read as an anticipation of the description of Christ in Heb 10:5–14.

⁷ Cf. Plutarch, *Numa* 8.7, on Pythagoras; Xenophon, *Mem.* 4.3.13–14, where Socrates employs the metaphor of wind to describe the god who is “unseen” (ἀόρατος) and yet can be discerned through his works in the world; Ps.-Aristotle, *De Mundo* 399a; on the Stoics, cf. Aëtius, *Placita* 1.3.25 (*Doxographi Graeci* [ed. Diels], p. 289; = *SVF* 1.85), and Diogenes Laertius 7.88, 134–136, 138, 147; Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 381b, 382f, 383a; *Amat.* 756d; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 12.59.

⁸ Plutarch, *Numa* 8.7 (Perrin, LCL).

⁹ Cf. Plato, *Resp.* 6.486a; 7.517d (cf. Franco Volpi, “Theoria: Philosophischer Begriff,” *DNP* 12/1:401–2).

have already discussed (see above, “Plato of Athens”). If something can be known because it can be “seen,” then it stands to reason that what cannot be seen cannot be known. And this is precisely the use of ἀόρατος that we find in a theological context in some documents of the early Roman imperial period.

Yet does this mean that God is completely unknowable or ineffable, as some sources from the early Imperial era suggest? For Philo, the God of the Hebrew scriptures is “the invisible (ἀόρατος) and greatest God.”¹⁰ Similar to Plutarch (*Is. Os.* 381b), Philo can say in of the human mind, when comparing its essence to God, that it “is invisible, itself seeing all things,” and yet he goes further, saying that while the mind – and thus, God – “has an unknown essence, it grasps the essences of other things” (*Opif.* 69).¹¹ Similarly, we read in the *Sibylline Oracles* 3.11–12 that “[there is] one God, sole ruler, utterly ineffable (ἀθέσφατος), dwelling in the ether, self-produced, unseen (ἀόρατος), [yet] himself seeing all things.”¹² God is thus not only materially invisible, but also conceptually so. As Philo puts it in *De posteritate Caini*:

For whenever the God-loving soul embarks upon an examination of the essence of Being, it arrives at an inquiry into that which is formless and invisible, from which the greatest reward comes about for the soul, namely to comprehend that God’s being is incomprehensible for everyone, and to see this very thing, that God cannot be seen. (*Post.* 15)

ὅταν οὖν φιλόθεος ψυχή τὸ τί ἐστὶ τὸ ὄν κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν ζητῇ, εἰς ἀειδή και ἀόρατον ἔρχεται ζητήσιν, ἐξ ἧς αὐτῇ περιγίνεται μέγιστον ἀγαθόν, καταλαβεῖν ὅτι ἀκατάληπτος ὁ κατὰ τὸ εἶναι θεὸς παντὶ και αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἰδεῖν ὅτι ἐστὶν ἀόρατος.

Further, Philo notes that even if one were to view God in his light, one would be blinded, and thus the ascent of the soul to the dwelling of God can only end up revealing *that* God is (*Praem.* 44–46), not precisely *how* or *what* God is (cf. also *Opif.* 69–71).¹³

Whereas it was not yet a widespread view among pagan philosophers of the latter first century and early second cent A.D. that God’s invisibility also necessarily entailed God’s ineffability or unknowability – one need only think of Dio Chrysostom’s simultaneously insistence on divine invisibility on the one

¹⁰ *Somm.* 1.72: ὁ ἀόρατος και μέγιστος θεός. Cf. also *Migr.* 183. Beyond theological matters, Philo follows Plato in making a general distinction between noetic and perceptible realities, the former contemplated by the mind, the latter received through sense perception (cf. *Opif.* 53).

¹¹ *Opif.* 69: ἀόρατός τε γάρ ἐστιν, αὐτὸς τὰ πάντα ὄρων, και ἄδηλον ἔχει τὴν οὐσίαν, τὰς τῶν ἄλλων καταλαμβάνων.

¹² *Sib. Or.* 3.11–12: εἷς θεός ἐστὶ μόναρχος ἀθέσφατος αἰθέρι ναίων αὐτοφυῆς ἀόρατος ὁρώμενος αὐτὸς ἅπαντα.

¹³ Francesca Calabi, *Filone di Alessandria*, Pensatori 32 (Rome: Carocci, 2013), 80, notes that in addition, the ability to catch glimpses of the “rays” of divine splendor is relative to the cognitive and moral status of the human subject.

hand and both the innate conception of the divine and the inexhaustibility of human language in describing the divine on the other¹⁴ – it seems that this connection emerged clearly in the second century A.D., as we can see in Maximus of Tyre.¹⁵

In his second *Dissertatio*, the orator Maximus of Tyre raises the question of the propriety of figural images of the divine. At the end of his deliberations, he notes that the inability to name God, the inability to express the divine nature by way of verbal utterance, and the inability to see God all ground the inability of humans to apprehend God’s essence. Because this essence cannot be apprehended, the human striving of naming and depicting the divine is little more than a stopgap born of human frailty. In the end, this human striving cannot transcend its own limitations:

For God, the father and fashioner of all things, elder than the sun, elder than the heaven, [is] greater than time and season and every flowing nature, not named by the lawgivers, inexpressible by voice, and invisible to the eyes; not being able to apprehend his essence, we strive with our utterances, and with names and images, and with patterns made of gold and ivory and silver, and with plants and rivers and mountaintops and running streams, desiring knowledge of him, yet under weakness naming his nature by way of the things that are beautiful to us. (*Diss.* 2.10)

Ὁ μὲν γὰρ θεός, ὁ τῶν ὄντων πατήρ καὶ δημιουργός, {ὁ} πρεσβύτερος μὲν ἡλίου, πρεσβύτερος δὲ οὐρανοῦ, κρείττων δὲ χρόνου καὶ αἰῶνος καὶ πάσης ῥεούσης φύσεως, ἀνόνημος νομοθέταις καὶ ἄρρητος φωνῇ καὶ ὄρατος ὀφθαλμοῖς· οὐκ ἔχοντες δὲ αὐτοῦ λαβεῖν τὴν οὐσίαν, ἐπερειδόμεθα φωναῖς καὶ ὀνόμασιν καὶ ζῳοῖς, καὶ τύποις χρυσοῦ καὶ ἐλέφαντος καὶ ἀργύρου, καὶ φυτοῖς καὶ ποταμοῖς καὶ κορυφαῖς καὶ νάμασιν, ἐπιθυμοῦντες μὲν αὐτοῦ τῆς νοήσεως, ὑπὸ δὲ ἀσθενείας τὰ παρ’ ἡμῶν καλὰ τῇ ἐκείνου φύσει ἐπονομάζοντες·

¹⁴ Gianluca Ventrella, “Commentaire,” in *Dion de Pruse, dit Dion Chrysostome: Œuvres. Discours Olympique, ou sur la conception première de la divinité (Or. XII). À Athènes, sur sa fuite (Or. XIII)*, ed. Ventrella (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2017), 137–493, 408–9.

¹⁵ The *Epitome doctrinae platonicae (Didaskalikos)* of Alcinous is not included here because it is not clear to me that his attestation of the ineffability of God excludes the possibility of knowing God, for although Alcinous says that “the first God is eternal, ineffable” (*Epit.* 164.31: ὁ πρῶτος θεὸς αἰδιός ἐστιν, ἄρρητος [...]), he subsequently states that God is “ineffable and apprehended by the mind alone” (*Epit.* 165.5: Ἀρρητος δ’ ἐστὶ καὶ νῶ μόνῳ ληπτὸς [...]) and then proceeds to describe three processes of thought (νοήσις) which one might characterize as the *via remotionis*, *via analogiae*, and the *via eminentiae* (*Epit.* 165.16–34). On the meaning of ἄρρητος in Alcinous and the *via remotionis* as a precursor of a *via negationis*, see Michele Abbate, “Non-dicibilità del ‘Primo Dio’ e *via remotionis* nel cap. X del *Didaskalikos*,” in *Arrhetos Theos: L’ineffabilità del primo principio nel medio platonismo*, ed. Francesca Calabi (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2002), 55–75. For similar reasons, Apuleius’ *De deo Socratis* 3.4–6 is not considered here. On the question of the relation between ineffability and unknowability in Apuleius, and of his thought vis-à-vis Plutarch and Alcinous, see Pierluigi Donini, “Apuleio: Ineffabilità o inconoscibilità del principio?,” in Calabi, *Arrhetos Theos*, 93–102.

For Maximus, the ineffability of the invisible God is underscored by the fact that our ability to obtain and express knowledge of God is constrained by the medium of human language and also by human perceptions of the fair and beautiful, and therefore cannot be immediate, unadulterated knowledge. The inability to know God therefore has a twofold grounding, namely in God’s invisibility and in the weakness of human faculties of thought and expression.

As for a possible connection between invisibility and unknowability, Colossians evinces a stronger conceptual affinity with Dio Chrysostom and Plutarch than with Philo, the third *Sibylline Oracle*, and Maximus of Tyre: although God is “unseen” (ἀόρατος) and thus inaccessible to human perception, the role that an image plays in conveying something about the nature of God seems to prevent the author from saying that God is ultimately ineffable (ἄρρητος) or incomprehensible (ἀκατάληπτος). The “image of the invisible God” serves the purpose of revealing something about the character and nature of the God who can neither be seen nor known in an unmediated fashion. What would otherwise remain vague and obscure takes on a representation that can be apprehended. This is undergirded by the motifs of concealment and revelation that appear later on in Col 1:26: the word of God is said to be “the mystery that was hidden from the ages and from the generations – but now has been revealed to [God’s] saints,” and in the following sentence, the author makes it clear that this mystery is “Christ within you, the hope of glory” (1:27).¹⁶ In Christ are hidden, further, “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2:3), for “the fullness of divinity dwelt in him bodily” (2:9). The “image of the invisible God,” therefore, serves not only to display something of the divine nature, but also affirms that this God does not remain hidden, but chooses rather to make himself known to humanity.

II. 15b: Firstborn of All Creation

Here, in v. 15b, the Son who is the image of the invisible God is said to be the “firstborn of all creation.” The grammar and syntax of Col 1:15–16 suggest that the two predicates εἰκὼν and πρωτότοκος cohere tightly with one another: (1) they are both predicated of the same subject, and (2) v. 15b is connected asyndetically to v. 15a and the whole of v. 15 is followed by the explanatory ὅτι-clause of v. 16.¹⁷ Prima facie, the two clauses of v. 15 are akin to a

¹⁶ The motifs of concealment and revelation play a significant role in 1 Cor 2:6–10, and elsewhere in the Corpus Paulinum, the motif of revelation figures prominently (1 Cor 14:6, 26; 2 Cor 4:1–7, 12:1, 7; Gal 1:12, 2:2; Phil 3:15).

¹⁷ Similarly, Ugo Vanni argues that the asyndetic connection in v. 15 suggests that the second clause belongs semantically to the first as its further specification (“Immagine di Dio invisibile, primogenito di ogni creazione (Col. 1,15),” in *La cristologia in San Paolo: Atti della XXIII settimana biblica*, ed. by the Associazione Biblica Italiana [Brescia: Paideia, 1976], 97–113, 111–12).

parallelismus membrorum insofar as the Son is described in v. 15a in his relation to God the Father and in the v. 15b in his relation to creation; as we shall see, however, both predicates, *πρωτότοκος* and *εικών*, relate the Son to the Father and to creation. As we turn to an examination of the term *πρωτότοκος*, we begin with a lexical observation before moving on to the theological use of the term in the LXX; because the term does not occur in Greek mythology or philosophical theology, nor in Philo's writings – instead, one encounters there *πρεσβύτατος* and *πρωτόγονος* – these sources will not be considered here, but rather in the exegesis of v. 17a.

We are dealing with the proparoxytone variant – that is, accent on the antepenult – of the word *πρωτότοκος*. The paroxytone lexeme *πρωτοτόκος* is a nominal adjective signifying a mother who has borne her first offspring.¹⁸ The proparoxytone variant *πρωτότοκος* has a passive meaning, namely “firstborn.” Both variants of the term can be applied to humans and animals,¹⁹ and there is at least one instance of the proparoxytone variant, *πρωτότοκος*, being used of an adopted son in order to ensure the child's rights and privileges as a legitimate heir.²⁰ Clearly, the legal application of the term *πρωτότοκος* is not restricted to biological relations, and this application aids us in seeing the full extent of the symbolic meaning of the term. Whoever has the status of *πρωτότοκος* is ensured special benefits from the head of the family and, further, the ‘firstborn son’ enjoys a relation of primacy over all siblings born – or adopted – thereafter.²¹ It is surely the importance of the firstborn encapsulated

¹⁸ *LSJ*, s.v. *πρωτοτόκος*. The differentiation between the two is offered by the second cent. B.C. grammarian Ptolemaeus of Ascalon (cf. Peter Barr Reid Forbes, Nigel Wilson, and Simon Hornblower, “Ptolemaeus (1),” *OCD* 1233) in his *Περὶ διαφορᾶς λέξεων κατὰ στοιχείων*, “On the differentiation of words according to [their] syllable[s]”: see Π.122.1: *πρωτότοκος* καὶ *πρωτοτόκος* διαφέρει. *πρωτότοκος* μὲν λέγεται ὁ πρῶτος γεννηθεὶς, *πρωτοτόκος* δὲ ἢ <πρώτως> γεννήσασα. “*πρωτότοκος* and *πρωτοτόκος* differ. The one who is born first is called *πρωτότοκος*, and the woman who has borne <for the first time> [is called] *πρωτοτόκος*.” Cf. also, for example, Homer, *Il.* 17.5, and Plato, *Theaet.* 151c, for the use of *πρωτοτόκος*.

¹⁹ Cf. Arist. *Hist. an.* 546a.12 (5.14), using *πρωτοτόκος* of a sow.

²⁰ See Papyrus 28.15 of the Leipzig Papyrus Collection (ed. Mitteis). The adoption document from the Leipzig Collection stems from Hermopolis in the fourth cent. A.D. and conveys how the child Paësis, whose father Parnuthios has died, is given into the custody of his uncle Silbanos on the authority of their common mother Teeus (i.e., the mother of Parnuthios and Silbanos). Parnuthios had requested before his death that Paësis be given to Silbanos in order to receive a good upbringing. Teeus therefore declares in the adoption document that she is giving Paësis to Silbanos so that he might be “his right and first-born son, as though born from your own blood” (*πρ[ό]ς τὸ εἶναι σου υἱ[ὸ]ν γνήσιον καὶ πρωτότοκον ὡς ἐξ ἰδίου αἵματος γεννηθέντα σοι*).

²¹ For an interesting use of *πρωτότοκος*, see *Anthologia Graeca* 9.213, where the city of Colophon is praised for having nursed two noble poets: first Homer, and later, Nicander (*πρωτότοκον μὲν Ὅμηρον, ἅτῃρ Νικανδρὸν ἔπειτα, ἀμφοτέρους Μουσίας οὐρανίησι φίλους*). It is possible that *πρωτότοκος* was applied to Homer not only to signify temporal

in this privileged status that stands behind the command of the Mosaic Law to dedicate firstborn sons to God (Exod 22:28 LXX).

Aside from this dedication, there are two significant theological uses of *πρωτότοκος* in the LXX, referring in the one case to Israel and referring in the other case to the king. In Exod 4:22, Moses is instructed to announce to Pharaoh, “Israel is my firstborn son” (Υἱὸς πρωτότοκός μου Ἰσραηλ, as a translation of *בְּנִי בְּכָרִי יִשְׂרָאֵל*). In Jer 38:9, when the prophet proclaims the restoration of Israel (vv. 1–4), God declares, “For I have become to Israel as a Father, and Ephraim is my firstborn.”²² In Ps 89:27 (88:28 LXX), this notion of being made the firstborn of God is applied to the king: “And I will make him [my] firstborn, supreme among the kings of the earth.”²³ Just as the designation as “firstborn” is a consequence of God’s promise of restoration in Jer 38:1–4, so too is the king’s adoption as God’s firstborn accompanied by God’s promise “to preserve my mercy for him forever, and my covenant with him [shall] stand firm” (Ps 88:29 LXX).²⁴ With the assurance of the firstborn’s legitimacy comes the inheritance of divine blessing.

In Col 1:15b, the Son is said to be *πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως*. The term *πρωτότοκος* not only describes the Son in his relation to the Father, but also in his relation to the other side of the Creator-creature divide. The theological significance of this cannot be overstated. “Son” is a relational concept, implying an Other; namely, a parent. Without a parent, there is no son, and vice-versa. “Firstborn” is a relational concept as well, yet not in the same manner. That is, “firstborn” can indeed imply the first in a series and therefore a multiplicity of Others,²⁵ but it is not necessary that some such series exist.²⁶ It is conceivable that a parent has a firstborn child without having further children;

priority but also priority in status; this might explain why the author chose to juxtapose the adverb *ἔπειτα* with the substantive *πρωτότοκος* rather than with the corresponding adverb. A similar notion of primacy in status is conveyed by *πρωτόγονος* in an Orphic hymn to Dionysus (ed. Quandt, Hymn 30, p. 24, line 2). Dionysus was, obviously, not the firstborn of Zeus, and thus the claim that he is *πρωτόγονος* might be accredited to an attempt to increase his prestige. In addition, the reason could lie in its role in a wordplay of numeric epithets that praise him as lord of the Bacchic revelry: *Κυκλήσκω Διόνυσσον [...] πρωτόγονον, διφυῆ, τρίγονον, Βακχεῖον ἄνακτα* (lines 1–2).

²² Jer 38:9: *ὅτι ἐγενόμην τῷ Ἰσραηλ εἰς πατέρα, καὶ Ἐφραϊμ πρωτότοκός μου ἐστίν.*

²³ Ps 88:28 (LXX): *κἀγὼ πρωτότοκον θήσομαι αὐτόν, ὑψηλὸν παρὰ τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν τῆς γῆς.* Cf. the use of *υἱός* in Ps 2:7.

²⁴ Ps 88:29 (LXX): *εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα φυλάξω αὐτῷ τὸ ἔλεός μου, καὶ ἡ διαθήκη μου πιστὴ αὐτῷ.*

²⁵ Cf. Frisk’s *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, s.v. *πρῶτος*.

²⁶ Cf. Wilhelm Michaelis, “*πρῶτος, πρῶτον, κτλ.*,” *TWNT* 6:866–83, 874. Michaelis goes so far as to conclude for the LXX usage of the term: “Die Vokabel ist überhaupt nicht mehr am Vorhandensein anderer Söhne orientiert, sie bezeichnet das Volk, den Einzelnen, den König als von Gott besonders geliebt” (875).

a firstborn might simply be “that which first opens the womb.”²⁷ Therefore, it is no foregone conclusion that the πρωτότοκος of Col 1:15b should be defined in relation to anything else aside from his parent, and therein lies the significance of the addition πάσης κτίσεως.

Although the relation between Father and Son is clearly one of the associations evoked by the use of πρωτότοκος, the description of the Son as πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως in Col 1:15b directs the focus towards the relation of the Son to *everything else*.²⁸ It aims to reassure the addressees that: (1) the Son holds the place of primacy over all creation, and (2) there is some sense in which all of creation is connected to the Son; that is, if we are to take the familial metaphor seriously, as seems most prudent based on the use of πρωτότοκος in the Corpus Paulinum. When Paul uses the term in Rom 8:29 – along with the term εικόν! – it expresses the concomitant circumstance of the conformation of believers to the “image of his [sc. God’s] Son”: insofar as they are conformed to the image of the Son, the Son becomes the “firstborn among many brothers.”²⁹ Yet whereas Paul applies this thought to “those whom God foreknew,” which presumably refers to believers in Christ, the author of Colossians extends the range of the Son’s siblings to include all of creation. Just as the Son is connected to the Father, there is some sense in which all of creation – and thus the addressees of Colossians – are connected to the Son and through him to the Father. Of course, the creation (κτίσις) figures prominently in Rom 8:18–30, and it is clear that creation itself “awaits the revelation of the children of God [...] in the hope that it will be liberated from its bondage to decay, [liberated] unto the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (v. 21).

²⁷ Cf. Exod 34:19 (LXX): πᾶν διανοίγον μήτραν ἐμοί, τὰ ἀρσενικά, πρωτότοκον μόσχου καὶ πρωτότοκον προβάτου.

²⁸ Understandably, this might open the door to the confusion that the Son were the first creature of God, thereby suggesting that the primacy of the Son over creation is merely temporal. That this is not the case might be deduced from the lexical asymmetry of the phrase πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως. The two verbs underlying the substantives (i.e., τίκω and κτίζω) are not identical. If the author had intended to convey that the Son is the first creature of many, then he would have been better served to offer a formulation such as πρωτόκτιστος πάσης κτίσεως (Michaelis, “πρῶτος, πρῶτον, κτλ.,” 879–80: “Denn Erschaffenwerden und Geborenwerden sind verschiedene Termini, und πρωτότοκος darf nicht ohne weiteres als Synonym zu πρωτόκτιστος genommen werden.” Cf. also André Feuillet, *Le Christ sagesse de Dieu d’après les épîtres pauliniennes*, ÉBib [Paris: Gabalda, 1966], 205: “Selon cet hymne, le Christ n’a pas été créé, mais est antérieur à toutes les créatures”). The Son is πρωτότοκος and therefore bears an intimate relation to the Father; everything else must be described as κτίσις and therefore does not inherently bear that intimate relation to the Father. See also Giovanni Luzzi, *Le lettere di San Paolo agli Efesini, ai Colossesi, a Filemone, ai Filippesi*, Commentario esegetico-pratico del Nuovo Testamento 3/3 (Florence: Claudiana, 1908), 81.

²⁹ Rom 8:29: ὅτι οὗς προέγνω, καὶ προώρισεν συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνος τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν πρωτότοκον ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς.

Yet the κτίσις of this passage differs from that of Col 1:15b in two respects: (1) though the creation in Rom 8 will benefit from the redemption awaiting the children of God, there is still a distinction between the κτίσις and the πολλοὶ ἀδελφοί of Rom 8:29; (2) the connection between the κτίσις and the πρωτότοκος in Rom 8:18–30, and the benefit conferred upon the former by the latter, is grounded in an eschatological event, whereas the intimate connection between creation and firstborn in Col 1:15b is grounded in *protology*. This latter point will become evident through the analysis of Col 1:16.

III. 16: All Things Created in, through, and unto Him

The predications εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου and πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως do not stand alone, but rather are qualified by v. 16. That is, the particle ὅτι introduces the explanation that the Son is the “image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, *for all things were created in him.*”³⁰ For the first time in the Corpus Paulinum, a direct connection is drawn between the predication εἰκὼν θεοῦ and some manner of involvement in the act of creation. Further, the author asserts that *all* things, rather than a subset of creation, were created “in him.”

As previously mentioned,³¹ a unifying element of Col 1:15–20 is the use of some form of πᾶς. Col 1:16 accounts for two of eight occurrences and in this instance, they function as ‘bookends’ in the description of how the Son is the image of God and the firstborn of all creation. Between the ‘bookends,’ there is a list of those entities said to have been created “in him”: two doublets that express the totality of the universe, and then a fourfold series of powers that serve to describe the universe as a complex power structure.

The first doublet is the phrase ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, “in the heavens and upon the earth.” This division of the cosmos hearkens back to creation account of Gen 1, according to which God is said to have created “the heavens and the earth.” Following this reference cast in the conceptuality of the Hebrew Bible, the author proceeds to recast it in Greek conceptuality,³² for the second doublet concerns the division of reality into “visible” (ὄρατός) and “invisible” (ἀόρατος) entities. The division of reality into “visible” (ὄρατός) and “intelligible” (νοητός) entities was, as we have already seen, a commonplace in the Greek philosophical tradition. This was adopted by Philo, and we see in his writings that the terms νοητός and ἀόρατος are interchangeable and he can

³⁰ Alfio M. Buscemi, *Lettera ai Colossesi: Commentario esegetico*, ASBF 82 (Milan: Edizioni Terra Santa, 2015), 124, also argues in favor of reading ὅτι as a subordinate conjunction that explains both titles ascribed to Christ in Col 1:15, rather than only modifying 1:15b (πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως).

³¹ See above, “The Christological Section: Colossians 1:15–20.”

³² Eduard Schweizer, *Der Brief an die Kolosser*, EKK 12, 4th ed. (Zürich: Benziger, 1997), 54.

therefore use ὁρατός and ἀόρατος to denote a basic cosmological dichotomy.³³ In *Congr.* 144–145, he explains that the distinctive mark of philosophy vis-à-vis other sciences is its subject matter, namely “this world and every visible and invisible essence of all things that exist,” as opposed to isolated elements of the world.³⁴ In *Abr.* 69, he asserts that the error of the Chaldean astrologers was that they believed that the heavenly bodies and their movements were responsible for the governance of the world, and thus “they exalted visible existence and formed no conception of what is invisible and intelligible.”³⁵ When Philo contrasts the perceptible (αἰσθητός) sun with God as the noetic (νοητός) sun in *Spec.* 1.279³⁶ and in the following phrase uses the antithesis ὁρατός/ἀόρατος to refer to the respective rays of each sun, it is clear that the two binary pairs ὁρατός/νοητός and ὁρατός/ἀόρατος are interchangeable for him. In *Spec.* 1.302, he uses the ὁρατός/ἀόρατος dichotomy again when he states that both the perceptible heaven and the noetic heaven belong to God, the latter being the pattern of the former.³⁷ Lastly, he states that the invisible beings who inhabit the element of air were called ἄγγελοι by Moses and called δαίμονες by “other philosophers.”³⁸

The significance of Col 1:16c lies in the fact that the statement is made in a cosmogonic context and thus the Son is said to have been involved in the creation of all things “visible and invisible.” Therefore, as far as this manner of dividing the cosmos is concerned, the scope of the Son’s activity and primacy is all-encompassing. Whatever “seen” and “unseen” reality the reader may envision at the mention of the terms ὁρατός and ἀόρατος, none of them can be said to have come into being apart from the Son. The Son is also said to stand above all visible things, and thus above all material forms of power, such as the forces of nature and natural catastrophes, or human forms of power, such as rulers, institutions, and relations of dependence that seek to impose some sort of control over human lives and over the rest of creation. Again, none of these realities can be understood apart from the fact of their relation to the Son.

³³ This has some precedent in Plato, *Tim.* 36a–37a, for ὁρατός and ἀόρατος occur together in a cosmogonic context; namely, the Demiurge creates the visible world and the invisible soul of the world.

³⁴ Philo, *Congr.* 144–145: ὅλη γὰρ ἐστὶν αὐτῆς [sc. φιλοσοφία] ὁδε ὁ κόσμος καὶ πᾶσα ἡ τῶν ὄντων ὁρατὴ τε καὶ ἀόρατος οὐσία.

³⁵ Philo, *Abr.* 69: <καὶ> τὴν ὁρατὴν οὐσίαν ἐσέμνυνον τῆς ἀοράτου καὶ νοητῆς οὐ λαβόντες ἔννοιαν.

³⁶ Philo, *Spec.* 1.279: ὁ δὲ θεὸς καὶ νόμων ἐστὶ παράδειγμα ἀρχέτυπον καὶ ἡλίου ἥλιος, νοητὸς αἰσθητοῦ, παρέχων ἐκ τῶν ἀοράτων πηγῶν ὁρατὰ φέγγη τῷ βλεπομένῳ.

³⁷ Philo, *Spec.* 1.302: ἢ τοῦτο ἀγνοεῖς, ὅτι τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ὁ αἰσθητός ἐστιν οὐρανὸς καὶ ὁ νοητός, ὁ κυρίως, εἶποι τις ἄν, “οὐρανὸς οὐρανοῦ,” καὶ πάλιν ἡ γῆ καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ σύμπας ὁ κόσμος, ὁ τε ὁρατός καὶ ὁ ἀόρατος καὶ ἀσώματος, τὸ παράδειγμα τοῦ ὁρατοῦ οὐρανοῦ;

³⁸ Philo, *Gig.* 6: οὗς ἄλλοι φιλόσοφοι δαίμονας, ἀγγέλους Μωυσῆς εἴωθεν ὀνομάζειν.

This thought is continued by the claim of v. 16d–e. Here, the scope of creation includes “thrones, dominions, powers, and authorities.” The exact referent of each of these terms is unclear. Are they spiritual powers?³⁹ Earthly, human powers? If the latter, then are we dealing with ruling persons or rather intangible structures of power within the human sphere? A similar series of powers occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only in Eph 1:21, although the author replaces θρόνοι with δυνάμεις and inserts πᾶν ὄνομα ὀνομαζόμενον. Not only is the phrase itself peculiar, but its conjunction with the dichotomy “seen” and “unseen” in v. 16c led Eduard Schweizer to suppose that a phrase cast in “Jewish conceptuality” was inserted by the author so as to follow upon the “Hellenistic summarization of the entire cosmos as ‘seen’ and ‘unseen’” and thus to reinterpret the sphere of Christ’s superiority so as to assuage the addressees’ fears vis-à-vis the “powers and authorities” mentioned in Col 2:10.⁴⁰

Yet we might expect too much of the text if we demand of it a precise identification of the “powers.” The details of the named powers are too vague and, in addition, “all” powers in view, which makes a precise identification of them somewhat superfluous.⁴¹ Secondly, the intention of the passage is an altogether different one. What is more significant than the precise identity of these powers is the function they play in v. 16 and how the author returns to them, in part, later in the letter. That is, after describing the whole of reality in v. 16b–c through two cosmological dichotomies, the author describes the cosmos as a complex power structure over which the Son stands. It is certain that the readers of Col 1:16, ancient and modern, experience their world as a space pervaded

³⁹ Thus James D.G. Dunn, who states we “should suppose a hierarchy of heavenly powers – ‘thrones’ superior to ‘lordships,’ and so on [...]” (*The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996], 92). Schweizer draws a similar conclusion when he refers to the fourfold powers of v. 16d–e as “angelic powers” (“Engelmächte,” Schweizer, *Der Brief an die Kolosser*, 54). See also Jerry L. Sumney, *Colossians: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 66–67.

⁴⁰ Schweizer, *Der Brief an die Kolosser*, 54: “Die Aufzählung der Mächte in V 16 ist eigentümlich [...]. Wohl aber widerspricht die typisch jüdische Aufzählung der Mächte der hellenistischen Zusammenfassung des ganzen Kosmos als ‘Sichtbares und Unsichtbares’, da damit ja nur Unsichtbares genannt ist. Die Uminterpretation von ‘das Sichtbare und Unsichtbare’ in jüdische Begrifflichkeit und zugleich der Bezug auf die Ängste der Gemeinde vor den ‘Mächten und Gewalten’ (vgl. 2,10) dürfte also auf den Briefverfasser zurückgehen, der damit die Beziehung des Hymnus auf die konkrete Situation in Kolossä herstellt.”

⁴¹ With Walter Wink, *The Powers*, vol. 1, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 11, commenting on the various “powers” in the NT: “These Powers are both heavenly and earthly, divine and human, spiritual and political, invisible and structural [...]. The clearest statement of this is Col. 1:16, which should have been made the standard for all discussions of the Powers.” Further, Wink points out that the repetition of πᾶς and εἶτε in v. 16 indicates that *all* possible powers are to be understood, rather than a particular subset (65).

by multiple – and oftentimes competing – powers that influence their lives and to which they are subjected in some measure. As surely as one lives, one cannot extricate oneself from the entangled web of power in which one is caught. Whether one considers the ramifications of Aristotle’s concept of the human as a “political animal”⁴² or the implications of Paul’s concept of sin,⁴³ one must conclude that there is simply no entity in the created order that exists as an isolated individual free of the influence of the powers external to it. Therefore, rather than providing disclosure concerning the precise identity of the fourfold powers as such, the primary concern of v. 16d–e is to define them in relation to the Son as the image of God and firstborn of creation.⁴⁴ Whosoever and whatsoever they are, they can only be understood in the light of who he is.

I. ἐν αὐτῷ, δι’ αὐτοῦ, εἰς αὐτόν

The first and last clauses of v. 16 combine the verb κτίζειν with a reference to the Son, expressed each time through a prepositional phrase. These clauses bookend the verse and thereby form an *inclusio*: the point of v. 16 as a whole – namely, explaining v. 15 and thus what it means for the Son to be the image of the invisible God and the firstborn of all creation – is to explain the relationship of the Son to creation. All creation, without remainder, is said to have been created ἐν αὐτῷ and to be in a state of having been created δι’ αὐτοῦ and εἰς αὐτόν. It seems clear that Colossians engages in prepositional metaphysics in a fashion similar to what we find in Hellenistic Jewish writings and Greco-

⁴² Aristotle, *Pol.* 1253a.4 (1.1.9): πολιτικὸν ζῷον.

⁴³ For Paul, the corrosive influence of sin is so pervasive that he has no better option than to refer to his “body of death” when describing its effect upon him (Rom 7:24, cf. 6:6).

⁴⁴ Friedrich D.E. Schleiermacher makes much the same point in his angelology, noting Col 1:16 as one of the many “obscure and ambiguous expressions” (“dunkle und vieldeutige Ausdrücke” [*sic*]) used by Paul: “[Es] wird nicht sowol [*sic*] über die Engel domatisirt [*sic*], als nur vermittelt derselben; denn behauptet wird auch, daß Christus weit erhabener sei als alle Engel” (*Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt: Zweite Auflage (1830/31). Erster und zweiter Band*, 2nd ed. [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008], 1:244–45 [§42.2]). On Schleiermacher’s reading, this applies to the bible generally, seeing that the existence of angels is presumed, yet nothing about them is taught directly. Although he implies that Jesus and his disciples did not sincerely believe in such beings, he states that this is no cause for concern, for they were not intending to be dogmatic on *this* point (i.e., angels), but rather appropriated popular notions in order to address *other* topics. Although the de-historicization inherent in the implication that Jesus, the early Christians, and the biblical authors did not sincerely believe in angelic beings exceeds the bounds of credulity, the underlying point which Schleiermacher makes still stands: within the biblical writings, notions of spiritual beings are often employed to make statements about some other topic. In the case of Col 1:16, mention is made of the fourfold powers in order to make a statement about the Son.

Roman philosophy.⁴⁵ Yet what exactly do the prepositional metaphysics of Col 1:16 mean to convey?

The first hint as to the meaning of v. 16 is the conspicuous lack of ἐξ αὐτοῦ, which would signify the source of creation through the use of ἐκ, “from/out of.” As we see in the case of Rom 11:36 and 1 Cor 8:6, the use of ἐκ in such phrases in the Corpus Paulinum is reserved for the Father.⁴⁶ The lack of ἐξ αὐτοῦ in Col 1:16 has been seen by some interpreters as sufficient reason to describe God the Father as the creator and the Son as the mediator of creation.⁴⁷ While this is not inaccurate, the precise nature of the Son’s relationship to creation as it is expressed in Col. 1:16 must follow from an analysis of what the verse contains rather than what it lacks. With that, we turn to the first of the three prepositional phrases.

a) ἐν αὐτῷ

The meaning of ἐν αὐτῷ is not immediately clear. Which use of the dative is this prepositional phrase supposed to convey? Two plausible options are a “locative ἐν” or an “instrumental ἐν.”⁴⁸ Proponents of the “locative ἐν” point to a supposed *Vorlage* of the hymn’s first strophe which is to be reckoned to the

⁴⁵ Following Jacob Jervell’s critique of reading Col 1:16 as an interpretation of בְּרֵאשִׁית in Gen 1:1 in a way similar to later Rabbinical interpretations, this possibility will not be considered here (cf. *Imago Dei: Gen. 1, 26f. im Spätjudentum, in der Gnosis und in den paulinischen Briefen*, FRLANT 58 [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960], 200, n. 197).

⁴⁶ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 91, n. 20. Eduard Norden, *Agnostos Theos: Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte religiöser Rede*, 4th ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1956), 253, is correct in saying that the doxology of Rom 11:36 is “divided between Father and Son” in 1 Cor 8:6 (cf. also 253, n. 4). He expresses the relation between Rom and 1 Cor in such a way that it is not evident which letter he believes was composed first.

⁴⁷ Thus Petr Pokorný, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Kolosser*, THKNT 10/1, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1990), 66, and Eduard Lohse, *Die Briefe an die Kolosser und an Philemon*, KEK 9/2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 89, n. 5.

⁴⁸ Properly speaking, one should refer to the *dativus instrumentalis*, for example, when the dative is used without any preposition, and when a preposition is used, one should refer to it and its mode (e.g., “instrumental ἐν”). For a list of options in classical usage, cf. CGCG §30.36–54. For a treatment of NT usage, cf. BDR §187–202, esp. 195 and 199, and on the use of ἐν with the dative, cf. §219–220. Cf. also Siebenthal §173c and §184i for the use of ἐν with the dative to replace the *dativus instrumentalis* and *loci*. Cf. also Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* 10.7 (= *SVF* 2.501.19–23), on the *dativus loci*: ἔστιν ἄρα καὶ τὸ ἐν ᾧ τι γίγνεται, τούτῃστιν ὁ τόπος. The basic philological problem of how to read ἐν αὐτῷ is reflected in various Bible translations: the NRSV and NIV, for example, opt for the “locative ἐν” and therefore translate “in him,” while the ESV and NKJV opt for the “instrumental ἐν,” translating “by him.”

Platonic-Stoic philosophical tradition.⁴⁹ According to this thesis, one must understand ἐν αὐτῷ in v. 16a in light of the phrase ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος in v. 18a, supposing that the Stoic view of the universe as the divine body, the space inhabited and vivified by the λόγος and which contains all creatures, has been applied to the Son, albeit modified by the addition of τῆς ἐκκλησίας.⁵⁰ This explanation has two weaknesses: first, it is dubious that the passage can be traced back to a Stoic *Vorlage*,⁵¹ and second, as will be explained shortly, it seems more promising to interpret v. 16a in the light of v. 16f rather than v. 18a, thereby understanding ἐν αὐτῷ through the *inclusio* of v. 16. That is not to say that ἐν αὐτῷ in no way signifies a location, however, but rather a dismissal of this particular interpretation of the locative ἐν in this context.

A different possibility for considering ἐν αὐτῷ as a locative ἐν might be offered by way of reading it in conjunction with Col 3:11. There, the author admonishes the addressees to “put on the new human who is being renewed unto knowledge according to the image of the one who created him, *in whom there is no* (ὅπου οὐκ ἔνι) Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ [is] all things and in all things.” The local adverb ὅπου can perform the function of a preposition with a personal pronoun,⁵² and in conjunction with the verb ἔνεμι, “to be in,” one might read either “the new [human] being renewed” or the “image of the one who created him” as the antecedent of ὅπου οὐκ ἔνι.⁵³ That the ‘place’ of this image is not

⁴⁹ The designation “Platonic-Stoic” represents, synthetically, the viewpoint of Eduard Schweizer as expressed in two of his significant works on the topic (Schweizer and Friedrich Baumgärtel, “σῶμα, σωματικός, σύσσωμος,” *TWNT* 7:1035, and Schweizer, *Der Brief an die Kolosser*, 52–53). Cf. Plato’s *Tim.* 30c–d and *Leg.* 4.715e (ὁ μὲν δὴ θεός, ὥσπερ καὶ ὁ παλαιὸς λόγος, ἀρχὴν τε καὶ τελευτὴν καὶ μέσα τῶν ὄντων ἀπάντων ἔχων); for the Stoics, cf. Hippolytus, *Haer.* 21.1 (= *SVF* 1.153), and Diogenes Laertius, 7.137. According to the late first/early second cent. A.D. Sceptic Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* 10.33.1–3, the Peripatetics promulgated a similar view: ὅσον δὲ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὕτω λεγομένοις ὑπὸ τῶν Περιπατητικῶν, κινδυνεύει ὁ πρῶτος θεὸς τόπος εἶναι πάντων.

⁵⁰ Schweizer, *Der Brief an die Kolosser*, 53, 62.

⁵¹ To recap our previous argument (see above, “Author of Col 1:15–20”), positing a literary source is tenuous. If one were to counter that problems of textual transmission might explain the lack of such an extant Stoic source, it would be necessary to point out that the phrase ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος is not congruent with Stoic physics and the Stoic manner of theological expression (cf. T.R. Niles, “Does the Stoic Body Have a Head? On Stoicism as an Interpretive Background for Colossians 1:18a,” *NovT* 63, no. 3 [2021]: 390–407).

⁵² Cf. Passow’s *Handwörterbuch der griechischen Sprache*, s.v. ὅπου: “Zuweilen wird ὅπου auch in Beziehung auf ein Substantivum gebraucht u[nd] vertritt die Stelle des relativen Pronomens in Verbindung mit einer Präp[osition], z.B. ἦδον δὲ πάντες μέλη, ὅπου (= ἐν οἷς, worin), χειλιδὼν ἦν τις ἐκπεποιημένη, Ar[istophanes] Av[es] 1301.”

⁵³ Reading either ὁ νέος [ἄνθρωπος] ἀνακαινούμενος or ἡ εἰκὼν, rather than ὁ κτίσας, as the antecedent of ὅπου οὐκ ἔνι depends on the reference to Christ at the end of v. 11. It is hard to conceive how the creator, who is the Father, could be conceived as the ‘place’ in which Christ is all things. It is more plausible to read the “image,” who is Christ, as the

a physical location but rather a mental conception⁵⁴ or figure is a possibility which is borne out by two previously discussed passages.⁵⁵ An additional passage is relevant here: Philo's threefold definition of "place" (τόπος) in *Somn.* 1.62 points to the Logos as the "place" that God has filled with incorporeal potencies. If one may understand the ἐν αὐτῷ of Col 1:16a in a similar fashion, then the Son as the "image" would be the idea, the *Vorstellung*, of the totality of a perfect and harmonious creation where the dividing lines separating human beings from one another are overcome.⁵⁶

The other option, an instrumental ἐν, is also plausible.⁵⁷ All things would be created "by him" in some sense and because the Father is the agent and source of creation,⁵⁸ the Son would be something of a mediator. This reading is plausible in light of Hellenistic Jewish traditions that portray the role of the Logos and/or Wisdom in creation with a *dativus instrumentalis* or instrumental ἐν.⁵⁹

'place' in which there no longer exist commonplace human divisions, but only Christ as a fundamental point of orientation.

⁵⁴ A legitimate question to raise concerns which concepts of place were conceivable in antiquity. While philosophical discussions of the concept of place often dealt with *physical* localities (cf. Plato, *Tim.* 50c–d, 52a–d, and Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* 10.1–36), it was also possible to conceive of a mental conception, especially in conjunction with the verb ἐνεῖμι, as a non-physical locality. This is attested in the Classical (e.g., Thucydides 2.20.5, στάσιν δ' ἐνέσεσθαι τῇ γνώμῃ, and Xenophon, *Mem.* 2.6.31, οὐκ ἐνεσθιν ἐν τῇ ἐμῇ ἐπιστήμῃ) as well as in the Imperial period (e.g., Plutarch, *Virt. mor.* 447d: ὅθεν οὐτε λύπη τοῖς ἄνευ πάθους λογισμοῖς ἐνεσθιν).

⁵⁵ See the comments above on Philo, *Opif.* 24–25 (pgs. 74–75), and Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 12.71 (pgs. 101–2).

⁵⁶ Already in the work of Nikolaus Kehl and André Feuillet, one finds the proposal of this kind of "exemplary" understanding of ἐν αὐτῷ; namely, Christ is the *causa exemplaris* (cf. Seneca's prepositional metaphysics in *Ep.* 65.8) that provides the "teleologische Vorangelegtheit des Universums auf Christus hin" (Kehl, *Der Christushymnus im Kolosserbrief: Eine motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Kol 1,12–20* SBM 1 [Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1967], 108), and therefore, "[en] Col. I, 16 le Christ incréé est comme le miroir dans lequel Dieu lui-même a contemplé le plan de l'univers lorsqu'il l'a créé" (Feuillet, *Le Christ sagesse de Dieu*, 208). Joachim Gnilka, *Der Kolosserbrief*, HTKNT 10/1 (Herder: Freiburg, 1980), 64–65, follows their lead.

⁵⁷ Although the *dativus instrumentalis* does not require the preposition ἐν in Classical Greek (cf. CGCG §30.43), the use of ἐν in this sense is common in NT writings as a "reproduction of the Hebrew construction with אֵל" which often replaces the *dativus instrumentalis* (BDR §219).

⁵⁸ Admittedly, Col 1:12–20 does not directly predicate ἐξ αὐτοῦ of the Father, but it does not predicate it of the Son, either.

⁵⁹ Cf. Ps 104:24 (103:24 LXX): ὡς ἐμεγαλύνθη τὰ ἔργα σου, κύριε: πάντα ἐν σοφίᾳ ἐποίησας; Prov 3:19: ὁ θεὸς τῆ σοφίᾳ ἐθεμελίωσεν τὴν γῆν, ἠτοίμασεν δὲ οὐρανοὺς ἐν φρονήσει. Cf. Wis 9:1–2a: Θεὸς πατέρων καὶ κύριε τοῦ ἐλέους ὁ ποιήσας τὰ πάντα ἐν λόγῳ σου καὶ τῆ σοφίᾳ σου κατασκευάσας ἄνθρωπον. Cf. also Philo, who can speak of both Wisdom and the Logos as the instrument used in creation: *Det.* 54: [σοφία], δι' ἧς ἀπετελέσθη τὸ πᾶν, and *Fug.* 110, where God is the Father and Sophia is the mother δι' ἧς τὰ ὅλα ἤλθεν

It is also plausible insofar as it underscores that the Father is the agent of creation and that it also understands ἐν αὐτῷ to be analogous to δι' αὐτοῦ in v. 16f (see below) and therefore interprets a part of v. 16 within the framework of the verse's *inclusio*. Yet if one reads ἐν αὐτῷ and δι' αὐτοῦ as formulations with a conceptual overlap, what are we to make of εἰς αὐτόν? Reading ἐν αὐτῷ only as an instrumental ἐν bundles ἐν αὐτῷ and δι' αὐτοῦ together, but it leaves εἰς αὐτόν out of the picture. Is there a way of reading the three prepositional phrases so that εἰς αὐτόν might correspond conceptually to the other two prepositional phrases (ἐν αὐτῷ, δι' αὐτοῦ)? In other words, is there any way of reading v. 16 which does justice to all three prepositional phrases in the sense that they can be read *together*, as a unity? Presuming that the author intentionally chose this combination of three prepositions, is it possible that the three expressions mutually condition each other and if so, what would that mean? The significance of the question rests, as previously indicated, on the assumption that it would be more prudent to read the prepositions in their immediate context (v. 16), rather than isolating one of them in order to interpret it in the light of v. 18a. In order to approximate an answer, a closer examination of δι' αὐτοῦ and εἰς αὐτόν is required.

b) δι' αὐτοῦ

We begin with δι' αὐτοῦ. When an active verb is used with διά and a genitive noun or pronoun in the New Testament, then the genitive item governed by διά represents either the means or mediator through which an action is executed at the direction of another person, or the means or mediator through which a beneficiary receives something. For example, John the Baptist is said to have sent word to Jesus “through his disciples” while in prison.⁶⁰ This holds true for the protopauline letters, although there are a few exceptions in which a passive verb replaces an active one.⁶¹ Paul often uses διά with Ἰησοῦ, Χριστοῦ, or a pronoun referring to Jesus Christ in order to indicate him as the mediator

εἰς γένεσιν (James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, WBC 38A [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988], 701–2). On the instrumentality of the Logos, cf. *Somm.* 1.241, where God states of his act of bringing order to his creation: ἵνα στηριχθῆ [τὸ πᾶν] βεβαίως τῷ κραταιῷ καὶ ὑπάρχω μου λόγῳ. Cf. also *Cher.* 125–127 in the section “δι' αὐτοῦ” below.

⁶⁰ BDR §223.3, cf. Matt 11:2, διὰ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ εἶπεν, and Matt 1:2, τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ κυρίου διὰ τοῦ προφήτου. Cf. also Siebenthal §184f. This is consistent with classical usage; cf. CGCG §31.8, e.g., δι' ἐρμηνέως λέγειν. Cf. also the description of the threefold criteria of philosophy offered by Sextus Empiricus, *Math* 7.35,37 (= *SVF* 2.107), in which the agent of philosophy is the human “by whom” (ὅφ' οὗ) a judgment is made, and sense perception and understanding (αἴσθησις καὶ διάνοια) form the instrument “through which” (δι' οὗ) the judgment is made.

⁶¹ Rom 5:9, πολλῶ οὖν μᾶλλον δικαιοθέντες νῦν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ σωθησόμεθα δι' αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς. Cf. also 1 Cor 1:9 and Gal 6:14.

through which an action is accomplished,⁶² or a benefit conferred,⁶³ or as the basis on which an action is performed.⁶⁴ This is different from the use of ὑπό with the genitive. When a genitive noun or pronoun governed by ὑπό is used in conjunction with a passive verb, then the genitive term indicates the direct agent of the action and the passive verb refers to the grammatical subject and thus the recipient of the action.⁶⁵ Greek syntax, therefore, presupposes a sharp distinction between the direct agent of an action and the means or mediator through which the action might be carried out.

We find such a usage in Philo of Alexandria's *Cher.* 125–127.⁶⁶ Here, Philo delineates four causes involved in creation:

For God is the cause, not the instrument, but that which becomes, becomes through an instrument, but undoubtedly comes about by the cause.	ὅτι ὁ θεὸς αἴτιον, οὐκ ὄργανον, τὸ δὲ γινόμενον δι' ὄργανου μὲν ὑπὸ δὲ αἰτίου πάντως γίνεται.
For many things must converge for the gen- esis of any item, that by which, that from which, that through which, that for the sake of which; and the cause is that by which, but matter is that from which, and the instrument is that through which, and the reason is that for the sake of which. (<i>Cher.</i> 125)	πρὸς γὰρ τὴν τινος γένεσιν πολλὰ δεῖ συνελθεῖν, τὸ ὑφ' οὗ, τὸ ἐξ οὗ, τὸ δι' οὗ, τὸ δι' ὅ- καὶ ἔστι τὸ μὲν ὑφ' οὗ τὸ αἴτιον, ἐξ οὗ δὲ ἡ ὕλη, δι' οὗ δὲ τὸ ἐργαλεῖον, δι' ὃ δὲ ἡ αἰτία.

Here, the phrase ὑφ' οὗ refers to the cause (τὸ αἴτιον) and δι' οὗ refers to the instrument (ἐργαλεῖον). A few brief sentences later, Philo applies this scheme to “the greatest household or city, the cosmos,” writing:

⁶² 2 Cor 5:18, τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ καταλλάξαντος ἡμᾶς ἐαυτῷ διὰ Χριστοῦ καὶ δόντος ἡμῖν τὴν διακονίαν τῆς καταλλαγῆς; cf. Gal 1:1; 1 Thess 4:14.

⁶³ Rom 5:1–2, ἐκ πίστεως εἰρήνην ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δι' οὗ καὶ τὴν προσαγωγὴν ἐσχίκαμεν τῇ πίστει εἰς τὴν χάριν αὐτῆν ἐν ἣ ἑστήκαμεν καὶ κυχώμεθα ἐπ' ἐλπίδι τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ. Cf. also Rom 1:5, 5:11, 21; 2 Cor 1:5, 20, 3:4; Phil 1:11.

⁶⁴ E.g., Rom 2:16, ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ὅτε κρίνει ὁ θεὸς τὰ κρυπτὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων κατὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιόν μου διὰ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ. Cf. also Rom 1:8, 5:11, 17, 15:30.

⁶⁵ E.g., 1 Cor 2:15, ὁ δὲ πνευματικὸς ἀνακρίνει τὰ πάντα, αὐτὸς δὲ ὑπ' οὐδενὸς ἀνακρίνεται. Cf. also 1 Cor 8:3 and Phil 3:12.

⁶⁶ Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 347–48.

For you will find that its cause is God, by whom it has become,
 but [its] matter the four elements from which it was constituted,
 and the instrument is the Logos of God, through whom it was fashioned,
 and the reason of its fashioning is the goodness of the craftsman.
 (Cher. 127)

εὐρήσεις γὰρ αἴτιον μὲν αὐτοῦ τὸν θεὸν ὑφ' οὗ γέγονεν, ὕλην δὲ τὰ τέσσαρα στοιχεῖα ἐξ ὧν συνεκράθη, ὄργανον δὲ λόγον θεοῦ δι' οὗ κατεσκευάσθη, τῆς δὲ κατασκευῆς αἰτίαν τὴν ἀγαθότητα τοῦ δημιουργοῦ.

Although God is the cause of the universe, it is clearly the Logos who serves as the instrument (ὄργανον) in the process, which is expressed with the construction δι' οὗ. Philo repeats this in *Spec.* 1.81: “But the Logos is the image of God through whom the entire cosmos was fashioned” (λόγος δ' ἐστὶν εἰκὼν θεοῦ, δι' οὗ σύμπας ὁ κόσμος ἐδημιουργεῖτο).⁶⁷

Yet in a striking passage in his allegorical interpretation of the creation story of Genesis 2, we see that Philo's use of δι' οὗ makes it clear that obtaining the status of an instrument or mediator does not entail a mode of passivity. Namely, he describes how the mind (νοῦς) was ensouled by God and in its turn bestows a share of its life upon the irrational part of the soul:

For of that in which the mind partakes from God, it [sc. the mind] gives of this to the irrational part of the soul, so that the mind is ensouled by God, but the irrational part by the mind; for the mind is, as it were, the God of the irrational part [...]

οὗ γὰρ μετέσχεν ὁ νοῦς παρὰ θεοῦ, τούτου μεταδίδωσι τῷ ἀλόγῳ μέρει τῆς ψυχῆς, ὥστε τὸν μὲν νοῦν ἐψυχῶσθαι ὑπὸ θεοῦ, τὸ δὲ ἄλογον ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦ· ὡσαυτεῖ γὰρ θεός ἐστι τοῦ ἀλόγου ὁ νοῦς [...]

For of the things that come to be, they come to be by God and through him, and some by God, but not through him; the best things, however, have come to be both by God and through him [...]
 and of such things is the mind; but the irrational part [of the soul] has come to be by God, yet not through God, but rather through the rational part which governs and reigns in the soul.
 (Leg. 1.40–41)

τῶν γὰρ γινομένων τὰ μὲν καὶ ὑπὸ θεοῦ γίνεται καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ, τὰ δὲ ὑπὸ θεοῦ μὲν, οὐ δι' αὐτοῦ δέ· τὰ μὲν οὖν ἄριστα καὶ ὑπὸ θεοῦ γέγονε καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ [...]
 τούτων καὶ ὁ νοῦς ἐστὶ· τὸ δὲ ἄλογον [sc. τῆς ψυχῆς] ὑπὸ θεοῦ μὲν γέγονεν, οὐ διὰ θεοῦ δέ, ἀλλὰ διὰ τοῦ λογικοῦ τοῦ ἄρχοντός τε καὶ βασιλεύοντος ἐν ψυχῇ.

It seems that for Philo, the use of διά with the genitive can signify instrumentality or mediation without excluding agency, for the νοῦς that serves as the instrument of the vivification of the irrational part of the soul “gives”

⁶⁷ Cf. also *Det.* 146, where Philo uses the instrumental construction to state that God chastens the human's understanding through the Logos: [θεός] τὸν ἑαυτοῦ λόγον, εἰς τὴν διάνοιαν ἐκπέμψας, δι' οὗ δυσωπήσας καὶ ὀνειδίσας περὶ ὧν ἐπλημέλησεν αὐτὴν ἰάσεται.

something it has received from God (τούτου μεταδίδωσι) and thus entails agency in a process initiated by another entity.

Perhaps, then, the sharp distinction between “mediator” and “agent” presupposed by Greek syntax turns out to be a false binary as far as the use of δι’ οὗ/αὐτοῦ in Philo and Col 1:16f is concerned. As Gregory E. Sterling has pointed out, Philo offers the first recorded instance of the application of this construction to a mediatory figure situated between a transcendent God and creation, a construction which would become more common in later Middle Platonist writings.⁶⁸ One might then say that for Philo and the author of Colossians, metaphysical considerations led to a transgression of the boundary delineated by Greek syntax.

In the case of Col 1:16f, we might say that as it concerns the work of creation, a close and indissoluble relationship between the Father and the Son is implied: just as the Father would not have created without the Son as the mediator of creation, so too would the Son have been unable to have any agency in creation in isolation from the Father. Creation, on the view of Col 1:16f, is the result of a relation of mutual dependency. Rather than being an afterthought in the mind of God, the person known as “Christ Jesus” (Col 1:1), who is the Son (1:13) and image of the invisible God (1:15a), is foundational in the work of creation, and creation cannot be conceived of in isolation from him and would not have arisen without him.⁶⁹ The intricate relationship between Father and Son in the act of creation communicated by δι’ αὐτοῦ can be expressed concisely, by way of a transfer, with the words Ernst Lohmeyer once offered in commenting upon the use of ἐν αὐτῷ in Col 1:16a:

“Der Nachdruck liegt auf dem betonten ‘in ihm’, daß in diesem Briefe immer wieder anklingt und seinen wahren Gegenstand bildet. Es enthält *mehr* als den Gedanken, daß ‘durch ihn’ als einem Mittel alles erschaffen wurde, und zugleich *weniger* als die Anschauung, daß ‘aus ihm alle Dinge sind’. Das letztere ist unmöglich, weil Gott der Schöpfer bleibt, und das andere ist ungenügend, weil dieser ‘Er’ nicht ein gleichsam zufälliges Mittel in der Hand eines anderen ist. Dieses ‘in ihm’ bezeichnet, sachlich gesehen, die Möglichkeit, in der alles Dasein sich gründet, das Prinzip, durch das es ist. Darum ist ‘er’ von diesem Dasein

⁶⁸ Gregory E. Sterling, “Prepositional Metaphysics in Jewish Wisdom Speculation and Early Christian Liturgical Texts,” in *Wisdom and Logos: Studies in Jewish Thought in Honor of David Winston*, SPhilo 9, eds. David T. Runia and Gregory E. Sterling [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997], 219–38, 231. Noting that this usage was not widespread in Middle Platonism during Philo’s career, Sterling leaves open the possibility that Philo coined this usage, but he also maintains the possibility that Philo “found it in the Platonic tradition and exploited it fully” (ibid.). Sterling reckons Col 1:15–20 to the group of NT passages that apply the prepositional metaphysics of Middle Platonism to Christ (along with John 1:3, 10; 1 Cor 8:6b; Heb 1:2), whereas the formulation of Rom 11:36 (along with 1 Cor 8:6a; Heb 2:10) reflects the application of Stoic prepositional metaphysics to God (ibid., 232, 234–35).

⁶⁹ If this is correct, then we may conclude that Col. 1:16f conveys, with other words, the content of John 1:3: “All things came to be through him, and apart from him, not a single thing came to be” (πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν).

geschieden als dem immer fernen Ausdruck eigenen Seins und zugleich auf dieses Dasein gerichtet als die Norm seiner Bestimmung, religiös gesprochen seiner ‘Schöpfung.’”⁷⁰

c) εἰς αὐτόν

How should εἰς αὐτόν in Col 1:16f be understood? The preposition εἰς expresses movement “to,” “toward,” or “into” something and in a metaphorical sense, it expresses the goal or purpose of an action, that thing “towards which” the action is meant to progress or find its conclusion.⁷¹ This preposition is found in some expressions of prepositional metaphysics, such as Marcus Aurelius’ praise of Nature in *Med.* 4.23: ἐκ σοῦ πάντα, ἐν σοὶ πάντα, εἰς σὲ πάντα. Such a use of εἰς, along with a use of the preposition ἐκ, is applied to the God the Father in Rom 11:36a and 1 Cor 8:6b. In all these formulations, εἰς could perhaps be understood both as a spatial and as a telic designation: in the first instance, the cosmos would proceed from God/Nature as its origin and would ultimately return there; in the second, the cosmos would proceed from the source of the λόγος or ἀρχαί that provide the structure of cosmic existence, and all life would have the purpose of living in accordance with that λόγος. Stoic philosophy encompasses both of these readings: not only is the cosmos brought about by the vivifying presence of God/Logos in matter only to be dissolved subsequently in a catastrophic cosmic conflagration (ἐκπύρωσις), but the σπερματικὸς λόγος that shapes and permeates the entire cosmos is also the Nature according to which one ought to live, as is summarized in the Stoic ethical formula: *secundum naturam vivere*.⁷²

Discussions of εἰς αὐτόν in Col 1:16f often point to such parallels, but they tend to omit one key difference: ἐξ οὗ does not occur at all in Col 1:16.⁷³ In the Corpus Paulinum, ἐξ οὗ is reserved for the Father, and in Rom 11:36a and 1

⁷⁰ Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Briefe an die Kolosser und an Philemon*, KEK 9/2, 10th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1954), 56 (italics mine).

⁷¹ Cf. CGCG §31.8, e.g., the ‘goal’ of speaking to the Athenians (εἰς Ἀθηναίους ἀγορεύειν). Cf. Siebenthal §184g.a.cc.1: εἰς may be used to denote, “[die] Bestimmung, Ziel einer ‘Handlung.’”

⁷² Cicero, *Fin.* 4.14–15; Diogenes Laertius, 7.87: διόπερ πρῶτος ὁ Ζήνων ἐν τῷ Περὶ ἀνθρώπου φύσεως τέλος εἶπε τὸ ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν· ὅπερ ἐστὶ κατ’ ἀρετὴν ζῆν· ἄγει γὰρ πρὸς ταύτην ἡμᾶς ἡ φύσις (italics mine). The Greek formulations of this ethical dictum use πρὸς or κατὰ rather than εἰς, or simply the dative of manner, but it is conceivable that τῇ φύσει ζῆν could also be expressed by εἰς φύσιν ζῆν.

⁷³ Friedrich-Wilhelm Eltester, *Eikon im Neuen Testament*, BZNW 23 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1958), 145–46; Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians*, AB 34B (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 197–98; Schweizer, *Der Brief an die Kolosser*, 60–61; Lohse, *Der Brief an die Kolosser*, 91–92. Exceptions are the commentaries by Gnllka, *Der Kolosserbrief*, 64, and Michael Wolter, *Der Brief an die Kolosser, der Brief an Philemon*, ÖTK 12 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 1993), 79, and the study by Franz-Josef Steinmetz, *Protologische Heils-Zuversicht: Die Strukturen des soteriologischen und christologischen Denkens im Kolosser- und Epheserbrief*, FTS 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Josef Knecht, 1969), 72.

Cor 8:6b, the phrase εἰς αὐτόν is applied to the Father only: all things proceed from the Father and return to him.⁷⁴ In Col 1:16, the situation is different: the Son is the referent of εἰς αὐτόν, not the Father. Of course, the focus of the hymn is the Son, not the Father,⁷⁵ and had the Father been the focus, then perhaps ἐξ οὗ would have been used. What is certain is that ἐξ οὗ is not applied to the Son. This being the case, we conclude that εἰς αὐτόν does not have a spatial meaning here because there is no corresponding initial use of ἐξ οὗ to denote a source to which the cosmos might return.⁷⁶

Further, the concept of an “image” plays a crucial role here. As we have seen in Dio Chrysostom’s *Or.* 12.59, an εἰκών in the mind of the artisan provides the pattern according to which a material image is fashioned: the subsequent εἰκών is intended to correspond to the first εἰκών. And as we have seen in Philo’s writings, he too can speak of an “image” becoming a model for other images, both in a cosmogonic and ethical sense. If the Son of Colossians is the “image” “by whom” and “through whom” all things have been created, then it stands to reason that he is the “image” according to which all things were created and that they are intended to correspond to this image.

The most plausible option, therefore, is that the εἰς of Col 1:16f is a telic εἰς that expresses the goal of an action. In this case, it is said that “all things have been created unto him” (τὰ πάντα [...] εἰς αὐτόν ἔκτισται), that is, unto the Son.⁷⁷ Yet what does it mean to say that the Son is the goal of the creation of all things? To begin with, it means that they should be made like him. This reading is plausible in light of the ethical admonitions in later sections of the letter which characterize the Son as the determining foundation of Christian behavior, such as Col 2:6–7 and 3:9–11. In the latter, the addressees are admonished to remove the “old human” and clothe themselves with the “new [human]” who is being renewed unto the comprehension of the image of its maker; that is, they shall comprehend the Son as the image of God (cf. 1:15a) in which the dividing lines separating humanity from itself disappear (3:11).⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *Nota bene*: εἰς is not applied to the Son in 1 Cor 8:6d. This is in keeping with the eschatology of 1 Cor 15:20–28, according to which the final “goal” does not consist in the Son retaining all things in his own hands, but rather in handing over all things to the Father so that the Father will be “all in all”: εἶτα τὸ τέλος, ὅταν παραδιδῶ τὴν βασιλειαν τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ [...] ἵνα ἢ ὁ θεὸς τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν (1 Cor 15:24a, 28c).

⁷⁵ Feuillet, *Le Christ sagesse de Dieu*, 203–4.

⁷⁶ These observations dovetail nicely with Sterling’s remarks on the affinity of Col 1:15–20 with Middle Platonism and the affinity of 1 Cor 8:6a and Rom 11:36 with Stoicism (see above, n. 68).

⁷⁷ Buscemi, *Lettera ai Colossesi*, 129.

⁷⁸ The following ‘dividing lines’ are found in 3:11: (1) the notion of who belongs to the elect people of God and those who do not (Ιουδαῖος, Ἕλλην); (2) prestige or value based on religious observance (περιτομή καὶ ἀκροβυστία); (3) culture (βάρβαρος, Σκύθης); (4) social divisions, such as those which ground and reinforce power differentials (δοῦλος, ἐλεύθερος).

That the final determination (*Bestimmung*) of the life of the addressees is found in and determined by Christ is expressed through such statements as “you have died with Christ” (2:20, ἀπεθάνετε σὺν Χριστῷ), “you have been raised with Christ” (3:1, συνηγήρθητε τῷ Χριστῷ), “your life is hidden with Christ in God” (3:3, ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν κέκρυπται σὺν τῷ Χριστῷ ἐν τῷ θεῷ), and by the promise that “whenever Christ, your life, is revealed, then you too will be revealed with him in glory” (3:5, ὅταν ὁ χριστὸς φανερωθῆ, ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν, τότε καὶ ὑμεῖς σὺν αὐτῷ φανερωθήσεσθε ἐν δόξῃ). That the author of Colossians sees Christ as the goal and determination of Christian existence is expressed once again in 3:17, the closing verse of the main body of the letter: “[A]nd whatever you do, in word or in deed, [do] all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

The notion that the life of Christian believers is conformed to and determined by Christ’s own life permeates the Pauline tradition. One finds it in Rom 8:29, where the promise of being “conformed to the image of his Son”⁷⁹ is combined with the characterization of Christ as the “firstborn (πρωτότοκος) among many brothers” (also with a telic εἰς applied to the Son).⁸⁰ It also plays a role in 1 Cor 15:20–22, 47–49, where Paul contrasts Adam and Christ and assures the Corinthians that as the “final Adam,” Christ grounds the promise of new life (ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδάμ [ἐγένετο] εἰς πνεῦμα ζωοποιῶν), and it is the “image of [this] heavenly human,” and no longer the “image of the earthly one,” which believers shall bear (v. 49, καὶ ἐφορέσαμεν τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ χοϊκοῦ, φορέσομεν καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ ἐπουρανίου).

However, three peculiarities of Colossians in this connection must be noted. First, whereas the aforementioned passages understand the determination of the human “unto Christ” in the framework of eschatology, the author of Colossians pushes this thought back into the realm of protology.⁸¹ Indeed, the determination of the believer is to become like Christ, but this is something which was determined in the act of creation. Second, in Col 1:16f, it is the *Son* who is the telic referent of creation, not the Father. In Rom 11:36 and 1 Cor 8:6, the phrase εἰς αὐτόν is applied to the Father only. Thirdly, Colossians stakes the claim that it is not only Christians who have re-oriented their lives towards Jesus in faith (cf. Col 1:2, τοῖς ἐν Κολοσσαῖς ἀγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ; 1:4, ἀκούσαντες τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ), but rather *all things* which have been created with the Son, the image of God, as their goal. The significance of the resultative passive perfect ἔκτισται is critical in making this claim, seeing that it expresses the result of a past action whose effect is still valid at the moment of speaking: all things “are in a state” of having been

⁷⁹ Cf. also 2 Cor 3:18.

⁸⁰ Rom 8:29b: [...] εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν πρωτότοκον ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς.

⁸¹ As is stated concisely in Steinmetz, *Protologische Heils-Zuversicht*, 81: “Das Eschaton erscheint so als das Proton.”

created through and unto the Son as their goal.⁸² What is more, this determination is viewed by the author as valid for his time and not as something which has been lost or which has disappeared for any reason. Further, because “all things” are in view here, we can say that the image through which and unto which all things have been created is co-extensive with the scope of creation. Truly all things, whether sensible or noetic realities, whether “thrones, dominions, powers, and authorities,” or anything in heaven or on earth, cannot be understood without this ultimate determination of their existence.⁸³ This is not to say that that their *Sosein und Dasein* corresponds automatically to this existential determination; the author is too aware of how creaturely reality can estrange itself from God (cf. 1:21, καὶ ὑμᾶς ποτε ὄντας ἀπηλλοτριωμένους καὶ ἐχθρὸς τῆ διανοία ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς πονηροῖς; 3:5–6, νεκρώσατε οὖν τὰ μέλη τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς [...] δι’ ἧ ἔρχεται ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας).⁸⁴ Rather than legitimizing the status quo of the creation of his day, the author seeks to portray the Son as the goal towards which creation should be moving and which was determined for it before and in the act of its

⁸² CGCG §33.35: “The emphasis in such cases [i.e., use of the passive perfect] is not so much on the responsibility of the agent of the action, but on the current state of the [grammatical] subject.”

⁸³ In his *Glaubenslehre*, Schleiermacher references Col 1:16 when he argues: “In dem christlichen Glauben, daß alles zu dem Erlöser hin geschaffen ist [n. “Kol 1,16”], liegt hingegen, daß schon durch die Schöpfung alles vorbereitend und rückwirkend [*sic*] eingerichtet ist in Bezug auf die Offenbarung Gottes im Fleisch und zu der möglich vollständigsten Uebertragung derselben auf die ganze menschliche Natur zur Gestaltung des Reiches Gottes. Desgleichen haben wir auch die natürliche Welt nicht so anzusehen, als ob sie vermöge der göttlichen Erhaltung ihren Gang für sich gehe, und die göttliche Weltregierung nur durch besondere einzelne Acte [*sic*] einen Einfluß auf dieselbe ausübe, um sie mit dem Reich der Gnade in Verbindung zu bringen. Vielmehr sind beide völlig eins, und wir sind uns dessen gewiß, daß auch die ganze Einrichtung der Natur von Anfang an eine andere gewesen sein würde, wenn dem menschlichen Geschlecht nicht nach der Sünde die Erlösung durch Christum wäre bestimmt gewesen” (2:494–95 [§164.1]). Cf. also §89.3: “Denn kam gleich bei der ersten Schöpfung des Menschengeschlechtes nur der unvollkommene Zustand der menschlichen Natur zur Erscheinung: so war doch das Erscheinen des Erlösers ihr auf unzeitliche Weise schon eingepflanzt” (2:31). Of course, Schleiermacher does not rely on Col 1:16 alone to make this argument. What lurks in the background is his view of the identity of divine potentiality with divine actuality; that is, there is nothing possible in God which is not also becoming actual (cf. §54, Leitsatz: “Die göttliche Ursächlichkeit, wie unser Abhängigkeitsgefühl sie aussagt, [wird] in der Gesamtheit des endlichen Seins vollkommen dargestellt [...], mithin auch alles wirklich wird und geschieht, wozu es eine Ursächlichkeit in Gott gibt” [1:324]). Regardless of whether one is inclined to agree with Schleiermacher on this particular point, the fact remains that this likely played a role in allowing him to see passages like Col 1:16 in a new light.

⁸⁴ Even if one were to omit the text-critically uncertain phrase ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας, this would not alter the point being made here.

inception.⁸⁵ The author thus presents the reader with something that is unprecedented in the Pauline tradition: he has spanned the arc of the Son's relationship to creation and supremacy in it and above it from the moment of creation all the way to the eschaton, and thus from protology to eschatology. Whereas Gal 4:4, for example, portrayed the sending of the Son as the endpoint of a development (ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου, ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ), Colossians clearly connects the Son's salvific significance to protology.

Without desiring to make the author of Colossians into a Peripatetic, it might be helpful to introduce the Aristotelian distinction between a formal and final cause.⁸⁶ Aristotle expresses in different terms what the author of Colossians expresses with εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται and he pursues a similar goal. As Aristotle held that “we suppose we first know [a thing] whenever we explain its causes,”⁸⁷ the author of Colossians portrays a vision of Christ as the goal of creation and in this way aims to help the addressees to better understand themselves in light of their existential determination of being created “unto him.” Yet what does it truly mean to say that humans are created “unto him” as their goal? For Aristotle, there is a fine yet critical distinction between a formal and a final cause.⁸⁸ The formal cause encompasses the characteristics that any entity must have in order to qualify as the thing which it ought to be. The final cause is similar to the formal cause in the sense that both causes stipulate that if an entity develops as it ought, then it will develop into an entity having the full number of characteristics appropriate to a member of its class. The final cause, however, goes further by introducing an ethical dimension; namely, it asserts that it is better for the entity to be *this* way than to be otherwise.⁸⁹

The application to Col 1:16 would be as follows: to say that the Son is the *telos* of creation would not merely imply the existence of a list of characteristics which, if fulfilled, would qualify the human person as “authentically human.” To call the Son the *telos* entails an implicit value judgment that it is better for humanity to be like the Son than to be otherwise. As Aristotle says

⁸⁵ Similarly, Buscemi, *Lettera ai Colossesi*, 129, although he connects the verse with a much later Rabbinic tradition rather than a tradition antecedent to Colossians: “Cristo è la causa finale verso cui va tutta la creazione [...]”

⁸⁶ Cf. Schleiermacher's description of the Son as the “Endursache” rather than a “wirkende Ursache” when he cites Col 1:16 (Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube*, 2:103 [§99, Zusatz]).

⁸⁷ Aristotle, *Metaph.* 994b.30–31 (2.2.13): τότε γὰρ εἰδέναι οἰόμεθα, ὅταν τὰ αἷτια γνωρίσωμεν.

⁸⁸ Admittedly, Aristotle uses a different turn of phrase for his final cause (τὸ οὗ ἕνεκα, “that for the sake of which,” *Metaph.* 994b.10, 13 [2.2.9]) rather than the preposition εἰς, yet it is clear through his use of the substantive τέλος that there is conceptual overlap here.

⁸⁹ Aristotle, *Phys.* 198b.9–10 (2.7): καὶ διότι βέλτιον οὕτως – οὐχ ἀπλῶς ἀλλὰ τὸ εἶναι πρὸς τὴν ἐκάστου οὐσίαν.

in his *Metaphysics*, the final cause is the Good, the “end (τέλος) of every generative or motive process.”⁹⁰ In a similar manner, one might say that the end of creation is to be conformed the Son, to “put on the new human” (Col 3:10–11), and thus to share, with him, in “the inheritance of the saints” (Col 1:12).

2. Proposal

My proposal for understanding ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα along with, and not separate from, the clause τὰ πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται is this: in the same way that an artisan employs a mental εἰκὼν by which and through which and unto which he fashions something, so too is the Son as the image of God the figure by whom and through whom and unto whom God created all things. Because a mental conception can be thought of as a place *in* which an activity is thought to occur in the phase of its preparation, and also something *by* which an action is executed, and *unto which* the action is carried out as its purpose, such a synthetic reading of the three prepositional phrases of v. 16 gains in plausibility. In this way, one combines the readings of ἐν αὐτῷ as both a locative and instrumental ἐν, aligns ἐν αὐτῷ with δι’ αὐτοῦ, and opens a way to align both with εἰς αὐτόν.

3. Conclusion: Verses 15–16

When one reads verses 15 and 16 together, an understanding of “image” emerges that goes beyond the suggestion of a “likeness” or “simile” or “imitation.” According to Col 1:15–16, the Son of vv. 13–14 is the “image of the invisible God” and “firstborn of creation” insofar as he had a role in the mediation of creation. Further, to understand this “image” as a kind of idea in the mind of God in the act of creation has the most explanatory power in terms of understanding all three prepositional phrases of v. 16 together. It is this very series of prepositions used in conjunction with εἰκὼν, rather than explicit semantics of cognition such as ἰδέα or νοήσις, which suggests this. The image is that which God envisions – akin to the German *sich vorstellen* – and in so doing, God posits for himself a *Gegenüber* (“counterpart”), the Son, who becomes the means and purpose of his creative act.

⁹⁰ Aristotle, *Metaph.* 983a.32–33 (1.3.1–2) (Tredennick, LCL): τὸ οὐ ἕνεκα καὶ τὰγαθόν (τέλος γὰρ γενέσεως καὶ κινήσεως πάσης τοῦτ’ ἔστιν). Cf. also *Metaph.* 1072b.2–4 (12.7.4).

B. Verse 17: The Supremacy of Christ

I. 17a: He is before All Things

The explanation of the Son as the image of the invisible God and the firstborn of all creation continues with the statement: *καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων*, “and he is before all things.” How is *πρὸ* to be understood? This preposition may indicate a spatial, temporal, or abstract phrase.⁹¹ In the New Testament, the preposition displays a straightforward temporal sense in the majority of its occurrences (35 of 47).⁹² In some of these, *πρὸ* occurs in statements referring to cosmogony or to the period prior to the genesis of the world.⁹³ In five occurrences, the preposition indicates a straightforward spatial statement.⁹⁴ The dividing line, however, between the temporal and spatial senses can be blurry. In six of the other occurrences, the Septuagintal phrase “before your/his face” (*πρὸ προσώπου σου/αὐτοῦ*) bears a primarily spatial sense, yet it occurs in the context of sending one person ahead of another, and thus the suggestion that one person arrives *before* the other one carries a temporal note.⁹⁵ In another instance, *πρὸ* is used in the metaphor of a “judge standing before the door,” which is clearly a spatial reference in terms of grammar. However, it occurs in a paraenetic passage which is grounded in an eschatological vision and therefore the proximity of the “judge” conveys the brevity of the time remaining before the judgment.⁹⁶ In two instances, the syntagma *πρὸ πάντων* is used adverbially.⁹⁷ James, for example, admonishes his addressees: “Above all [*πρὸ πάντων*], my brothers, do not swear [...] but let your ‘Yes’ be yes and your ‘No’ be no [...]” (Jas 5:12). Regardless of whether one prefers to characterize this use of *πρὸ* as temporal or spatial, the effect will be the same: a particular mode of behavior is granted a prime status vis-à-vis another one.⁹⁸

⁹¹ CGCG §31.8.

⁹² In addition, compound verbs and substantives with the prefix *προ-* often indicate a temporal relationship. A small sample includes: *προακούω* in Col 1:5; *πρόγνωσις* in Acts 2:23, 1 Pet 1:2; the deponent form of *προεπαγγέλλω* in Rom 1:2; *πρόθεσις* in Rom 8:28, 9:11; *προτίημι* in Rom 3:25; *προορίζω* in Acts 4:28, Rom 8:29, 30, 1 Cor 2:7, and Eph 1:5, 11.

⁹³ John 17:5, 24; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2; 1 Pet 1:20.

⁹⁴ Acts 1:6, 14; 14:13 (in an epithet of Zeus); Jas 5:9, 12; 1 Pet 4:8.

⁹⁵ Cf. Matt 11:10 (par. Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27; in each case, a quote from Exod 23:20 [LXX]); Luke 9:52; 10:1; Acts 13:24. The latter occurrence makes the temporal indication more explicit by the addition of *εἰσόδος* (*πρὸ προσώπου τῆς εἰσόδου αὐτοῦ*).

⁹⁶ Cf. Jas 5:9 in the context of Jas 5:1–12.

⁹⁷ Jas 5:2; 1 Pet 4:8. Cf. also Epictetus, *Diatr.* 3.21.18, *δεῖ δὲ [...] πρὸ πάντων τὸν θεὸν συμβουλευεῖν ταύτην τὴν χάραν κατασχεῖν*.

⁹⁸ Cf. the fragment of Pittacus of Mylene (late seventh/early sixth cent. B.C.): *Πρὸ πάντων σέβου τὸ θεῖον*, “Above all things, honor the divine” (*FPG* 1:216, line 10).

What is common to both the spatial and the temporal uses of *πρό* is this: despite referring to the *quantitative* categories of space and time, the preposition can nevertheless indicate a *qualitative* judgment about status. This is particularly important for Col 1:15–20. The use of *πρό* is temporal, seeing that creation is one of the chief themes of vv. 15–18a. The Son is said to exist before all things.⁹⁹ The assertion of a temporal relation, however, goes beyond a mere quantitative statement, for it also asserts the prime *status* of the Son as the image of God and the firstborn of all creation. Such status guaranteed by way of temporal priority can be found in Jewish and Greek religious and philosophical traditions as well.

In an Orphic fragment, Zeus' primacy is expressed in part through the affirmation that he came to be "first."¹⁰⁰ In Phaedrus' speech in Plato's *Symposium* 178b–c, Eros is referred to as *πρεσβύτατος*, "eldest" of the gods, for he had no parents and he and Gaia were the first to be born from Chaos. This temporal priority grants a certain status and grandeur, for Phaedrus deduces from this temporal priority the conclusion that Eros "is for us the cause of our greatest goods."¹⁰¹ In *Amatorius* 756e–f, Plutarch cites the same Parmenidean and Hesiodic lines about Eros that Phaedrus quotes in Plato's *Symposium*. Like Phaedrus, he considers the causal efficacy of Eros to derive from his *ancienneté*, yet he substitutes *προγενέστατος*, "born first of all," for Phaedrus' term *πρεσβύτατος*, "eldest."

⁹⁹ It is likely that Marcion amended his text of Colossians to the effect that the Son would be "before all [humans]," but not before "all things." See Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott: Eine Monographie zur Geschichte der Grundlegung der katholischen Kirche*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrich'sche Buchhandlung, 1924; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 54, n.: "Kol. 1,17 (καὶ αὐτός ἐστι πρό πάντων) gibt Tert. V, 19 also wieder: 'Posuit apostolus: "Et ipse est ante omnes." Quomodo enim ante omnes, si non ante omnia?' Wenn Tert. hier auf 'ante omnia' hinauskommen wollte, konnte er nach dem griechischen Text ohne weiteres so übersetzen; da er das aber nicht getan hat, so ist evident, daß ihm der Text 'ante omnes' und nicht πρό πάντων vorgelegen hat."

¹⁰⁰ PEG, vol. 2, fasc. 1, Orphica, frg. 14:
 Zeus came to be first, Zeus the lightning-wielder last; Ζεὺς πρῶτος [γένετο, Ζεὺς] ὕστατος [ἀργικέραυτος]
 Zeus the head, Zeus the middle, and from Ζεὺς κεφα[λή, Ζεὺς μέσ]σα, Διὸς δ' ἐκ
 Zeus have all things been wrought; [π]άντα τέ[τυκται]
 Zeus the breath of all things, Zeus is the fate [Ζεὺς πνοῆ πάντων, Ζεὺς πάντων ἐπλετο]
 of all things; Zeus the king, and Zeus the μοῖρα: Ζεὺς βασιλεύς, Ζεὺς δ' ἀρχὸς
 ruler of all things, [the] lightning-wielder. ἀπάντων ἀργικέραυτος.

Martin L. West attributes this fragment – with minor variations – to a hypothetical "Protogonos theogony," which he dates ca. 500 B.C. (*The Orphic Poems* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1983], 89, 110). Against the notion of a singular such theogonic narrative, see Gábor Betegh, *The Derveni Papyrus: Cosmology, Theology and Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 138, n. 23.

¹⁰¹ Plato, *Symp.* 178c: *πρεσβύτατος δὲ ὢν μεγίστων ἀγαθῶν ἡμῖν αἰτιός ἐστιν.*

The ascription of status through temporal priority is common in Jewish traditions as well. In Prov 8:22–31 (LXX), the high status accorded to Wisdom on the basis of her temporal priority is the heartbeat of the entire passage and provides the foundation for the ethical admonition in v. 32 and following.¹⁰² In *Leg.* 3.5 and *Migr.* 183, Philo employs a temporal reference to affirm God’s supremacy, interpreting Exod 17:6a to assert God’s existence prior to any and all genesis.¹⁰³

In Col 1:16–17, something similar takes place, insofar as it is the “firstborn of all creation in whom all things were created” who is said to be “before all things.” Colossians 1:17a therefore acclaims the supreme status of the Son vis-à-vis creation using a conceptual idiom that was well at-home in Hellenistic and Jewish traditions: that which is temporally most prior (quantity) is that which has the highest status (quality).¹⁰⁴ This phrase dovetails nicely with the preceding material in vv. 15–16. The Son is supreme over all things because he is *before* all things, and akin to the statements of Phaedrus and Plutarch, the following clause (v. 17b) demonstrates the way in which the Son’s *ancienneté* benefits the life of the cosmos.

II. 17b: All Things Hold Together in Him

Colossians 1:17b stakes the claim: τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν, “all things hold together in him.” Two possible options for understanding the prepositional phrase ἐν αὐτῷ are the “instrumental ἐν” or the “locative ἐν.” The proposal to understand the phrase as a locative ἐν relies on the thesis of a Stoic *Vorlage* of the hymn, which is dubious, as already noted,¹⁰⁵ and further, it does not do justice to v. 18a, in which it is the *church* that is said to be “his body,” not the cosmos. Reading ἐν as a locative ἐν would entail a circular logic, for v. 17b can only express the thought of v. 18a if one hypothesizes an interpolation of τῆς ἐκκλησίας in 18a.¹⁰⁶ Only then might one be able to say that both verses communicate the same thought while resorting to different expressions.

¹⁰² Juxtapose esp. Prov 8:22–23 with vv. 32–34b: κύριος ἔκτισέν με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ, πρὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος ἐθεμελίωσέν με ἐν ἀρχῇ [...] νῦν οὖν, υἱέ, ἀκούέ μου. Μακάριος ἀνὴρ, ὃς τὰς ἐμὰς ὁδοὺς φυλάξει. One can deduce from vv. 34c–36 that it is not the father of Prov 1:1, 8, who speaks, but rather Wisdom.

¹⁰³ Philo, *Leg.* 3.5: πρὸ γὰρ παντὸς γενητοῦ ὁ θεός ἐστι. Cf. also *Migr.* 183, in which he makes the same interpretive move.

¹⁰⁴ Although Hugo Grotius reckoned this idiom to be Hebraic only, he rightly noted the connection of *ancienneté* with status in his commentary on Colossians: “[primogenitum] *Hebraeis dicitur et quod primum et quod summum est in quoque genere, ut Ps. 89:27 [et alibi]*” (*Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*, 9 vols. [Paris: Grotius, 1646, in 2 vols.; Groningen: Zuidema, 1829], 7:116).

¹⁰⁵ See above, “Author of Colossians 1:15–20.”

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Dübbbers’ remarks on this thesis (see above, “Author of Col 1:15–20”).

Further, readings of v. 17b that presuppose a locative ἐν misunderstand that in philosophical speculation about the uniting principle of the universe, such a principle need not be understood as a place but could simply be conceived of as a power with particular qualities; Philo, for example, can speak of a πνεύματος ἐνωτικού δύναμις (*Opif.* 131). And Philo is not alone: ever since the time of the Pre-Socratics, there was an awareness that the cosmos was a unity, yet also an awareness that it was a *composite* unity.¹⁰⁷ Accordingly, there existed an interest in the question of the world's constitution and what unites or repels disparate elements and/or gradations of metaphysical existence.¹⁰⁸ Further, something must guarantee this composition, so there must be some force or principle that mediates this unity and thus fosters conditions congenial to the life of the cosmos, the life of humans, and the co-existence of humanity with the divine. What is it, then, which holds the world together?

This force ‘by which all things are held together’ – or are torn asunder – was interpreted in various ways. Empedocles maintained that the four elements fire, air, water, and earth were drawn towards and driven apart from one another by “two sovereign powers, Love and Strife.”¹⁰⁹ Although competing interpretations of Empedocles existed concerning which power truly resulted in unity,¹¹⁰ there is no disagreement concerning the basic notion that Empedocles believed that these two powers organized the composition and dissolution of the cosmos. The power maintaining the structural integrity of the cosmos could also be portrayed as a personalized divine force – a deity endowed with a conscious intellect and a will – such as the Demiurge in Plato's *Tim.* 41a–b:

¹⁰⁷ Cf. the reference in Plato, *Soph.* 242d–e, to the view of Heraclitus and Empedocles: τὸ ὄν πολλά τε καὶ ἐν ἔστιν.

¹⁰⁸ E.g., Plato, *Symp.* 202d–203a, it is τὸ δαιμόνιον that unites the divine with the human world: καὶ γὰρ πᾶν τὸ δαιμόνιον μεταξύ ἔστι θεοῦ τε καὶ θνητοῦ [...] ὥστε τὸ πᾶν αὐτὸ αὐτῶ συνδεδέσθαι [...] θεὸς δὲ ἀνθρώπων οὐ μείγνται, ἀλλὰ διὰ τούτου πᾶσα ἔστιν ἡ ὁμίλια καὶ ἡ διάλεκτος θεοῖς πρὸς ἀνθρώπους, καὶ ἐγρηγοροῖσι καὶ καθεύδουσι [...].

¹⁰⁹ Aëtius, *Placita* 1.3.20 (= DK 21.A.33): Ἐμπεδοκλῆς Μέτωνος Ἀκραγαντίνος τέτταρα μὲν λέγει στοιχεῖα, πῦρ ἀέρα ὕδωρ γῆν, δύο δὲ ἀρχικὰς δυνάμεις, φιλίαν τε καὶ νεῖκος· ὅν ἡ μὲν ἔστιν ἐνωτικὴ, τὸ δὲ διαιρετικόν.

¹¹⁰ Whereas Aëtius views Love as the uniting power and Strife as the divisive power (cf. previous footnote), Aristotle interpreted this the other way around (*Metaph.* 985a.25 [1.4.6] (= DK 31.A.37): ἡ μὲν φιλία διακρίνει, τὸ δὲ νεῖκος συγκρίνει). For both thinkers, Love brings the four elements together and mixes them, and Strife disbands them, yet it is precisely the state in which each of the four elements in their entirety form four distinct groups, in isolation from one another, which Aristotle considers to be a unity. That is, whereas unity consisted in the conjoining of diverse elements for Aëtius, Aristotle understood the unity of the elements to consist in homogenous purity.

Gods of gods, works of which I am creator and father, you have arisen through me and thus are indissoluble so long as I do not will it. To be sure, anything that is bound together surely is dissoluble, but separating whatever is beautifully joined together and is good would be the wish of someone evil; for these reasons and seeing that you have come to be, you are neither immortal nor are you at all indissoluble, yet you shall indeed in no way be dissolved nor furnished with a share of death, for my will is yet the greater and more sovereign bond than those you received when you were bound together in your generation.

(*Tim.* 41a–b)

“Θεοὶ θεῶν, ὧν ἐγὼ δημιουργὸς πατὴρ τε ἔργων, δι’ ἐμοῦ γενόμενα ἅλτα ἐμοῦ γε μὴ ἐθέλοντος. τὸ μὲν οὖν διη δεθὲν πᾶν λυτόν, τὸ γε μὴν καλῶς ἀρμοσθὲν καὶ ἔχον εὖ λυεῖν ἐθέλειν κακοῦ· δι’ ἃ καὶ ἐπέπερ γεγένησθε, ἀθάνατοι μὲν οὐκ ἐστὲ οὐδ’ ἄλλοι τὸ πάμπαν, οὔτι μὲν δὴ λυθήσεσθέ γε οὐδὲ τεύξεσθε θανάτου μοίρας, τῆς ἐμῆς βουλήσεως μείζονος ἔτι δεσμοῦ καὶ κυριωτέρου λαχόντες ἐκείνων οἷς ὅτ’ ἐγίγνωσθε ζυνεδεῖσθε.”

Although there is scholarly disagreement concerning the nature of the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*, specifically whether Plato considered him to be real or rather an accommodation to a mythical mode of speech,¹¹¹ it is clear that Plato considered not only the genesis¹¹² but also the continuing unity of the cosmos to be grounded in something divine and supramundane.

The Stoics maintained a similar view, although for them the personal Olympian deities were at best allegorical representations of divine forces, such as Zeus being the divine reason that permeates, shapes, and maintains the cosmos.¹¹³ This reason could be portrayed through an organic metaphor, such as the σπερματικὸς λόγος,¹¹⁴ or the biological metaphor of πνεῦμα as (vital) breath,¹¹⁵ or through a psychic metaphor in which Zeus is the “soul” of the cosmos that holds the cosmos together and animates it, as does the human soul in the human body.¹¹⁶ Or, this power might be represented more abstractly,

¹¹¹ Cf. Filip Karfik, *Die Beseelung des Kosmos: Untersuchungen zur Kosmologie, Seelenlehre und Theologie in Platons Phaidon und Timaios*, Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 199 (Munich/Leipzig: Saur, 2004), 127–38; Gerd van Riel, “Perspectivism in Plato’s Views of the Gods,” in *Plato and the Power of Images*, MNS 405 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 107–20, 113–19.

¹¹² Cf. *Tim.* 30b–c on the generation of the cosmos via divine providence: δεῖ λέγειν τόνδε τὸν κόσμον [...] διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ γενέσθαι πρόνοιαν.

¹¹³ Seneca, *Ep.* 58.27–28; Diogenes Laertius 7.135–136; Ps.-Aristotle, *De mundo* 397b.

¹¹⁴ Diogenes Laertius 7.136.

¹¹⁵ Maximilian Forschner, *Die Philosophie der Stoa: Logik, Physik und Ethik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2018), 117–18: “Pneūma ist nach stoischer Vorstellung das alles durchdringende feinst-körperliche Substrat, dessen Dynamik für die synchrone und diachrone Verbindung von allem verantwortlich zeichnet [...] Die Pneumaspaltung (*pneumatikos tonos*) durchdringt den Kosmos und hält ihn zusammen.”

¹¹⁶ Seneca, *Ep.* 65.24: *Quem in hoc mundo locum deus obtinet, hunc in homine animus; quod est illic materia, id in nobis corpus est*; Cornutus, *Nat. d.* 2.1: “Ὡσπερ δὲ ἡμεῖς ὑπὸ

simply as a “ruling principle.”¹¹⁷ Despite the fact that this was not considered to be a personal deity endowed with a will, the Stoics readily affirmed that this unifying and sustaining force is the noblest entity of all that exists,¹¹⁸ and thus this Stoic tenet addresses not merely the mechanics of the cosmos but also asserts what is worthy of praise and what ought to guide ethics.¹¹⁹

Though the Middle Platonist Plutarch rejected the Stoic allegorical interpretation of the gods, his presentation of a speech by his teacher Ammonius at the end of *De E apud Delphos* is clearly reminiscent of Stoic “vitalism”¹²⁰ insofar as some divine entity is present within the cosmos and holds it together.¹²¹ After denouncing the (Stoic) notion that the god Apollo and the sun might be one and the same, Ammonius says:

For on the contrary, that which is divine is, in some way or other, innate in the cosmos, and it binds its being together and prevails upon its corporeal weakness, which drives it towards dissolution.

τούναντίον γὰρ ὁ θεῖον ἀμωσγέπως ἐγγέγονε τῷ κόσμῳ, τοῦτο συνδεῖ τὴν οὐσίαν καὶ κρατεῖ τῆς περὶ τὸ σωματικὸν ἀσθενείας ἐπὶ φθορὰν φερομένης.

(*De E* 393c–f)

ψυχῆς διοικούμεθα, οὕτω καὶ ὁ κόσμος ψυχὴν ἔχει τὴν συνέχουσαν αὐτόν, καὶ αὕτη καλεῖται Ζεὺς, πρῶτως καὶ διὰ παντὸς ζῶσα καὶ αἰτία οὐσα τοῖς ζῶσι τοῦ ζῆν.

¹¹⁷ See Cicero, *Nat. d.* 2.29, where the Stoic Lucilius Balbus uses the term *principatus* and equates it with the term ἡγεμονικόν.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Cleanthes’ *Hymn to Zeus* 1, where Zeus is addressed as the “most-honorable of [the] immortals” (Κύδιστ’ ἀθανάτων), and Cicero, *Nat. d.* 2.36, where Balbus asserts that the nature that “embraces all things” is the best of all things: *Quid autem est inscitius quam eam naturam quae omnis res sit complexa non optumam dici [...]*?

¹¹⁹ Cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.86, in which life according to reason is a life “according to nature” for rational beings (τὸ κατὰ λόγον ζῆν ὀρθῶς γίνεσθαι <τού> τοῖς κατὰ φύσιν), and 7.87, in which such a life “according to nature” is the proper τέλος of human life: διόπερ πρῶτος ὁ Ζήνων ἐν τῷ Περὶ ἀνθρώπου φύσεως τέλος εἶπε τὸ ὁμολογουμένως τῆ φύσει ζῆν· ὅπερ ἐστὶ κατ’ ἀρετὴν ζῆν· ἄγει γὰρ πρὸς ταύτην ἡμᾶς ἡ φύσις. Cf. also 7.88 for a portrayal which appropriates mythical speech concerning Zeus as the king and governor of the universe. Though his “will” is mentioned here, I would argue that this must be understood against the background of the Stoics’ persistent reliance on allegorical interpretation of the Olympians. Seeing that Diogenes Laertius was an Epicurean and anthropomorphism was a bone of theological contention between the Stoics and the Epicureans (cf. the comments of Cotta the Academic in Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.62–63, 90; 3.20–21), it is possible that Diogenes sought to emphasize any seeming concessions to Epicurean thought in his portrayal of the Stoics.

¹²⁰ On the designation of Stoic physics/theology as “vitalistic” rather than “materialistic,” see Jean-Baptiste Gourinat, “The Stoics on Matter and Prime Matter: ‘Corporealism’ and the Imprint of Plato’s Timaeus,” in *God and Cosmos in Stoicism*, ed. Ricardo Salles (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 46–68.

¹²¹ On the coincidence of the active and passive principles in Stoicism, see Forschner, *Die Philosophie der Stoa*, 106–8.

I would argue that the author of Colossians engages his addressees in a similar way and that understanding the ἐν αὐτῷ of v. 17b as an instrumental ἐν is the most plausible reading. In comparison with the previously cited sources and thinkers, the author of Colossians provides the addressees with a different point of reference: it is the Son, the image of God, the firstborn of all creation by whom all things are held together. This serves to reinforce the general thrust of the first strophe of the hymnic passage; namely, the demonstration of Christ's supremacy over and in creation. "Der Kosmos existiert also nicht für sich, sondern nur durch seinen Bezug auf Christus."¹²² That this also entails an ethical component – "all things are held together in him" in the sense that a life corresponding to his prevents the world from dissolving into chaos and disarray, as it were – will be considered in the final chapter of our study.¹²³

C. Verse 18a: The Head of the Body, Which is the Church

The first strophe of the hymn concludes with the statement: καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας. The term κεφαλὴ primarily signifies the biological head of a human or animal. Beyond this, various metaphorical usages emerge. The term may be used *pars pro toto* to signify the entire person,¹²⁴ or one's life,¹²⁵ and may be employed in this sense in imprecatory formulas.¹²⁶ It may also signify a source or point of origin, such as that of a river.¹²⁷ What it does not signify, at least in sources prior to the third century B.C., is the leader of a human community. Such an application of κεφαλὴ appears for the first time in the Septuagint¹²⁸ as a translation of the Hebrew term שִׂרָה, as in Judg 10:18:

¹²² Feldmeier and Spieckermann, *Menschwerdung*, 309.

¹²³ See below, "All Things Hold Together in Him."

¹²⁴ *LSJ*, s.v. κεφαλὴ I.2; e.g., *Od.* 1.343–344, when Penelope expresses her longing for Odysseus: "For such a head I deeply long, calling ever to mind the man whose renown ranges wide across Hellas and in Argos! (τοῖν γὰρ κεφαλὴν ποθέω μεμνημένη αἰεὶ, / ἀνδρός, τοῦ κλέος εὐρὺ καθ' Ἑλλάδα καὶ μέσον Ἄργος).

¹²⁵ *LSJ*, s.v. κεφαλὴ, I.3; e.g., *Il.* 17.242, when Ajax expresses to Menelaus his fear that they will not make it out of the war alive and that he does not fear for the corpse of Patroclus but rather, "I fear much more for my own life" (ὄσσον ἐμῆ κεφαλῆ περιδείδια).

¹²⁶ *LSJ*, s.v. κεφαλὴ, I.4; e.g., Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.155: τὰ μὲν γὰρ πρότερον ἐγὼ τε ἔπρηξα καὶ ἐγὼ κεφαλῆ ἀναμάξας φέρω. Cf. *LSJ* on the idiom ἀναμάσσω τῆ κεφαλῆ: "[to] rub or wipe off [...] a deed (as if a stain) [...] [on the] head (since it was believed that the pollution of murder was avoided by wiping the weapon on the victim's head)."

¹²⁷ *LSJ*, s.v. κεφαλὴ, II.d; e.g., Herodotus, *Hist.* 4.91, when Darius commends the river Tearus: Τεάρου ποταμοῦ κεφαλαὶ ὕδωρ ἄριστόν τε καὶ κάλλιστον παρέχονται πάντων ποταμῶν.

¹²⁸ Heinrich Schlier, "κεφαλὴ, ἀνακεφαλαιοῦμαι," *TWNT* 3:672–82, 673: "Soviel sichtbar wird, dient κεφαλὴ innerhalb des profanen griechischen Sprachgebrauchs nicht zur

“The commanders of the people of Gilead said to one another, ‘Who will begin the fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head (ᾤᾱ/κεφαλή) over all the inhabitants of Gilead.’”¹²⁹

There is no occurrence in the Septuagint of a corresponding explicit use of *σῶμα* in such statements to refer to those *under* the rule of a political “head.”¹³⁰ It seems that within the biblical traditions – and perhaps outside of them as well¹³¹ – Col 1:18a is the first occurrence of an *explicit* juxtaposition of *κεφαλή* and *σῶμα* used to refer to the leader of a given community and the community itself.

Even in the protopauline letters, Christ is not the “head of the body.” When Paul first describes the community as a *σῶμα* in 1 Corinthians, it is not to address the issue of unity, but rather that of sexual morality (1 Cor 6:12–20), and accordingly, the focus lies on how the addressees are the members of Christ rather than how Christ might be considered their collective “head.” Yet Paul does not simply say that the believers are members of *Christ’s* body but, fitting for a passage concerning sexual ethics, he writes: “Do you not know that *your bodies* are members of Christ?” (1 Cor 6:15a). Further, *κεφαλή* does not appear in this passage; it appears for the first time in 11:3, where Christ is said to be the “head” of every male, but not of the entire community of faith. The first time Paul employs the language of “body” to describe the unity of the church, it is in a eucharistic context: the addressees are “one body” because they all partake of the “one bread” of the eucharist (1 Cor 10:16–17). This surely symbolizes their unity in Christ, but it is due to their participation in a meal commemorating his sacrifice that was offered for all of them and which in this way unites them. When Paul employs the metaphor of a body and its members to

Bezeichnung des Hauptes einer Gemeinschaft. Eine solche tritt erst in der Sphäre des griechischen AT zu Tage.”

¹²⁹ Schlier, *ibid.*, 3:674: “*κεφαλή* dient zur Bezeichnung des *Hauptes und Herrschers einer Gemeinschaft*,” a development that begins in Deut 28:13 with reference to Israel’s primacy over other peoples, provided that it obeys the divine will, and which is later applied to an individual level in Judg 10:18 and 11:11. In Codex B, ἄρχων appears in place of *κεφαλή* in 10:19 and 11:8, 9; the latter term, however, does appear in Codex B in 11:11 (*ibid.*).

¹³⁰ Schlier, *ibid.*, 3:674: “Bei diesem Gebrauch von *κεφαλή* fehlt jedoch jede Ausbeutung des Bildes in dem Sinn, daß die von der *κεφαλή* Beherrschten ihr als ein oder als ihr *σῶμα* gegenüberstehen.” The author proceeds to mention Isa 1:4–5, where a metaphorical body “an sich im Hintergrund steht,” in order to support his claim that the lack of the term *σῶμα* is particularly significant.

¹³¹ Even in Seneca’s *Clem.* 1.4.3, where he uses the corresponding *caput* to refer to the Roman emperor, he does not employ the corresponding term *corpus*, thus making it a matter of suggestion rather than explicit assertion. That he would have had no qualms about the possibility of making such a statement and ensuring that the reader had no misunderstanding concerning the importance of this “head” for the body politic may be deduced from his characterizations of the emperor in 1.4.1, where he calls him the *spiritus vitalis* and *mens illa imperii*.

describe the church in 1 Cor 12:12–27, he does not refer to Christ as the head of the body. Instead, he describes how improper and senseless it would be for the addressees to create a hierarchy based on their spiritual gifts and he casually uses the head as an example in v. 21; that is, he refers to a head when he has the addressees themselves in view and the head, in this passage, simply serves as one member among others, and thus *inter alia* rather than *primus inter pares*. Paul employs the metaphor of a σῶμα again in Rom 12:4–5, when he states that the many members are “one body *in Christ*” (οἱ πολλοὶ ἐν σῶμά ἐσμεν ἐν Χριστῷ). Here, too, there is no mention of Christ as the “head” of the body. The point of the metaphor here is not that the body of Christ has an anthropomorphic form, with a “head” at the top, but rather that the harmony of a diverse set of members operating in unity is a fitting metaphor for the individual believers united “in Christ.”

In Col 1:18a, the issue at hand is not whether the divine may have a body or dwell in one – that is attested clearly enough in Col 2:9 – but whether the church as the community of persons “rescued” (1:13) and “reconciled” (1:21) have a vital connection to Christ, the head. That is, after all, what the biological metaphor conveys: a biological σῶμα is any living entity which must be connected to its head in some manner in order to remain alive.¹³² In the context of the entire letter, the affirmation that Christ is the head of the body serves to address the situation at hand. That is, against the claim that one must observe particular religious practices in order to reach the heavens (2:16–23), the author of Colossians assures the addressees that they are already united with Christ as a body is joined to its head. It is not only the case that they could have no better “head” than this one, seeing that it is the “head over all power and authority” (2:10), but they also experience the benefits of this vital connection *now*, for it is this head “from which the entire body, held together by ligaments and sinews [...] grows the growth of God” (2:19). It might be said that 2:19 provides a clear expression of the conjunction of Col 1:17 and 1:18a, insofar as the Son “in whom all things hold together” is also the “head of the body” and thus holds it together. Their union with Christ as the source of their life, unity, and spiritual well-being is, therefore, not a reality far off in the future, some state of affairs that might be reached through enough years of observing the correct religious festivals (2:16), experiencing mystical visions of the worship of the angels (2:18), or observing certain religious sanctions (2:20–21). This manner of worship and religious ethics is a state of affairs that the author can only refer to as the “commandments and the teachings of men that have [merely] the

¹³² Similarly, Filippo Belli, *Lettera ai Colossesi: Introduzione, traduzione e commento*, NVBTA 48 (Milan: Edizioni San Paolo, 2015), 14, noting that the motif “head” conveys that Christ is the “unica fonte vitale” of the body.

appearance of wisdom in self-imposed worship¹³³ and humility and discipline of the body,” but which in reality only serve the flesh (2:22b–23). Opposed to this, the author claims that the Son, with whom the addressees have been raised to new life, is “seated at the right hand of God” and their “life is hidden with Christ in God,” and they should therefore seek that which is “above” rather than “things upon the earth” (3:1–3). Rather than having yet to attain their union with Christ and new life in him, their life is *already* connected to Christ’s own life and thus they are already connected to the “head” and “growing the growth of God” *now*. In contrast to the use of the σῶμα-metaphor in 1 Cor 12, in which the unity of the body is grounded in the reasoned argument that a body only functions as a coherent whole, the use of σῶμα in Col 1:18a and 2:19 indicates that the unity and life of the body derives from the body’s vital connection to its head.

In Colossians, the concept of πνεῦμα that is used in the Protospaulines to express the vital connection between Christ and believers is conspicuously lacking, though one might say that the author seeks to express the *point* of Pauline pneumatology with a different metaphor: the vital connection of head and body.¹³⁴ The two images are certainly not the same, yet they both seek to affirm the vital connection between Christ and believers.

The notion that this is a present reality also addresses the question of where the divine might be living and active. It is the Son in whom the fullness of deity dwells (present indicative: κατοικεῖ) bodily and by whom the addressees are being filled (2:9–10 [paraphrastic present construction: ἐστὲ ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι]). In this way, a correspondence is affirmed: as the πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος dwells in the Son, the Son “fills” the addressees and his λόγος can dwell in them.¹³⁵ This thought is continued in 3:15–17 when the author: (1) assures the addressees that they have been “called in one body” to the peace of Christ; (2) exhorts them to “let the word of Christ dwell in [them] abundantly”;

¹³³ This term ἐθελοθησκεία appears for the first time in Greek literature in Colossians. It is either a neologism or a term which merely appears to be so because any other texts which might have contained it are no longer available to us. A further argument for a neologism, and perhaps the simpler of the two, is that ἐθελο- as the primary member of a composite substantive is well-attested: see the considerable list of entries in Passow, *Handwörterbuch*, which range from ἐθέλεχθρος (*apud* Pollux 3.64) to ἐθελοθησκεία to ἐθελόπορνος (Anacreon, frg. 19.7) to ἐθελοφιλόσοφος (the latter occurring, albeit in the twelfth cent. A.D. *Etymologicum Magnum*). In each case, ἐθέλο- signifies voluntarily assuming a task or posture. Though Schweizer, *Der Brief an die Kolosser*, 128, proposes that the term ἐθελοθησκεία means a “freiwillig übernommen[er] Gottesdienst,” and Pokorný, *Kolosser*, 131, suggests that the term is likely a “sprachliche Neubildung des Verfassers,” and I agree with both of them, it was Ernst Lohmeyer who long before them advanced a credible reason for it: he supposed that the neologism was meant to counter the θρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων in 2:18 (Lohmeyer, *Kolosser*, 129, n. 4).

¹³⁴ Cf. Rom 8:12–17; Gal 4:4–7.

¹³⁵ Col 2:9–10; 3:17; cf. also Eph 1:22–23.

and (3) enjoins them, saying, “Whatsoever you do in word or in deed, [do] all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”¹³⁶

Lastly, the mention of the “church” is the first and only instance in which the cosmic scope of Col 1:15–18a is reduced to focus on a particular human community. Whereas the items of v. 16 could be defined as subsets in isolation whose combination results in universal predications, thus making statements of a cosmic scope, the introduction of a definite, particular human community introduces for the first time something of a limit on the Son. It is *this* community, of which the addressees are a part, which has the Son as their leader and source of unity.

D. Verses 18b–20: Restorative Reconciliation

The subject matter of Col 1:18b–20 appears more recognizably Pauline; after a treatment of the topic of creation in vv. 15–18a, the hymn proceeds to treat the soteriological significance of the Son and his death on the cross, presenting it as the reconciliation of all things in heaven and earth.¹³⁷ Yet if the Son, according to Col 1:15–18a, is the Image of God in whom and through whom and unto whom all things have been created and in whom all things hold together, what need is there of a subsequent reconciliation? Further, how does the affirmation of the Son’s status as the Image of God and his priority and supremacy over creation fit with the reference to a soteriological act in time? In other words, how does the Image as the transcendent reference point of all creation – the “firstborn of all creation” who guarantees the hidden connection between the Father and all creation – fit with the death of Jesus, an event entangled in the immanence of human history?

In the protopauline letters, we find a different scheme: through Adam’s transgression, sin and death entered the world, and the remedy was “the obedience of the one man” Jesus Christ (Rom 5:19), through which he became the “last Adam,” the “life-giving spirit” (1 Cor 15:45) in whom all shall live (1 Cor

¹³⁶ Col 3:15–17: καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ Χριστοῦ βραβευέτω ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν, εἰς ἣν καὶ ἐκλήθητε ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι· καὶ εὐχάριστοι γίνεσθε. Ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐνοικεῖτω ἐν ὑμῖν πλουσίως, ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ διδάσκοντες καὶ νοουθετοῦντες ἑαυτοὺς ψαλμοῖς ὕμνοις ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς ἐν τῇ χάριτι ᾄδοντες ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν τῷ θεῷ· καὶ πᾶν ὃ τι ἐὰν ποιῆτε ἐν λόγῳ ἢ ἐν ἔργῳ, πάντα ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου Ἰησοῦ, εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ.

¹³⁷ “Enfin, n’oubliez pas que Col 1,15-20 est aussi redevable aux traditions du christianisme naissant, notamment d’empreinte paulinienne [...] De même l’idée de la compréhension positive (sotériologique) de la mort du Christ à la croix (voir Col 1,20b – mais formulée ici au sens non spécifiquement paulinien), idée que Paul partage avec d’autres traditions du christianisme émergent” (Andreas Dettwiler, “Le Christ comme pensée de la création: Un exercice en théologie interculturelle (Col 1,15–20),” *FoiVie* 54, no. 3 [2015]: 37–52, 43).

15:22). This is none other than the Son sent by Father “in the fullness of time” (Gal 4:4), the Son to whose image believers are conformed now in part and to whom they shall be fully conformed in the eschaton.¹³⁸ At least in this scheme, the Son’s role as Image commences in the present and is consummated in the eschatological future. Yet what happens when creation is added to the equation? And what does it have to do with the Son *as* Image?

The meaning of Col 1:18b–20 and its proximity to or distance from the theology of the protopauline letters will only become clear after an analysis of the passage. For this reason, we shall begin with a syntactical and semantic analysis of the constituent parts of the passage before moving on to a treatment of its content *en bloc*.

The basic structure of Col 1:15–18a is repeated in vv. 18b–20, though with fewer members. Both strophes begin with a clause that ascribes a particular identity to the Son, doing so with the relative pronoun ὅς, followed by an explanatory ὅτι. While the ὅτι clause in v. 16 explains the preceding verse, three additional explanatory clauses are added through a conjunctive καί, namely in 17a, 17b, and 18a. The basic structure is as follows: ὅς ἐστιν [...], ὅτι [...] καί [...]. The relative pronoun ὅς introduces the leading theme of the strophe and the theme’s content is explained by the ὅτι clause and the καί clauses subordinated to it. In the case of vv. 15–18a, the conjunctive καί is used three times in order to add more determinate content to the explanation introduced by ὅτι. In the case of vv. 18b–20, the conjunctive καί is used only once. In addition to the number of καί-clauses, one further dissimilarity in the structure of the two strophes is the presence of an intermediary explanatory clause, introduced by ἵνα, in v. 18d.

As the beginning of the second strophe of the hymnic passage, the structure of v. 18b–d is similar to that of v. 15. Just as the relative pronoun ὅς in v. 18b corresponds to the use of ὅς at the beginning of v. 15, so too does the asyndetic connection between 18b and 18c mirror the asyndetic connection of 15a and 15b. They resemble one another further insofar as they make a claim about the identity of the Son, which is subsequently explained. They are also related semantically, for the term πρωτότοκος and the use of πᾶς are common to both.

I. 18b: The Beginning, Firstborn of the Dead

The Son is said to be ἀρχή. The term has a variety of meanings. The most general meaning is “beginning” or “origin.” In the Hellenistic philosophical tradition, it can also mean “cosmic principle,” such as the two cosmic principles “God” and “matter” in Stoic physics.¹³⁹ When Philo attests the

¹³⁸ See the treatment of 1 Cor, 2 Cor, and Rom above in the section, “The Apostle Paul.”

¹³⁹ Diogenes Laertius 7.134 (= *SVF* 1.85): δοκεῖ δ’ αὐτοῖς ἀρχὰς εἶναι τῶν ὄλων δύο, τὸ ποιῶν καὶ τὸ πάσχον. τὸ μὲν οὖν πάσχον εἶναι τὴν ἄποιον οὐσίαν, τὴν ὕλην, τὸ δὲ ποιῶν τὸν ἐν αὐτῇ λόγον, τὸν θεὸν· τοῦτον γὰρ ἀίδιον ὄντα διὰ πάσης αὐτῆς δημιουργεῖν ἕκαστα.

πολυωνυμία of the divine Logos, the first name he mentions is ἀρχή (*Conf.* 146). In the Corpus Paulinum, ἀρχή can represent power, whether spiritual or earthly, such as one finds in 1 Cor 15:24 and Rom 8:38, but also within our passage (Col 1:16e) and its immediate context (Col 2:10). As in the case of εἰκόν in v. 15a, the term ἀρχή in v. 18b must be explained by its immediate context. The term is explained by what immediately follows in an asyndetic connection: he is the “beginning” insofar as he is the “firstborn of the dead,” for though he might be the *first* to be resurrected, he will not remain the last.¹⁴⁰

Christ as the “beginning, the firstborn of the dead” (ἀρχή, πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν) is clearly reminiscent of 1 Cor 15:20, where Christ is said to be the “first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (ἀραρχή τῶν κεκοιμημένων), the one who shall precede all believers in the general resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:23, Ἐκαστος δὲ ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ τάγματι· ἀραρχή Χριστός, ἔπειτα οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ). This, along with the theme of reconciliation and the reference to the cross in v. 20, appears to point us in the direction of the “last Adam” Christology of 1 Cor 15, Rom 5.¹⁴¹ Yet whether or not the last Adam Christology of the protopauline letters is in view here will only become evident after our analysis.

II. 19: All the Fullness

The term πλήρωμα derives from πλήρης and means “fullness” or “fulfillment.”¹⁴² In Ps 23:1, 49:12, and 88:12 (LXX), it refers to the “fullness” of the earth as the possession of the Lord. It can also mean “fulfillment” in a manner which comes close to being synonymous with κεφάλαιον, “chief point” or “sum” of an affair,¹⁴³ such as when Paul refers to love (ἀγάπη) as the “fulfillment” of the Law (Rom 13:10b).¹⁴⁴ The term can also assume salvation-

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Luzzi, *Le lettere di San Paolo*, 81. Though his interpretation relies heavily on the ἀραρχή metaphor of 1 Cor, he is right to note that for Col, Christ as “beginning” and “firstborn of the dead” is the *first* to be raised, but not the *only* one (“il primo, non il solo”).

¹⁴¹ Philo can use ἀρχή precisely in this sense when speaking of Noah in *Mos.* 2.60. Noah was not only considered to be morally suitable before God and free of the common misfortune of humankind but was also judged to be worthy to be the beginning of a second genesis of humanity (νομισθεῖς γὰρ ἐπιτήδειος εἶναι μὴ μόνον ἀμοιρῆσαι τῆς κοινῆς συμφορᾶς, ἀλλὰ καὶ δευτέρας γενέσεως ἀνθρώπων αὐτὸς ἀρχὴ γενέσθαι [...]).

¹⁴² Hans Hübner, “πλήρωμα,” *EWNT*, 3rd ed. (2011), 262–64. See further Gerhard Dellling, “πλήρης, πληρώω, πλήρωμα,” *TWNT* 6:283–309, 297–304.

¹⁴³ E.g., the subject matter of the 13th Diatribe of Musonius Rufus, “What the Main Point of Marriage Is” (τὸ κεφάλαιον γάμου). According to Musonius, the “chief point” of marriage consists in “partnership in life and the procreation of children” (βίου καὶ γενέσεως παιδῶν κοινωνίαν κεφάλαιον εἶναι γάμου [ed. Hense, p. 65, lines 6–7]).

¹⁴⁴ πλήρωμα οὖν νόμου ἢ ἀγάπῃ. That a meaning close to κεφάλαιον might be in view here can be deduced from the use of the verb ἀνακεφαλαιῶ in Rom 13:9, where Paul states that all the commandments are “summed up” in the command to love one’s neighbor.

historical relevance, as in Gal 4:4, where Paul states that God sent the Son “when the fullness of time (τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου) had come,” or in Rom 11:12, 25, where Paul refers to the “fullness” or “full inclusion” of the Jews and Gentiles encompassed by God’s plan of salvation.

In the case of Col 1:19, two factors indicate its meaning. First, πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα is the grammatical subject not only of εὐδόκησεν and the ensuing complementary aorist active infinitive κατοικῆσαι in v. 19, but also of ἀποκαταλλάξαι in v. 20. The “fullness” therefore indicates a subject who, at the very least, has orchestrated the work of reconciliation.¹⁴⁵ If one assumes that the author of the letter is either Paul or a faithful disciple of Paul, then this term could have no other referent than God.¹⁴⁶ Even if one argues, as Christian Stettler has done, that πλήρωμα is a parallel concept to the Jewish notion of the Shekinah, the end result is much the same.¹⁴⁷ The analysis of the aorist active infinitive κατοικῆσαι, “to live in, reside, settle,” also plays a role in determining the subject of the verse. Here, it is used in an intransitive sense. It is

¹⁴⁵ Lohmeyer, *Kolosser* 64, ends up at a similar conclusion when discussing the subject of εὐδόκησεν: “[Wer] das Subjekt dieses Satzes ist, ob ‘alle Fülle’ oder ein zu ergänzendes ‘Gott’, ist nicht sicher zu entscheiden. Der sachliche Sinn ist klar: ‘Gott hat in ihm Wohnung genommen’ [...]”

¹⁴⁶ The attempt by Pierre Benoit, “Leib, Haupt und Pleroma in den Gefangenschaftsbriefen,” chap. 12 in Benoit, *Exegese und Theologie: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1965), 246–79, 271–73, to take πλήρωμα to mean the cosmos in a Stoic sense and God in a Pauline sense seems to be an attempt to mediate between two previous scholarly suggestions, but to do so in a way which does not do justice to the *object* of reconciliation, “all things upon the earth [and] in the heavens,” in v. 20. If one took Benoit’s suggestion seriously, then Col 1:19–20 would affirm that the cosmos reconciled itself to itself. For his part, Josef Ernst assumes the existence of a pre-Christian hymn which served as a *Vorlage* for Col 1:15–20 and states that in the original hymn, τὸ πλήρωμα indicated God as the creator and sustainer of the cosmos, but that in the redacted form presented to us in Col 1:15–20, an alteration of subject has taken place to the effect that the subject is no longer τὸ πλήρωμα, but the θεός who determined to allow the πλήρωμα to dwell in Christ and to achieve the work of salvation through him (*Pleroma and Pleroma Christi: Geschichte und Deutung eines Begriffs der paulinischen Antilegomena*, BU 5 [Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1970], 87). Ernst’s reason for supposing such a shift, however, is not exegetical but rather heresiological. That is, he shares Benoit’s concern that reading τὸ πλήρωμα as a cipher for God would lead to a Nestorian reading of Col 1:19 (Ernst, *ibid.*, 84; Benoit, “Leib, Haupt und Pleroma,” 270). Aside from the fact that allowing heresiology to determine exegetical questions is methodologically untenable, such an argument is also anachronistic – Nestorius lived in the fifth cent. A.D. – and thus is also for this reason not a convincing one.

¹⁴⁷ See Christian Stettler, *Der Kolosserhymnus: Untersuchungen zu Form, traditionsgeschichtlichem Hintergrund und Aussage von Kol 1, 15–20*, WUNT 2/131 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 261, who argues (in reliance upon the work of Sverre Aalen, “Begrepet πλήρωμα I Kolosser- og Efeserbrevet,” *TTK* 23 [1952], 49–67, 62), “Es handelt sich bei πλήρωμα um einen ‘Parallelbegriff zu Schekina’, der ‘Gott selbst in einer bestimmten Funktionsrelation’ meint, nämlich der der Nähe Gottes zur Welt, seines Wohnens an dem von ihm erwählten Ort.”

possible that the sigmatic aorist signifies a causative verb, to the effect that κατοικῆσαι would mean, “to make [the fullness] to dwell [in him],” such as one finds in the translations of the *Lutherbibel* and the *Neue Zürcher Bibel*. There are three reasons to see this as the weaker option. First, this usage would have been antiquated by the time of the composition of Colossians, having been a usage more proper of Homer’s era. Second, the causative sigmatic aorist often occurs in addition to an athematic intransitive aorist;¹⁴⁸ this is not the case with the verb κατοικέω. Lastly, one would need to supply θεός or πατήρ as the subject of εὐδόκησεν.¹⁴⁹ Yet in order to suggest this, one would need to construe κατοικῆσαι as a causative sigmatic aorist so as to make a meaningful grammatical construction of the sentence. The first two reasons listed, however, exclude this possibility.

As for the second factor in determining the meaning of πλήρωμα, the use of the syntagma πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος, “all the fullness of deity,” in Col 2:9 indicates that the author understands the term πλήρωμα to refer to God rather than to a more generic “fullness of being” (*Seinsfülle*).¹⁵⁰ That the term is used absolutely in 1:19 but occurs with an exegetical τῆς θεότητος in 2:9 might indicate that Colossians presents us with an intermediary stage in the development of πλήρωμα into a technical theological term.¹⁵¹ At any rate, the term πλήρωμα in Col. 1:19 appears to signify God.¹⁵²

One last item of note in the interpretation of πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα concerns the ‘chronology’ of its indwelling. In Col 1:20a, the purpose of its indwelling is said to be the achievement of reconciliation and in 1:20b, it is said to have done so “through the blood of his cross.” The antecedent of αὐτοῦ in τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ is of course the Son, the focus of Col 1:15–20. The logical temporal connection between v. 19 and v. 20 presupposes that the indwelling was already a feature of the life of the earthly Jesus. Of course, there is no indication in the letter that the author distinguishes between an “earthly Jesus” prior to the resurrection and a “resurrected Christ” or “Son of God” following the resurrection; on the contrary, he is conceived to be a single subject in whom all

¹⁴⁸ On both points, see Henri M.F.M. van de Laar, *Description of the Greek Individual Verbal Systems*, Leiden Studies in Indo-European 11 (Amsterdam/Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2000), 410.

¹⁴⁹ Against this suggestion, cf. Lohse, *Kolosser*, 97–98.

¹⁵⁰ Alternatively, Müller, *Kolossenerbrief*, 173, opts for “Fülle der göttlichen Kräfte.” Christoph Marksches, *Gottes Körper: Jüdischer, christliche und pagane Gottesvorstellungen in der Antike* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2016), 726, n. 16, reads θεότης in Col 2:9 as “divinity” (*Gottheit*).

¹⁵¹ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 100–1.

¹⁵² That a kind of “fullness” could be a mark of divine status can be seen in the use of the superlative of πλήρης in Philo, *Somn.* 1.75, where he describes the Word as light and as the archetype of all other kinds of light, for it is “[God’s] Word in all fullness” (τὸ μὲν γὰρ παράδειγμα ὁ πληρέστατος ἦν αὐτοῦ λόγος).

things were created (Col 1:16a) and through whom all things were reconciled through the crucifixion (Col 1:20).¹⁵³ The “indwelling” mentioned in Col 1:19 therefore cannot refer only to a point subsequent to the crucifixion and resurrection of the Son.

III. 20: All Things

In Col 1:20a and 20c, the author affirms that “all things” (τά πάντα) have been reconciled “through him [sc. the Son]” (δι’ αὐτοῦ). As with the work of creation in the first strophe, the second strophe describes the work of reconciliation with a universal quantification (ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς/ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς). The scope of the work of reconciliation, therefore, exceeds the limits of the community of faith called ἐκκλησία in Colossians and includes *all* things in the cosmos. The significance of a cosmic scope cannot be understated: if one presumes of the cosmos that “nothing at all exists outside it,”¹⁵⁴ then one must conclude that everything that exists is included in this statement.

IV. 20a: The Term ἀποκατάλλασσω

Yet if the scope of reconciliation is cosmic, then it is coextensive with the creation in and through the Image as portrayed in vv. 15–18a. We therefore stumble again upon the question of the commensurability of the affirmation of the Image in vv. 15–18a and the attestation of a reconciliation in vv. 18b–20.

The basic notion of such verbs as ἀλλάσσω, διαλλάσσω, and καταλλάσσω is that of a “change” in an item or set of affairs.¹⁵⁵ As for καταλλάσσω, which

¹⁵³ In a similar way, it might be going too far to superimpose the distinction between an eternal Logos and incarnate Logos onto Col 1:15–20, for the passage conceives of a unified subject: “Le fils est à la fois celui par qui tout a été créé, celui qui a tout pacifié par le sang de sa croix et celui qui a été enlevé dans la gloire. C’est donc au Fils éternel, né, mort et ressuscité, que le passage donne les titres d’image, principe, premier-né de toute créature et d’entre les morts” (Jean-Noël Aletti, *Saint Paul: Épitre aux Colossiens: Introduction, traduction et commentaire*, ÉBib [Paris: Gabalda, 1993], 94).

¹⁵⁴ Cleomedes, *Caelestia* 1.1–2 (ed. Todd, p. 1, 2–7): κόσμος ἐστὶ σύστημα ἐξ οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς καὶ τῶν ἐν τούτοις φύσεων. οὗτος δὲ πάντα μὲν τὰ σώματα ἐμπεριέχει (οὐδενὸς ἀπλῶς ἐκτὸς αὐτοῦ ὑπάρχοντος [...]). Although a precise dating of Cleomedes’ work is “adventurous” and rests upon a “fragile basis,” proposals range from the first to the fifth cent. A.D. (Richard Goulet, *Cléomède: Théorie élémentaire. Texte présenté, traduit et commenté*, HDAC 3 [Paris: Vrin, 1980], 5). His basic orientation is Stoic (“Cléomède est donc un ‘physicien’ et un physicien de l’école stoïcienne” [Goulet, *ibid.*, 9]), but his attempt to reconcile knowledge of the natural sciences with philosophy reflects the approach of Posidonius and perhaps indicates that he followed in the latter’s footsteps (“Cléomède se rattache en fait à une tradition minoritaire dans le stoïcisme, celle qu’a illustrée Posidonius” [Goulet, *ibid.*, 10–11]).

¹⁵⁵ Friedrich Büchsel, “ἀλλάσσω, ἀντάλλαγμα, ἀποκατάλλασσω, κτλ.,” *TWNT* 1:252–60, 252, 254.

one finds in the Corpus Paulinum, we are dealing with a term that played no role in the cultic life of the ancient world.¹⁵⁶ Far from being a cultic term, it derives primarily from the diplomatic context, specifically the brokering of peace between warring parties, although it could be applied to interpersonal relations on a smaller scale as well.¹⁵⁷ The terms καταλλάσσω and καταλλαγή are found in the New Testament only in the Corpus Paulinum and we are therefore dealing with a trademark of Pauline thought.¹⁵⁸ Its use may be demonstrated in exemplary fashion by the following passage:

And all things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning their transgressions against them, and establishing among us the word of reconciliation. (2 Cor 5:18–19)

τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ καταλλάξαντος ἡμᾶς ἐαυτῷ διὰ Χριστοῦ καὶ δόντος ἡμῖν τὴν διακονίαν τῆς καταλλαγῆς, ὡς ὅτι θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῷ κόσμον καταλλάσσωσιν ἑαυτῷ, μὴ λογιζόμενος αὐτοῖς τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν καὶ θέμενος ἐν ἡμῖν τὸν λόγον τῆς καταλλαγῆς.

Here, Paul portrays God as the subject of reconciliation who reconciles the world to himself (ἑαυτῷ), which is mediated through Christ (διὰ Χριστοῦ, a *genitivus mediatoris*). There is no indication that God is the object of

¹⁵⁶ Cilliers Breytenbach, *Versöhnung: Eine Studie zur paulinischen Soteriologie*, WMANT 60 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1989), 83: “Die Terminologie wird nirgends in der hellenistischen oder kaiserzeitlichen Zeit verwendet, um auf einen Vorgang in religiösem Zusammenhang zu referieren, außer in einigen wenigen Fällen im hellenistischen Judentum und in der urchristlichen Literatur.” Breytenbach points out, however, that in the cases in Hellenistic Jewish writings – specifically, Josephus – where the terminology is applied to God, it differs from the Pauline usage: “Die religiöse Verwendung der Versöhnungsterminologie bei Josephus steht Paulus fern, denn hier geht es eindeutig um eine Veränderung bei Gott (Ant 7,295). Gott ist Objekt der Versöhnung (Bell 5,415; Ant 6,151)” (79). For Paul, the world is the object of reconciliation, not God (cf. 2 Cor 5:19, θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῷ κόσμον καταλλάσσωσιν ἑαυτῷ). For a counter to Breytenbach’s claim that the language of reconciliation does not appear at all in the pagan religious literature of the Hellenistic and Imperial eras, see Angela Standhartinger, *Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte und Intention des Kolosserbriefes*, NovTSup 94 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 209, n. 94.

¹⁵⁷ Breytenbach, *Versöhnung*, 80: “Wir kommen zu dem Schluß, daß die Verwendung der Versöhnungsterminologie bei Paulus eine Übertragung einer ursprünglich diplomatischen Vorstellung auf das Verhältnis Gott – Mensch bzw. Gott – Apostel ist. Mit dieser Übertragung knüpft Paulus an eine Sprachmöglichkeit an, die in den griechischen Texten nachweisbar ist.” For Breytenbach’s analysis of Greek sources, see *ibid.*, 45–64. There, he comes to the following conclusion: “Die weitverbreitete These, daß die Wörter ihre Verwendung im Bereich der zwischenmenschlichen Verhältnisse fänden, ist zwar durch unsere Untersuchung noch erhärtet worden; daneben aber – in der Mehrheit der nachgewiesenen Fälle – geht es um die Verwendung dieser Wortgruppe im Rahmen des antiken Friedensschluß-Vorgangs” (64).

¹⁵⁸ καταλλαγή occurs in Rom 5:11; 11:15; 2 Cor 1:18, 19; καταλλάσσω occurs in Rom 5:10 (*bis*), 1 Cor 7:11; 2 Cor 5:18, 19, 20.

reconciliation in the sense that a pacification or a change of attitude were necessary on God's part. On the contrary, "the world" is the object and beneficiary of the action insofar as God "does not reckon their transgressions to them," and this latter phrase is the description of the nature of this reconciliation. Yet when Paul entreats the addressees to be reconciled to God, he characterizes this action with the verb *πρεσβεύω* (2 Cor 5:20), which might allude to a delegate (*πρεσβύτης*) sent for the sake of peace negotiations.¹⁵⁹ Therefore, it seems that Paul employs *καταλλάσσω* to refer to the establishment of peace between two estranged parties, although he supplements it with the clause "not reckoning their transgressions against them."

One encounters the term with the prepositional prefix *ἀπο-* only in Col 1:20, 22, and Eph 2:16 (*ἀποκαταλλάσσω*), and there is no corresponding substantive in the New Testament. Because there is no record of the use of *ἀποκαταλλάσσω* prior to Colossians, it is possible that the term is a neologism, provided that the lack of the term in previous sources does not derive from problems of manuscript transmission. What does the term mean? To begin with, a basic continuity with the meaning of *καταλλαγή* as the diplomatic establishment of peace is surely part of the meaning: in Col 1:20b, the reconciliation is said to consist in "the fullness" [sc. God] "having made peace through the blood of his [sc. Christ's] cross" (*εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ*). This is taken up again in Col 1:21–22, where the author tells the addressees that although they were once "enemies" (*ἐχθροί*) of God, they have now been reconciled. The exchange of enmity for friendship, which forms the basis of a diplomatic *καταλλαγή* and which informed Paul's understanding of reconciliation (cf. Rom 5:10), is surely indicated by the term *ἀποκαταλλάσσω*.¹⁶⁰ Yet why the prepositional prefix? It is merely a "small formal detail"¹⁶¹ added for emphasis and thus indistinguishable from *καταλλάσσω* in the protopauline letters? Any hints as to the reason behind such an addition, if we presume that the change was intentional and meaningful rather than random and senseless,¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Breytenbach, *Versöhnung*, 64–66.

¹⁶⁰ Four later lexica condensed this meaning by defining *ἀποκαταλλάξαι* as *φίλον ποιῆσαι* and *φιλοποιῆσαι*. The first version is found in the *Lexicon* of the fifth/sixth cent. A.D. grammarian Hesychius of Alexandria. The second version is found in the anonymous eighth/ninth cent. lexicon *Synagoge* (*Συναγωγή λέξεων χρησίμων*), and also in the ninth cent. lexicon compiled by the Byzantine scholar Photius and in the tenth cent. Byzantine *Suda*.

¹⁶¹ Buscemi, *Lettera ai Colossesi*, 141, n. 361.

¹⁶² Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 214, see in the compound *ἀποκαταλλάσσω* "the Hellenistic propensity for replacing simpler forms with composites [...] with no change in meaning[.]" They cite *ἐπιγινώσκω* in Col 1:6 as an analogous case. This proposal, however, does not consider that *ἐπιγ[ι]νώσκω* was already a well-established verb – one finds it already in Homer, *Od.* 18.30, 24.217 – rather than a neologism of the Hellenistic era. Further, they refer to BDR §116. Here, one finds, "Die Koine braucht gern Verba composita, wo die klass[ische] Sprache mit dem Simplex auskommen kann" (§116.1). Though this is true, Barth and Blanke go too far in suggesting that the addition of prepositions do not change

must be gleaned from the immediate context. To that end, we begin with the question, “To *whom* are all things reconciled?”

In the protopauline letters, God is always the subject of the reconciliation achieved “through Christ,” although humans may participate in the subsequent “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18–20). Only in two instances does *καταλλάσσω* not refer to God’s own action. In one case, Paul refers to the reconciliation of spouses (1 Cor 7:11), and in the other, he pleads with his addressees to be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:20). Otherwise, God is portrayed as the subject who took the initiative in the reconciliation of the Christ-event. Further, God does this so as to reconcile the believers/the cosmos *to himself* (2 Cor 5:18, τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ καταλλάξαντος ἡμᾶς ἑαυτῷ διὰ Χριστοῦ; 2 Cor 5:19, θεὸς ᾧ ἐν Χριστῷ κόσμον καταλλάσσει ἑαυτῷ).

A shift takes place in Colossians, for the one *to whom* all things are reconciled has changed: in Col 1:19, τὸ πλήρωμα is the subject of reconciliation, not the Son, yet according to Col 1:20, all things have been reconciled “to him” (εἰς αὐτόν), namely, to the Son. To argue against this viewpoint, one would need to establish that εἰς αὐτόν should be read as εἰς αὐτόν (= εἰς ἑαυτόν), the epsilon having been elided.¹⁶³ If one could read Col 1:20 in this manner, then one could assert a continuity with the view of reconciliation found in 2 Cor 5:18–19. Although the use of αὐτοῦ as a morphological variant of ἑαυτοῦ is plausible in other contexts,¹⁶⁴ the proposal to read the αὐτόν of Col 1:20a as the reflexive pronoun αὐτόν appears unconvincing for two reasons. First, Colossians does not otherwise use αὐτός as a reflexive pronoun.¹⁶⁵ Second, both

meaning, for the very examples listed by BDR suggest the opposite: in one of the examples listed there, προ-σάββατον is used to indicate the day before the sabbath (cf. Mark 15:42).

¹⁶³ When commenting on the εἰς αὐτόν of v. 20a, Dunn points out that it is possible that the ΕΙΣΑΥΤΟΝ of the majuscules could be read as εἰς αὐτόν (= εἰς ἑαυτόν), but he rejects this for stylistic reasons, claiming that it “would break the triple parallel of ‘in him,’ ‘through him,’ ‘to him’ (1:16/1:19–20)” (Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 83, n. 3). A similar case is possible with ΚΑΤΕΝΩΠΙΟΝΑΥΤΟΥ in v. 22b, but this is unlikely.

¹⁶⁴ To begin with, ἑαυτοῦ is itself a contraction of the Homeric ἐμέο αὐτοῦ (CGCG §7.3, n. 2). That ἑαυτοῦ could be contracted to αὐτοῦ (CGCG §7.3, 26) is conceivable. It remains an open question whether the use of αὐτος which one finds in the manuscripts of the tragic works of the fifth cent. B.C. should be considered to be αὐτός or αὐτός in terms of morphology, but the sense is that of αὐτος being used as a direct reflexive pronoun (CGCG §29.17, n. 1; 29.18, n.1).

¹⁶⁵ Irrespective of case, number, and gender, the pronoun αὐτός occurs forty-five times in Colossians: 1:9, 11, 13, 16 (*ter*), 17 (*bis*), 18 (*bis*), 19, 20 (*quater*), 22 (*bis*), 24, 26, 29; 2:2, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12 (*bis*), 13, 14 (*bis*), 15 (*bis*), 18; 3:4, 9, 10, 17, 19; 4:2, 4, 8, 10, 13, 15, 17. However, only two of these forty-five occurrences (i.e., 4.5%) could possibly represent the reflexive pronoun αὐτοῦ (Col. 1:20a, 22).

the use of αὐτοῦ for ἑαυτοῦ and the condensed form αὐτοῦ are rare in the New Testament.¹⁶⁶

Were one to press the issue for the sake of claiming a continuity between Col 1:19–20 and the protopauline letters, then one would need to assume a *constructio ad sensum* connecting the neuter τὸ πλῆρωμα to a conjectured masculine reflexive εἰς αὐτόν in 1:20a. Although *constructiones ad sensum* are common in the New Testament,¹⁶⁷ it is more prudent to read Col 1:20a in light of its immediate context. That is, if a parallel exists between the two parts of the hymn (Col 1:15–18a and 18b–20), then one may conclude that the εἰς αὐτόν of 1:20a has the same telic referent as the εἰς αὐτόν of 1:16f; namely, the Son.¹⁶⁸ In this reading, the logic of Col 1:15–20 consists in the cosmos being reconciled to the Son as the ground and goal of its existence.¹⁶⁹

In Col 1:22, the shift concerning the one *to whom* things are reconciled is reversed, albeit with a significant difference. There, we read: “But now he [sc. Christ] has reconciled [you] in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and blameless and without reproach before him [sc. the Father] [...].” Although the author does not directly state that the believers are reconciled *to* the Father, the act of being presented before the Father is reminiscent of 2 Cor 5:18–19. Further, it is reminiscent of 1 Cor 15:20–28: although καταλλάσσω κτλ. does not occur there, the passage does describe the culmination of salvation-history in which the effect of Christ’s resurrection is the conquering of death that, in the eschaton, will culminate in his act of handing over dominion and “all things” to the Father. And yet, the formulation of Col 1:22 seems less suspicious at first glance than it truly is. In fact, for the first time in the Corpus Paulinum, the agent of reconciliation is not the Father, but rather the Son.¹⁷⁰

The discrepancy between v. 20a and v. 22 concerning the subject of reconciliation might strike us as odd. Could a mere slip of the pen or a minor grammatical error be responsible for such a significant shift in Christology? Such a conclusion would be hasty. As we have seen in the case of δι’ αὐτοῦ in Col 1:16f, the status of ‘mediator’ does not exclude agency. In Col 1:20a, the same

¹⁶⁶ BDR §282.2, p. 233, notes that the personal pronoun can stand for the reflexive pronoun, but it is added in a footnote that this is primarily a *Matthean* usage (§283, p. 233, n. 4). In the opinion of these grammarians, the use of αὐτοῦ for ἑαυτοῦ occurs in the NT only in Acts 25:21 (§283, p. 233, n. 3; §406, p. 336, n. 1). Cf. also Siebenthal §55.b.2, p. 81.

¹⁶⁷ BDR §282.

¹⁶⁸ Similarly, Müller, *Kolossierbrief*, who notes that all instances of αὐτός in Col 1:15–20 refer to the Son (147) and therefore he reads the εἰς αὐτόν of 1:20a in light of the εἰς αὐτόν of 1:16f (174).

¹⁶⁹ Thus also Lohse, *Kolossier*, 101, n. 5; Schweizer, *Der Brief an die Kolossier*, 67, n. 175.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Wolter, *Der Brief an die Kolossier, der Brief an Philemon*, 93; Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 221; Maisch, *Der Brief an die Gemeinde in Kolossä*, 128; Müller, *Kolossierbrief*, 189.

δι' αὐτοῦ is used to describe the Son's role in reconciliation. If the same indissoluble relation between the Father and the Son in the work of creation exists in the work of reconciliation as well, then it stands to reason that the Son could be presented as the mediator of reconciliation in one breath (1:20a) and as its subject in the next (1:22).

Our considerations of the use of αὐτός in Colossians generally and in Col 1:20a and 22 in particular yield the conclusion that αὐτός in Col 1:20a should not be read as a reflexive pronoun and therefore the prepositional phrase εἰς αὐτόν in v. 20a conveys that all things in heaven and on earth are reconciled *to the Son*. Whereas 2 Cor 5:18–19 affirmed that God reconciled the world to *himself* (ἑαυτῷ), Colossians envisions the “fullness” of deity reconciling all things to the Son and therefore to the one “in whom” and “unto whom” all things have been created (Col 1:16–17). This reconciliation therefore serves to “make peace” (εἰρηνοποιέω) with all things in heaven and on earth by realigning them with and restoring them to the one who is the foundation and goal of their existence.¹⁷¹

Yet what does all of this mean for understanding the term ἀποκαταλλάσσω? One of the basic meanings of the preposition ἀπό is the idea of a *separation*.¹⁷² This holds true for the use of ἀπό in Colossians, whether it is used as a preposition¹⁷³ or as a compound in a verbal or substantival form.¹⁷⁴ Even in Col 3:24, the term ἀπολαμβάνω, “I receive,” implies the separation of the given item from the giver, as the syntax of this example illustrates: ἀπὸ κυρίου ἀπολήμψεσθε τὴν ἀναταπόδοσιν. If the term ἀποκαταλλάσσω is analogous to ἀπολαμβάνω in the sense that an item is *separated* from one place or possessor and transferred to another place or possessor, then we might ask: does ἀποκαταλλάσσω convey that all things are reconciled *away* from something and *to* the Son? This notion is lent credibility when one considers that Col 1:15–20 is introduced with a benediction of the Father, “who saved us from the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of his love” (1:13). What is said of the Son in Col 1:15–20 serves as a further

¹⁷¹ Similarly, Müller, *Kolossierbrief*, 178, who notes: “Versöhnung ist nicht der Friede des Stärkeren (die *pax romana* wurde an den römischen Außengrenzen offensive verbreitet), auch nicht die Abwesenheit von (Bürger-) Krieg, sondern Frieden ‘von innen heraus’, der nur von Gott bzw. Christus herkommen kann, in dem alles Ursprung und Bestand hat.” Cf. Alessandro Sacchi, “La riconciliazione universale (Col. I,20),” in *La cristologia in San Paolo: Atti della XXIII settimana biblica*, ed. by the Associazione Biblica Italiana (Brescia: Paideia, 1976), 221–45, 236–38, who also argues, as is argued here, that εἰς αὐτόν refers to a reconciliation to the Son. He does not explicate this on the basis of Col 1:15–16, however, but rather through reading εἰρηνοποιέω in v. 20 as a reference to the Messianic peace promised in the Hebrew Bible.

¹⁷² BDR §211, p. 171.

¹⁷³ Col 1:2, 7, 23, 26 (*bis*); 2:20; 3:24.

¹⁷⁴ Col 1:5, 14, 20, 21, 22, 26; 2:3, 5, 11, 15, 20, 22; 3:3, 6, 8, 9, 24 (*bis*); 4:6.

explanation of how the Father *transferred* (μετέστησεν) believers from one sphere of influence to another. Regardless of the question of the commensurability of a creation whose stability is guaranteed by the Image and the subsequent claim of a reconciliation, Col 1:15–20 does indeed presume an intervening state of estrangement or alienation between creation and reconciliation:¹⁷⁵ all things were created in him (1:16), but something has intervened that requires “the fullness” (1:19) to take action and to “reconcile all things to him [sc. the Son]” (1:20).¹⁷⁶

Taking all of this into consideration, one might propose the following reason for the addition of the prefix ἀπό- in order to form ἀποκαταλλάσσω: all things were created in, through and unto the Image of God as their goal (Col 1:16), and “the fullness” reconciles all things *away* from the “authority of darkness” (Col 1:13), *away* from the state of alienation¹⁷⁷ and *to* the Image (Col 1:20). That is, all things are reconciled insofar as they are rescued from the state of estrangement signified by “the authority of darkness” and are brought back into alignment with the Image who is the ground, meaning, and goal of their existence. This would mean that in comparison to καταλλάσσω, the verb ἀποκαταλλάσσω conveys reconciliation as an act of *restoration*.¹⁷⁸

We have now examined the constituent parts of Col 1:15–20 necessary for the explanation of Col 1:18b–20 as a whole. Yet what do the constituent parts “beginning,” “firstborn of the dead,” and “reconciliation *to the Son*” as a realignment with the ground and goal of creation’s existence tell us about the understanding of the Image of God conveyed in Col 1:18b–20? If the meaning of calling the Son the “image of the invisible God” and “firstborn of all creation” in Col 1:15–18a is the affirmation of the Son’s supremacy in creation, then how do the constituent parts of Col 1:18b–20 affirm his supremacy in the work of reconciliation?

¹⁷⁵ Dettwiler, “Le Christ comme pensée de la création,” 42: “Il [sc. le cadre conceptuel de l’hymne] présuppose par là l’idée de l’humanité comme vis-à-vis de Dieu, dans un état d’adversité (ou d’aliénation) qui réclame un acte de réconciliation de la part de Dieu à travers son agent au monde.” To the objection of this reading on the grounds that such an “état d’adversité (ou d’aliénation)” is not expressly mentioned, Dettwiler responds that such an absence is grounded in the purpose of the passage, which is not to develop an exhaustive cosmology and anthropology but rather to highlight the work of Christ (ibid.) and to assert “la souveraineté absolue du Christ sur la réalité existante” (44).

¹⁷⁶ This notion is taken up again in Col 2:15 in the reference to the “disarming” of the powers, which in the view of Col is a decisive element in the liberation of believers from the “authority of darkness” (Col 1:13).

¹⁷⁷ Cf. ὄντας ἀπηλοτριωμένους in Col 1:21 and the subsequent νυνὶ δὲ ἀποκατήλαξεν in 1:22.

¹⁷⁸ This meaning was suggested already by J.B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (London: Macmillan, 1892), 157–58; cf. also Lohse, *Kolossier*, 101, although Lohse suggests this understanding of reconciliation by explicating the movement of thought in Col 1:15–20, rather than focusing directly on the term ἀποκαταλλάσσω.

V. Christ as the Prototypical Human: The “Beginning” and “Firstborn of the Dead” in Colossians 1:18b–20

According to Col 1:18b–20, the Son is the “beginning, the firstborn of the dead.” This may seem to be an echo of the “last Adam” Christology found in the Protopaulines: the Son is the beginning of a new humanity that comes about following an emergence from the dead. After all, he is the “firstborn” who occupies a place of primacy over his “siblings,” and this is affirmed through 1:18d: “[...] that he might occupy the first place in all things” (ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων). Just as in the first strophe, where “all things” are encompassed as his “siblings” in the framework of the metaphor “firstborn of all creation,” so too are all things encompassed as his “siblings” – “whether things on earth or things in the heavens” (1:20c–d) – in the metaphor “firstborn from the dead.”

And yet it is clear that Col 1:15–18a portrays Christ as standing before and above all creation.¹⁷⁹ Just as Col 1:15–18a had spanned the arc of Christ’s supremacy from protology to eschatology, Col 1:18b–20 demonstrates how reconciliation is a restoration of all things to their protological orientation toward the Son. In other words, reconciliation reveals Christ’s “dual primogeniture”¹⁸⁰ as the “firstborn of creation” and the “firstborn of the dead.”

Compared to 2 Cor 5:18–19, the specification of the indwelling of the divine in the Son in Col 1:19 states that “all the fullness” (πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα) was pleased “to dwell in him” (ἐν αὐτῷ [...] κατοικῆσαι). The purpose of this indwelling is elaborated by v. 20, namely that “the fullness” reconciled all things to the Son. Whereas the effect of reconciliation in 1 Corinthians and Romans was the defeat of death (1 Cor 15:25–26, 54–55; Rom 5:17–18, 21; 6:9) and the establishment of new life (cf. ζωοποιῶν in 1 Cor 15:36, 45; Rom 5:17–18, 21; 6:10–11), the author of Colossians affirms that it consists in establishing peace (εἰρηνοποιῶν) with all things (1:20). For the author of Colossians, establishing peace with all things consists in realigning them with the Image in whom and unto whom they were created. Just as Paul affirmed that the novelty of the Christ-event was rooted in God’s ancient plan (cf. 1 Cor 2:7; 15:3–4), Col 1:15–20 conveys that reconciliation is central to understanding creation itself.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Müller, *Kolossierbrief*, 163, n. 159.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Stefano Tarocchi’s concluding remarks in his interpretation of Col 1:15–20: “La duplice primogenitura di Gesù, vera potenza trascendente della storia, non resta un principio astratto, ma viene espressa concretamente nella chiesa di Colossi: essi sono stati realmente riconciliati con Dio per essere vero sacrificio davanti a Dio. Sono stati recuperati dalla condizione di estraneità e lontananza e dall’attenzione alle sole opere di male” (“Le lettere della prigionia,” in *Le lettere di San Paolo*, Commentari biblici esegetico-teologici, eds. Alessandro Biancalani and Benedetto Rossi [Siena/Rome: Cantagalli/Città Nuova, 2019], 2:1191–1359, 1260).

In this way, we see how an additional nuance of ἀρχή in Col 1:18b emerges: from the perspective of the addressees, the Son might be the beginning of a new humanity and thus a new creation, but insofar as all things are reconciled to the Image, the entirety of the cosmos is *restored* to its “beginning,” to the one in whom and unto whom it was created and thus in which all of creation find its way back to its primal determination for conformity to the Image of God. By continuing the thrust of the first strophe – affirming Christ’s supremacy – while introducing the second, ἀρχή displays the indissoluble unity of the two strophes. Just as the “beginning, firstborn of the dead” proceeds from and is dependent upon the subject matter of the first strophe and therefore cannot be conceived of apart from it, the same can be said of the second strophe: if the Son is truly the “head of the body, the church” – the pre-eschaton display of reconciliation – and if he truly is before all things and if all things truly “hold together in him,” then creation in general – and the God of whom he is the Image – cannot be conceived of apart from the subject matter of the second strophe; namely, reconciliation. In other words, predicating ἀρχή of the Son affirms the connection between the works of creation and reconciliation. For the author of Colossians, Christ is not a “second Adam” who appeared at an advanced stage in salvation history, but rather the *prototypical human* who was already present in the creation of the cosmos as the true Image of God.

The ‘novelty’ of the matter is addressed in Col 2 and 3. In 2:6, the addressees are told that as they have “received Christ,” so too should they “walk in him” (ἐν αὐτῷ περιπατεῖτε). They have been “circumcised with a circumcision not made by human hands in taking off the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ” (2:11), and just as they have been baptized with Christ, so too have they “been raised with” him (2:12: συνηγέρθητε; cf. 3:1) and “made alive with him” (2:13, συνεζωοποίησεν [...] σὺν αὐτῷ). Whatever it means for them to live now, it is intimately connected with Christ: “For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (3:3). He instructs them to live this reality, such that they reject sinful practices and thereby “take off (ἀπεκδυσάμενοι) the old human with his practices and put on (ἐνδυσάμενοι) the new human, the one who is being renewed unto knowledge according to the image of the one who created him” (κατ’ εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν; Col 3:9–10). In this new human, made possible by Christ, “Christ is all and in all” (3:11).

Compared with the content of Col 1:15–20, the idea of Christ as the ground of a “new human” in Col 3 only makes sense from the existential perspective of the addressees. Even directly after the hymn, the author tells them that although they were once estranged from God, they have now been reconciled (Col 1:21–22). Viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*, however, what is new for them is nothing other than their true beginning.

One last remark concerning the work of reconciliation according to Col 1:18b–20 must be made. In Col 1:20b, the author makes it clear that the work of reconciliation was achieved “through the blood of [Christ’s] cross.” When

one reads the appellation “firstborn of the dead” and the reference to the cross together, it is clear that the author is referencing the resurrection and crucifixion of Jesus, respectively. The significance of this lies in providing ‘historical coordinates’ to the work of reconciliation on the cross: whereas the first strophe had described creation and thus an action long preceding the lives of the addressees – one might say that from their viewpoint, it occurred *in illo tempore* and thus could be understood as a mythical account – the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth occurred in their not-too distant past. The Son who is called the “image of the invisible God” in the first strophe is thus provided a place within the historical, contingent reality of the addressees. In the view of the author, the Son is not a figure who exists only in a mode of transcendence apart from the course of worldly events, but rather belongs squarely within the course of human history as the addressees experience it.

Chapter 4

Colossians among its Contemporaries

The examination of Col 1:15–20 and how the author uses it throughout the letter, as well as an inspection of the religious-historical background of its motifs, yields raw material for a synthesis of the concept of the “image of the invisible God” in Colossians. This chapter provides such a synthesis and subsequently situates it in the image discourse of the first century A.D.

A. The Image Concept of Colossians

To begin with, the author predicates the status “image of the invisible God” of the Son, Jesus Christ, and this Image has a threefold character: (1) the Image as mediator of creation and restorative reconciliation; (2) the Image as epistemic avenue for knowledge of God; and (3) the Image as ethical model.

I. The Image, Creation, and Restorative Reconciliation

For the first time in the Corpus Paulinum, the designation “image of God” is directly associated with the *act* of the first creation rather than its product. All things, without remainder, have been created “in him,” “through him,” and “unto him.” They were created “in him” in the sense that he, as the Image of God, is the mental conception that God posits for himself in the act of creation. To create – or even merely to provide shape and order to chaos – requires a mental blueprint for the process. In creating, God ‘envisions’ the Son as the goal of the creative act. In so doing, God posits for himself a *Gegenüber* who becomes not only the goal of the creative act, but also its mediator. Further, this mediator is no passive instrument but participates actively in the work commissioned by the Father. Without the Son, the creation could not have transpired, as surely as the Son could not have been the means and purpose of the creation without the Father. The act of creation is therefore not adequately explained with the notion of a monistic principle’s emanation, nor the superimposition of an active will upon passive, otherwise lifeless material. Instead, it is the result of a dialectical process of the divine life wherein the relation with

a *Gegenüber* means an expansion and deepening of the divine within itself,¹ and what is manifested there is conveyed through the metaphor of a “Father” and the “Son of his love” (Col 1:13).

Yet the Image of God is not related solely to the Father in the act of creation, but also to the whole of creation as the “firstborn of all creation.” The Image as the “firstborn” in whom and unto whom all things have been created as their goal constitutes a deep and hidden (cf. Col 3:3) connection between the Father and creation. By interweaving this connection into the act of creation and thus making it part of the very fabric of created reality, Colossians transfers the significance of Christ as the “firstborn of many siblings” who shall be conformed to his image from eschatology (cf. Rom 8:29) to protology, and thus the supremacy of the Son in and over creation spans an arc from the creation of the cosmos all the way to its redemption and consummation.² Even before the addressees had heard the Gospel (cf. Col 1:5–6), they were envisioned as belonging to the Father by means of the act of creation mediated by the Son and the connection to the Father that exists in the Son as the “firstborn of all creation.” Along these lines, the church as that body of people who have Christ as their head assumes a protological dimension.³ The supremacy of the Image in and over creation, however, does not cease after the act of creation, for “all things hold together in him.” In this way, the Image participates not only in the origination of the cosmos, but also in its preservation.

The Image of God, however, is not only responsible for the first creation, but as the “beginning” and “firstborn of the dead” through whom and unto whom all things in heaven and earth have been reconciled, the Image is responsible for the *restoration* of creation. Though a state of alienation from God and thus from God’s Image follows upon the act of creation, God does not renege on the determination envisioned for creation, but rather reconfirms it through the act of reconciliation through which God “reconciled all things to him [sc.

¹ Analog to Hegel’s remarks at the beginning of “Die Lehre vom Sein” in his *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*: “Diese Fortbestimmung ist in Einem ein Heraussetzen und damit Entfalten des *an sich* seienden Begriffs und zugleich das *Insichgehen* des Seins, ein Vertiefen desselben in sich selbst” (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* (1830), eds. Friedheim Nicolin and Otto Pöggeler [Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1975], §84, 105; cf. also §85).

² Similarly, Filippo Belli, *Lettera ai Colossesi: Introduzione, traduzione e commento*, NVBTA 48 (Milan: Edizioni San Paolo, 2015), 39, when commenting on the significance of Col 1:17b for the entirety of 1:15–20: “[O]gni cosa in Lui ha consistenza”, giacchè in tale consistenza è racchiusa l’origine, la destinazione e la sussistenza attuale e fattuale di ogni aspetto della realtà e della storia.”

³ Cf. Samuel Vollenweider, “‘Der Erstgeborene vor aller Schöpfung’ (Kol 1,15–20): Überlegungen zum Stellenwert der kosmischen Christologie für das Gespräch zwischen Schöpfungstheologie und moderner Kosmologie,” chap. 4 in Vollenweider, *Antike und Urchristentum: Studien zur neutestamentlichen Theologie in ihren Kontexten und Rezeptionen*, WUNT 436 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 55–71, 60, 63.

Christ]” (Col 1:20a) and thus, in Christ, restores the entirety of creation to its goal and purpose. In this way, the Son as the Image of God is the indissoluble link between creation and reconciliation.⁴ Viewed *sub specie aeternitatis* in Col 1:15–20, reconciliation is not a new creation, but rather, as Filippo Belli puts it, a “re-creation” (*ri-creazione*) wherein the divine *opus* is directed toward Christ in such a way that Christ’s redemptive and pacifying supremacy “finds its accomplishment in manifesting the Christological orientation of all things.”⁵

Further, the two works of creation and reconciliation are not effected by different agents, as it were,⁶ but by the same Father, through the Son, who “rescued” the addressees from the “authority of darkness and transferred [them] into the kingdom of the Son of his love” (Col 1:13).

It is in this regard that Colossians takes up the concern of the Hebrew Bible concerning images. The prohibition against images was not grounded in the idea that God is, ultimately, incapable of figural representation (τὸ ἀνεἰκαστόν) because God is imperceptible to the senses, but rather that figural images are lifeless and impotent, incapable of sustaining or saving anyone. From the point of view of Deutero-Isaiah, a hewn cultic image is a farcical inversion of the relation between Creator and creation. Where God *does* have an image in the Hebrew Bible, it is a *living* image sanctioned directly by God in the act of creation. Colossians takes up this viewpoint insofar as the Image of the invisible God is no lifeless, created thing, but rather the Son in whom all life has arisen and holds together.⁷

⁴ Cf. Alberto di Giovanni, “Impianto teoretico e struttura dialettica di Col. 1,15–20,” in *La cristologia in San Paolo: Atti della XXIII settimana biblica*, ed. by the Associazione Biblica Italiana (Brescia: Paideia, 1976 ed.), 247–56, esp. 254–55, who argues that each section of the hymn (he divides the passage into vv. 15, vv. 16–17, and vv. 18–20) assumes and explicates the previous section.

⁵ Belli, *Lettera ai Colossesi*, 39, 42.

⁶ Cf. Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *Menschwerdung*, TOBITH 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 308–10, for the notion that one intention of the hymn’s affirmation of the “identity of the creator with the redeemer” might have been to argue against a proto-Gnostic line of thought that perceived a tension between creation and redemption. One might add that it was perhaps just such a concern which led Marcion to omit Col 1:15b and 16 from his version of Colossians, thus removing all references to the act of creation. According to Tertullian, Marcion’s text reads: ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων [...] (Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott: Eine Monographie zur Geschichte der Grundlegung der katholischen Kirche*, 2nd ed. [Leipzig: J.C. Hinrich’sche Buchhandlung, 1924; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980], 122, n.).

⁷ Cf. the remarks by Eckhard Nordhofen, “Einleitung: Das Bilderverbot – religiöser Gründungsakt und ästhetischer Urknall,” in *Bilderverbot: Die Sichtbarkeit des Unsichtbaren*, ed. Nordhofen (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2001), 15–25, 18, that the image prohibition can be seen as a parallel to the revelation of the name YHWH: one ought not to

II. The Image and the Knowledge of God

The Image of the invisible God provides humanity an avenue for knowing God. By using ἄορατος, the author appropriates a *topos* common to Greek and Hellenistic Jewish authors. The God who is “unseen” and thus “unknown” apart from an act of self-disclosure has presented himself in this εἰκὼν through whom God “transcends the barrier of his own transcendence.”⁸

The representation of the divine that is offered in the Image is put on display in the act of reconciliation effected in the cross (Col 1:20; cf. 2:14–15), and thus the true Image of God is none other than the Son in whom the addressees have “redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:14). Further, this “mystery, hidden from the eons and generations,” has “now been revealed to [God’s] saints, to whom God has desired to make known what is the wealth of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:26–27). Rather than being hidden in a transcendent and timeless realm removed from the view of the addressees, the author affirms for them that knowledge of God may be had by looking to the crucified and resurrected Christ. Further, the epistemic value is realized in the act of reconciliation: though the addressees had previously been under the “authority of darkness” (Col 1:13), a darkness that also has an epistemic character,⁹ they have now “been transferred into the kingdom of the Son of his [sc. God’s] love” (Col 1:13).

In case the addressees have forgotten this, the author reminds them once again that Christ is the “mystery of God [...] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:2b–3). The purpose of this reminder is that the addressees may “achieve every wealth of abundant understanding” (εἰς πᾶν πλοῦτος τῆς πληροφορίας τῆς συνέσεως) and that they might therefore not fall prey to anyone who might “lead them astray with arguments that are [merely] probable [and yet lack any foundation]”¹⁰ or “take [them] captive

attempt to “capture” God in a lifeless image nor in human language. In this sense, Jesus might be seen as the logical conclusion of the “Jewish Enlightenment,” for in his days, it had become clear that texts as well cannot capture God’s presence: ‘the letter kills, the Spirit gives life.’ In Jesus, the incarnate, God is present. When compared with images and texts, being present in a human is the only adequate mode of divine presence.

⁸ Ugo Vanni, “Immagine di Dio invisibile, primogenito di ogni creazione (Col. 1,15),” in *La cristologia in San Paolo: Atti della XXIII settimana biblica*, ed. by the Associazione Biblica Italiana (Brescia: Paideia, 1976), 97–113, 113: “[La immagine] ci fa conoscere Dio, che, di per sé inaccessibile, supera la barriera della sua trascendenza, impegnandosi nell’azione creatrice e nella storia della salvezza.”

⁹ Alfio M. Buscemi, *Lettera ai Colossesi: Commentario esegetico*, ASBF 82 (Milan: Edizioni Terra Santa, 2015), 114.

¹⁰ The term *πιθανολογία* is a NT hapax legomenon and occurs prior to the composition of Col only in Plato, *Theaet.* 162e. The larger context of this dialogue is the discussion whether there exists a difference between wisdom (σοφία) and knowledge (ἐπιστήμη)

through philosophy and empty deception” that “do not accord with Christ” (Col 2:4, 8). In light of the warnings of the author of Colossians against doctrines that merely “have the appearance of wisdom” (Col 2:23) but which do not “take hold of [Christ] the head” (Col 2:19), and seeing that Christ as the Image of the invisible God is the foundation and meaning of the created order (Col 1:15–18a) and is the one in whom wisdom and knowledge reside (Col 2:3), one may conclude that the author sees Christ as the firm epistemic foundation upon which the addressees should build their lives, rather than any teachings concerning the worship of angels (cf. Col 2:18) and various religious observances (cf. 2:16, 20–23).

III. The Image as Ethical Model

The Image of God is the one “unto whom all things have been created” as their goal (Col 1:16f). If the Image is the ‘final cause’ of their creation (to borrow an Aristotelian concept), then being like the Image is not only the determination of the particular *qualities* envisioned for God’s creatures but is simultaneously an affirmation that it is *better* for all of creaturely reality to reflect the Image than to be otherwise. As indicated above, the reconciliation does not negate the act of creation, but assumes and explicates it with the goal of actualizing its truth on a cosmic scale.

The significance of this for the addressees is expressed in Col 3:9–11, where they are told that they ought to

“take off the old human with its practices and put on the new human who is being renewed unto knowledge, according to the image of the one who created him, wherein there is no Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free, but Christ is all things and in all things.”

One sees here the dynamism of being conformed to the Image: though all things were created unto the Image and restored to him through the act of reconciliation, those who “have died with Christ” (Col 2:20) and who “have been raised with Christ” (Col 3:1) are caught up in the process of being conformed to this Image. They play a role in this as well, insofar as they ought not to let themselves “be moved away from the hope of the Gospel which [they] have heard” (Col 1:23) and ought to “seek the things which are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (Col 3:2). The consequence of this is conveyed through the paraenesis of Col 3:5–17, which may be divided into two

(*Theaet.* 145e) and whether knowledge and perception (αἴσθησις) are the same (*Theaet.* 151e). In an imagined exchange with the sophist Protagoras, who maintains the identity of knowledge and perception, the sophist is portrayed as warning Socrates and company against being taken in by *πιθανολογία*, namely an argument that sounds plausible and yet lacks the sure foundation and argumentative power of a precise science, such as geometry. In the context of Col, the ‘sure foundation’ is Christ, who is the “mystery of God [...] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:2–3).

parts (3:5–11, 12–17). The first part concerns the elimination of such practices as divide humanity from itself and this elimination is synonymous with being renewed according to the Image, in whom such divisions do not exist. The second concerns the appropriation of a catalogue of ethical behaviors (Col 3:12: “clothe yourselves with [...]”) which, instead of leading to divisions, culminate in the attempt to “bear with one another [...] [and] just as the Lord [Jesus] has forgiven you, thus you [ought to do so] too” (3:13).¹¹ This orientation toward Christ’s forgiveness should lead the addressees to unite themselves in “love, which is the bond of perfection” (Col 3:14), such that both “the peace of Christ might preside in [their] hearts” (Col 3:15) and Christ’s “word” (λόγος) as well (Col 3:16), all of which should culminate in the addressees conducting themselves, whether “in word or in deed,” in “the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col 3:17).

B. Situating Colossians in the Image Discourse of the First Century A.D.

I. Dio Chrysostom and the Three Stoics

Although one can find points of similarity between the image concept of Colossians and those found in Dio Chrysostom and the Stoics, the differences are significant enough to distance Colossians from them. Whereas the image concept of Colossians bears a threefold character as outlined above, the image concepts of Dio and the Stoics are so different in each of these three regards that one has trouble placing them in the same conceptual neighborhood.

Dio admits openly that human crafting of divine images is born of an aporia in which the human does not know how to portray that which cannot be portrayed (τὸ ἀνεῖκαστον) and is not visible (*Or.* 12.59, ἀφανές). Nevertheless, the attempt is made. Crucial for Dio Chrysostom’s considerations of such images is their proper grounding in the innate conception of the divine parent, which is shared by all humanity, as he points out in *Or.* 12.27: “There is first of all an opinion and notion common to the entire human race, in like measure for the Greeks and for the barbarians, necessary and innate in every rational

¹¹ Without using the term “imitation,” it is clear that the addressees should reproduce in their own lives the behavior which Christ has displayed toward them. One sees here clearly the connection between the understanding of Christ’s person and its significance for ethics. To quote the religious studies scholar Fritz Stolz: “Aus [dem Symbolsystem als] Konzept der Wirklichkeit ergeben sich bestimmte *Werte*, welche die Wahrnehmung und das Handeln leiten [...] Das Symbolsystem setzt fest, was man zu tun hat; die ethischen und moralischen Maßstäbe hängen in dieser oder jener Weise mit den religiösen Werten zusammen [...]” (*Grundzüge der Religionswissenschaft*, 3rd ed. [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001], 123–24).

being (ἔμφυτος ἐν παντὶ τῷ λογικῷ), arising in accordance with nature (κατὰ φύσιν).” Only those images that are rooted in this conception and become the object of subsequent philosophical interpretation in accordance with a knowledge of the “highest and most perfect nature” can be considered good and useful, for the philosopher is “through reason (λόγῳ) the most truthful and perhaps most perfect interpreter (ἐξηγητής) and prophet (προφήτης) of the immortal nature” (*Or.* 12.47).

The craftsman, however, bears significant responsibility in the attempt. As a source of theological knowledge, a good image is the one made according to the “one form” that is “immovable and enduring” and which “captures the totality of the divine power and nature” (*Or.* 12.70). No one, of course, would think that the εἰκὼν of Colossians is understood to be a graven image. Yet a key point of convergence is nevertheless noticeable: insofar as the Colossians hymn – and the Corpus Paulinum, for that matter – places such a central focus on the *cross* of Christ as an expression of God’s ‘power and nature,’ one could perhaps say that this is, for Colossians, the “single, immovable, and enduring form” that “captures the totality of the divine power and nature.” It is not that the life of the earthly Jesus preceding the crucifixion is discounted; on the contrary, it finds in the cross its consolidation (*Verdichtung*).¹²

The unspoken assumption of the Stoics is that the divine nature is already knowable and well-known – even if only to philosophers. It is already clear *who* and *what* God is, and the εἰκὼν θεοῦ therefore is not required to serve a basic epistemic purpose. Instead, it serves the purpose of encouraging the human to fashion itself according to the divine model. Though Colossians has this ethical component as well, the epistemic relation retains a basic importance: were the human to desire to emulate the divine, then the character of the divine would first need to be disclosed to the human, for the God of whom Colossians speaks is ἀόρατος, “unseen” and thus unknown. The εἰκὼν, however, reveals something of the character of God. This must happen first before the human can attempt to “put on the new human who is being renewed unto knowledge according to the image of its creator” (Col 3:10–11).

On balance, the differences between Colossians and Dio resemble the differences between Colossians and the Stoics. To begin with, no image executes a cosmogonic function in Dio and the Stoics. Whereas Colossians associates Christ as the Image of God with the creation of the world, there is no hint of such an idea in these other figures. In the same vein, no image bears for them a soteriological significance, neither in the sense of a restorative reconciliation as we find it in Colossians, nor even in the same way that Plutarch, for example, speaks of the wise ruler as the image of God who preserves the state and executes his office on behalf of the gods for the welfare of his subjects.

¹² Samuel Vollenweider, “‘Der Erstgeborene vor aller Schöpfung’ (Kol 1,15–20),” 58.

Perhaps the most significant difference between Colossians on the one hand and Dio Chrysostom and the Stoics on the other is that for the latter group, knowledge of God is either innate or might be deduced from the rational structure of the cosmos. Dio does assert that the “highest and most perfect nature” is unseen, but the epistemic significance that this would otherwise have is undercut by the affirmation of an innate conception of the divine. Further, Dio can argue that observation of the intricate and orderly workings of the heavenly bodies can lead to knowledge of the divine mind behind it all, a transcendental maneuver similar to that found in the Stoic tradition;¹³ for the Stoics, at least, God is known through a transcendental logic, but God is not transcendent.¹⁴ This being the case, there is no need for an image to convey knowledge of God across a metaphysical divide.

II. The Wisdom of Solomon, Philo, Plutarch, and Paul

In comparison with Dio Chrysostom and the Stoics, the image concept of Colossians evinces a stronger affinity with the image concepts found in the Wisdom of Solomon, Philo, Plutarch, and the protopauline letters. Their greatest similarities concern the *theological, soteriological, and ethical significance* of images of the divine, although there do exist subtle differences that even justify dividing this group into two subgroups with Wisdom and Philo on the one side and Plutarch and Paul on the other.

In the Wisdom of Solomon, Philo, Plutarch, Paul, and Colossians, an image of the divine mediates something of God’s nature to the world. Nevertheless, as we see in Philo and Plutarch, an epistemic gap exists between knowledge of God mediated through an image and a direct knowledge of God that arises in an encounter with God. For Plutarch, a divine image is the manifestation of the

¹³ Cf. the remarks of Balbus the Stoic in Cicero, *De natura deorum*, 2.2–44, where he offers transcendental proofs of the divine, and 2.153, where he states succinctly that observation of heavenly phenomena leads to knowledge of the gods, which in its turn leads to piety and to justice and to the virtues, through which the human may attain a blessed life similar to that of the gods: *Quae contuens animus accedit ad cognitionem deorum, e qua oritur pietas, cui coniuncta iustitia est reliquaeque virtutes, e quibus vita beata existit par et similis deorum, nulla alia re nisi immortalitate, quae nihil ad bene vivendum pertinent, cedens caelestibus.*

¹⁴ Stefan Dienstbeck, *Die Theologie der Stoa*, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 173 (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 318–19: “Das Transzendente wird mithin nicht zum Transzendenten. Gott bedarf keiner Transzendenz, weil dasjenige, was seine Transzendenz ausmachen würde, ausschließlich in seiner Transzendentalität für den Kosmos gipfelt. Das Element, welches Transzendenz begründen würde, wird mithin unmittelbar in die Realität hineingezogen, ja in sie gebettet. Als Realer ist Gott transzendental und als Transzendentaler ist er real. Oder anders formuliert: Die Metaphysik wird in die Physik überführt, indem das Metaphysische seinen Platz innerhalb dessen findet, was im Rahmen der Physik beschreibbar ist.”

noetic realm in the phenomenal one, and this manifestation is distinct from the epoptic vision. In Paul, too, one does not directly behold the glory of God, but rather sees it reflected in the face of Christ.¹⁵ There is no suggestion in Colossians that an unmediated encounter with God is possible; instead, Christ as the Image is the means through which God ‘transcends his own transcendence’ and mediates something of himself to the world. Throughout the letter, the author speaks of Christ as the fundamental point of theological orientation: he is the “image of the invisible God,” the mystery of God in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge lay hidden, and rather than bypassing Christ, the author tells the addressees to “take hold of [Christ] the head, from whom the whole body [...] grows the growth of God” (Col 2:19). For Colossians, seeing God through the Image is the best one can do.

This distance between God and the world is rooted either in a metaphysical dualism, either in the distinction between a noetic and a sense-perceptible realm, or in the distinction between Creator and creation, or both. Yet depending on the figure or writing under consideration, the εἰκὼν θεοῦ can be situated differently across this divide. For Plutarch, an εἰκὼν θεοῦ exists only in the realm of generation and decay; phenomena within this realm (e.g., the sun, a crocodile, a wise ruler) may serve the purpose of representing God in a visible, tangible manner and thus be an εἰκὼν θεοῦ, but there is no transfer of this status across the metaphysical divide. Philo’s image concept cuts a different profile, for the Image of God is the Logos, a transcendent figure who makes contact with the world, but is not part of created reality. A similar scheme is present in the Wisdom of Solomon, for Wisdom is not part of the creation, but rather is along with God the “fashioner of all things.” Colossians as well situates its εἰκὼν θεοῦ in the world of generation and decay as the Crucified Christ, but the Image of God in Colossians is also transcendent insofar as it stands above and before and grounds the order of all things “seen and unseen” (1:16bc), for it participated in its creation (1:16a–b, f).

Further, all of these thinkers maintain that the εἰκὼν θεοῦ exercises some kind of soteriological function. For Philo, the Image contributes to a *creatio continua*, insofar as Philo’s Image functions as the “charioteer” of the cosmos and preserves it. Similarly, Wisdom preserves the cosmos insofar as she “extends mightily from one end [of the cosmos] to the other and orders all things well,” but she also preserves the lives of humans who heed her, for she teaches the virtues that lead to life rather than to death. For Plutarch, the wise ruler does not exercise a soteriological function on a cosmic scale, but exercises one

¹⁵ Even if one takes 2 Cor 12:1–4 into account, it is clear that this is the exception rather than the rule in Paul’s letters. On the whole, Paul constantly points to Christ as the prism through which one knows God, which is clear even in the diction of Gal 1:12 when he states that he received his Gospel, not through an ἀποκαλύψεως θεοῦ, but through an ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

nonetheless: the wise ruler is the one who aids the preservation of the state, distributing the good gifts of the gods to his subjects and thus serving the preservation of their well-being. For Paul, Jesus Christ as the Image of God is the “last Adam” who enables a new mode of human existence over which death no longer has any hold, and all the forces of destruction and decay within and exterior to the human meet their end. In Colossians, the Image is the one “in whom all things hold together” and the Image thus contributes to the preservation of the cosmos. And yet vis-à-vis Philo, Wisdom, and Plutarch, one might say that Colossians portrays a ‘soteriological surplus’ of the Image insofar as the Image is the “beginning, the firstborn of the dead,” and thus the one in whom a re-creation has dawned in the work of reconciliation. Rather than merely continuing the first creation, the Image of Colossians is part of the restoration of an estranged creation to its source and goal.

Further, the εἰκὼν θεοῦ (Philo, Plutarch, Paul) or the εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος θεοῦ (Wisdom) bears an ethical significance for humans. In Wisdom, Sophia teaches the virtues necessary for humans to live up to their God-given determination to be an “image of God’s eternity.” For Philo, one may “strive to form oneself” according to the Image. For Paul, suffering with Christ in the present life is an anticipation of the conformation of believers to Christ’s image that will take place in the eschaton. For Plutarch, the wise ruler as the “image of God in the city” may become the model according to which his subjects might form themselves.

This is never a matter of outward appearance, but of virtue (Wisdom, Philo, Plutarch) or obedience to God (Paul). Plutarch discourages the ruler from projecting power by adorning himself with imitations of Zeus’ thunderbolts and instead admonishes the ruler to assimilate himself to God “through virtue” (δι’ ἀρετῆς) and thus “fashion [himself] into the most pleasant of statues to behold and most befitting of divinity” (*Princ. iner.* 780e–f: δημιουργῶν [αὐτὸν] ἀγαλμάτων τὸ ἥδιστον ὀφθῆναι καὶ θεοπρεπέστατον). Colossians, too, lacks an interest in outward appearances, choosing instead to speak of the Image’s wisdom (2:3) and forgiveness (3:14), and it also speaks of the Image as the one in whom human divisions disappear (3:10–11) and encourages the addressees to forebear particular forms of behavior (3:5–9a) and foster others (3:12–17), all in an effort to “put on the new human” and thus be “renewed according to the Image.”

While Colossians shares the concern of being conformed to a proper image of God with the Wisdom of Solomon, Philo, and Plutarch, its understanding of the necessary precondition for such a conformation stands squarely within the Pauline tradition. For Colossians, this is preceded by “dying” with Christ, being buried with Christ in baptism and subsequently being “raised” and “made alive” with Christ (cf. Col 2:12–13, 20; 3:1). This is, of course, grounded in the ‘re-creation’ made possible in the work of reconciliation and in this sense,

Colossians portrays not only the work of creation “unto the image,” but also the work of reconciliation as foundational to its ethical vision.

Finally, there is one characteristic of the image concept of Colossians that it shares in common with the Wisdom of Solomon and Philo, but not with Plutarch nor with Paul: the cosmogonic nature of the Image.

The Christology of Col 1:15–20 evinces a noticeable similarity with Philo and Jewish sapiential traditions: Sophia is the “fashioner of all things” who was present with God at creation; the Philonic Image is the Logos, the “eldest of all noetic realities” (*Fug.* 101), the mental blueprint through which God constructed the cosmos; for Colossians, Jesus Christ is the Image “in whom” all things, “seen and unseen,” were created, and is the *Gegenüber* that God posits for himself in the act of creation as its ground and goal. Colossians stands closer to Wisdom and Philo in this regard than to any other figure under discussion.¹⁶ Even in Paul, it is no foregone conclusion that Jesus Christ is considered to be preexistent and present at the first creation; even the phrase δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα in 1 Cor 8:6 need not be taken in a cosmogonic sense. As Friedrich-Wilhelm Eltester pointed out in his 1958 monograph *Eikon im Neuen Testament*, Paul is barely interested in the cosmological function of an εἰκὼν θεοῦ, which gives the reader the impression “daß Col 1 15 gegenüber II Cor 4 4 die ursprüngliche, kosmologische Konzeption bewahrt hat. Sachlich stellt das Gedankengut des Kolosserbriefes ein dem Paulus vorausliegendes Stadium dar.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Any dependence of Colossians upon Wisdom or Philo, however, must remain speculative. One might suggest, as is sometimes found in exegetical literature, that Colossians evinces a Philonic Logos theology without using the term “Logos.” While there is a possibility that Apollos provided a link between Philo and Paul and his co-workers – even if one presumes that Paul responds to Philonic thought in Apollo’s teaching without *proactively* appropriating it – such a possibility remains speculative. Cf. David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey*, CRINT Section 3, vol. 3 (Assen/Minneapolis: Van Gorcum/Fortress Press, 1993), 71. On Apollos, see Jürgen Wehnert, “Apollos,” in *Alexandria*, COMES 1, eds. Tobias Georges, Felix Albrecht, and Reinhard Feldmeier (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 403–12. Beginning by noting that details of Apollo’s life and teaching are scarce, he proceeds to discuss the problem and promise of reconstructing his teaching (407–12). With the caveat that *if* one might presume that Apollos maintained a certain “Alexandrian understanding of Wisdom,” he notes that it certainly would have been a Christologically modified version of it. Though one cannot say for certain whether Apollos developed his Christology with a base in Jewish-Alexandrian wisdom theology, Wehnert maintains that it may nevertheless be “considered seriously” (412).

¹⁷ Friedrich-Wilhelm Eltester, *Eikon im Neuen Testament*, BZNW 23 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1958), 149. Noteworthy in Eltester’s remarks is that he considers *Paul’s* εἰκὼν Christology to be a subsequent stage of development. This is a stark contrast to the widespread opinion in current scholarship that the *cosmic* nature of the Christology of Colossians is evidence of a development in Christology subsequent to Paul’s own writings.

And yet, there is a certain sense in which it is precisely at this junction that Colossians asserts its Pauline character over and against Philo and the Wisdom of Solomon: although the Image of Colossians is cosmogonic, it has a firm place within the flow of human history. Whereas Philo's Image is firmly situated in the noetic world and could never become corporeal, and whereas Sophia could teach and guide humans without herself becoming one, the Image of God in Colossians is squarely identified with Jesus Christ, in whom "the fullness of deity dwelt bodily" (Col 2:9), who lived a human existence and died on a cross (cf. Col 1:20; 2:14–15). For any thinker with a firm preference for the Platonic tradition (Philo, Plutarch), this would be simply inconceivable. Yet for Colossians, although the Image of God was present at the beginning of creation, it subsequently occupies a place in the flow of the history of the world and thus leaves the realm of transcendence. The relevance of this for the paraenesis of Colossians may be seen in the circumstance that Col 1:18b–20 speaks of the work of reconciliation as that through which the Son "became first in all things" (v. 18d).¹⁸ That a particular narrative element is implied through this – something took place in the immanent world of the addressees and not in the transcendent realm, nor in the *illo tempore* of mythical accounts – means that the addressees have a predecessor in their own striving to "put to death" certain practices (Col 3:5) and to "clothe themselves" with others (Col 3:12–14). In this sense, one might say that the Image (*Ebenbild*) of God in Colossians is simultaneously an ethical model (*Vorbild*) for the addressees with an historical, human dimension that is lacking in Philo's writings and in the Wisdom of Solomon.

C. Résumé

What might we say in conclusion? To begin with, the divine life and character are not accessible to the senses in an unmediated fashion. Though God's being may be perceived by the mind, either through philosophical reasoning or divine revelation, divine being cannot be perceived by the senses without the aid of a medium, and an εἰκὼν θεοῦ serves this purpose.

In the second place, none of these thinkers presume that εἰκὼν θεοῦ is to be predicated of anything and everything: there is either a restriction of the application to one figure alone through whom it might be mediated to others, as in the case of the Wisdom of Solomon, Philo, Paul, and Colossians, or the tendency to designate a limited number of discrete entities within the created order as an image of God, as in the case of the Stoics and Plutarch. An image of God cannot be found everywhere without further ado. Indeed, Plutarch does characterize the cosmos as an image of God, but the intention is to express how the

¹⁸ Lit. "so that he might become" (aor. subj., γένηται).

cosmos as an orderly unity functions as an image of God's essence, not to declare that every single part of the whole can be considered an image of God; it seems clear from Plutarch's concrete application of the term εἰκὼν that the latent possibility of parts of the cosmos to become εἰκόνες θεοῦ is not realized everywhere.¹⁹ Further, even though humans or a particular subset of humans can and even should become images of God or "become sons of the Image" (Philo) or "be renewed according to the Image" (Colossians), it is not the case that all of the figures discussed in this study consider εἰκὼν θεοῦ to be a basic human predicate.²⁰

Thirdly, none of these thinkers is concerned with outward appearances when it comes to how a human being might become an image of God or imitate the divine Image. Instead, the concern is holiness, love, and/or virtue, and thus an inward quality that expresses itself in outward action. Therefore, a true divine image manifests the divine character. Even in the case of Dio Chrysostom, where the appearance of the Olympian Zeus plays a crucial role in conveying something of the divine, it is clear that the use of the human form is a stopgap born of "want" and "aporía."

Lastly, we may say that at least for the Wisdom of Solomon, Philo, Plutarch, Paul, and Colossians, the "image of God" concept is threefold. In each case, the Image of God (Sophia, the Logos, the wise ruler, Jesus Christ the Son) performs a soteriological, epistemic, and ethical function. We are therefore presented with a subgroup within the image discourse of the first century A.D.

What is it, then, which is unique in Colossians vis-à-vis the conceptions found in these other thinkers? First of all, the notion that the Image of God is somehow responsible for creation as well as a re-creation. The first of these two aspects integrates a protological dimension into the image concept that is shared by Philo and the Wisdom of Solomon but is lacking in Plutarch and Paul. The second aspect – re-creation – is unique to Colossians. One might add,

¹⁹ Although one can say that for Plutarch, the entire realm of generation and decay has an "image-like character" and thus has the latent ability to serve as an image of the divine (cf. Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, *Plutarchs Denken in Bildern: Studien zur literarischen, philosophischen und religiösen Funktion des Bildhaften*, STAC 14 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002], 159–65 concerning "Der Bildcharakter der Welt: Sein und Schein"), it does not seem to be the case that Plutarch considers the landscape of his *Lebenswelt* to be over-populated with authentic εἰκόνες θεοῦ. This is reflected as well in his disdain of Stoic physics for its implication of a theological "immanentism" which would lead to a "corruption and eventually dissolution of the gods into the material world [...]" (Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, "Religions, Religion and Theology in Plutarch," in *Plutarch's Religious Landscapes*, BPS 6, eds. Hirsch-Luipold and Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta [Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2021], 11–36, 27).

²⁰ Even in Philo's case, it is not the entire human being in its dualistic constitution of body and soul which was created "according to the image of God," but rather only the mind (cf. *Her.* 230–231). In the case of the Wisdom of Solomon, it does not seem that the wicked who "summon death" by their aversion to God's righteousness can be called an "image of God's eternity."

further, that the unity of protology and eschatology (cf. Col 3:4) offered by Colossians' conception of the image of God represents an inverted relation of expansion when compared with Philo and the protopauline letters: vis-à-vis Paul, a protological element is added, and vis-à-vis Philo, an eschatological element is added.

In the second place, as it concerns the human's ability to be conformed to the divine Image, the notion of a divine initiative plays a significant role in Paul and in Colossians. For the Stoics and Plutarch, it is the human who must "ascend" and who must "fashion itself" through the process of behaving virtuously.²¹ This could be said of Colossians as well (cf. 2:6; 3:5–17), but this possibility is grounded by the divine initiative taken in the act of reconciliation. It is through the reconciliation achieved in the cross that the intervening estrangement of creation from God has been overcome and it is the process of being buried with Christ in baptism and being "made alive with him" (2:12–13) that grounds the possibility of "putting on the new human who is being renewed according to the Image of the one who made him" (3:10).

Finally, Colossians shares with the protopauline letters an exclusivity in its application of εἰκὼν θεοῦ to a figure who can be identified with a particular human being. As previously stated, all the thinkers under discussion restrain their application to a limited number of figures: for the Stoics, those who live in accordance with Nature and therefore live virtuously; for Plutarch, wise rulers; for Philo, the one Logos of God. Like Philo and Paul, Colossians affirms that there is only *one* Image of God, but in distinction from Philo and in similarity with Paul, Colossians predicates this status of the Son who is also known as Jesus Christ (Col 1:1),²² and thus one may conclude that it is this *one human* whom Colossians considers to be God's Image. What Wolfgang Klausnitzer and Bernd Elmar Koziel remark concerning the protopauline letters applies to Colossians as well: the image concept constitutes a *relecture* of the conception of the human as the image of God found in the Hebrew Bible in the sense that the status as an *imago dei* is radically recast so that it belongs properly solely to Jesus Christ and that it is achievable for other humans only by means of an assimilation to his image.²³

²¹ The aspect of divine initiative is not entirely lacking in Seneca (cf. the divine descent in *Ep.* 73.16), but it appears to me that this is such a minor note in his melody that one cannot avoid hearing Seneca's song as a challenge to the human to bear the burden and "rise up" (cf. *Ep.* 31.11).

²² Even Paul – excepting the Midrash of 1 Cor 11:7 – only speaks of Jesus Christ as the εἰκὼν θεοῦ.

²³ Wolfgang Klausnitzer and Bernd Elmar Koziel, *Christus als Bild Gottes: Fundamentalthologische Erwägungen zur Einheit der vielen Bilder von Gott* (Würzburg: Echter, 2019), 304–5.

Concluding Reflections

“As We Catch Sight of the Sun in the Water”

Sextus Empiricus shares an anecdote about the young Epicurus quitting his school lessons after his schoolmaster refuses to entertain a philosophical question following a reading of Hesiod, *Theogony* 116:

For when still quite a youth he asked his schoolmaster, who was reading out the line “Verily first created of all was Chaos,” what Chaos was created from, if it was created first. And when he replied that it was not his business, but that of the men called philosophers, to teach things of that sort, “Well then,” said Epicurus, “I must go off to them, if it is they who know the truth of things.”

(*Adversus physicos* 2.1.19 [Bury, LCL])

κομιδῆ γὰρ μειρακίσκος ὄν ἤρετο τὸν ἐπαναγινώσκοντα αὐτῷ γραμματιστὴν “ἦτοι μὲν πρότιστα χάος γένετ’,” ἐκ τίνος τὸ χάος ἐγένετο, εἴπερ πρῶτον ἐγένετο. τούτου δὲ εἰπόντος μὴ αὐτοῦ ἔργον εἶναι τὰ τοιαῦτα διδάσκειν ἀλλὰ τῶν καλουμένων φιλοσόφων, τοίνυν, ἔφησεν ὁ Ἐπίκουρος, ἐπ’ ἐκείνους μοι βαδιστέον ἐστίν, εἴπερ αὐτοὶ τὴν τῶν ὄντων ἀλήθειαν ἴσασιν.

The examination of Col 1:15–20 in light of other image discourses leaves us with questions that the text of Colossians does not directly answer. It is also clear that the approach of the schoolmaster in the foregoing anecdote is not a path we would like to take. Therefore, this exegetical study will conclude with a short series of reflections that attempt to provide at least the beginnings of an answer to a few of the many questions that might arise.

A. The Problematic Nature of Images

To begin with, Plato’s reflections on images make it abundantly clear that images can be problematic. If one cannot evaluate the authenticity of an image without direct knowledge of its model, then what sense does it make to speak of an image of an “invisible God”? If this God truly is “invisible” and thus not directly knowable and no image *qua* medium can provide unmediated knowledge of God and no one image could be evaluated on the basis of another (cf. Plato, *Crat.* 439a–b), then there would be no point in appealing to other portrayals of God in the biblical traditions nor in taking a more ecumenical approach and comparing *Gottesbilder* across multiple religions in order to figure out whether Jesus Christ is a proper image (*Ebenbild*) rather than a

distortion (*Zerrbild*).¹ Unless we have direct knowledge of the original pattern, no comparison of one image with another image would help. Whereas Plato, Philo, and Plutarch all have some conception of a mystical vision through which one might catch an unmediated glimpse of divine being, Colossians does not. Even when the author speaks of the “mystery hidden from the eons and from the generations but which has now been revealed to [God’s] saints” (Col 1:26), it is clear that this “mystery” is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27b), and therefore the mystery is a revelatory content rather than an epistemic mechanism by which one might catch an unmediated vision of the invisible God. The mediate nature of the resulting knowledge remains.

Colossians does not provide the resources necessary to answer this critique of the problematic nature of images, for the issue of a comparison of images with one another, which gives rise to the necessity of an immediate knowledge of the model in the first place, is simply beyond the purview of the letter. There are two interrelated reasons for this: the radical exclusivity of the predication of an image status and the role played by the second strophe of the hymn in elucidating the first.

First, Colossians – like Paul – presumes that there is only one Image of God. From Colossians’ point of view, such an exclusivity means that any attempt at comparison remains unfounded, for there is no *primum quid* and *secundum quid* that necessitate a *tertium comparationis*. This is a reflex of the Christological monotheism of the Corpus Paulinum, for there is no way of circumventing the primary *datum* of the Christ-event, the prism through which God becomes visible. Even if one were to introduce the Holy Spirit – conspicuously absent in Colossians – as an avenue of illumination, as Basil of Caesarea would propose a few centuries later, the object seen by the light of the illumination would still be Christ as the one εἰκὼν θεοῦ.²

Second, Colossians does not presume the necessity of a mystical vision but refers the reader instead to the second strophe of the hymn: the work of reconciliation by which the character of God becomes visible. Instead of relying on metaphysical categories, the author proposes “soteriological predicates” as a basis for knowledge of God.³ One might then say that the ontologically stylized

¹ The remarks of Pierre Destrée and Radcliffe G. Edmonds III, “The Power – and Problems – of Plato’s Images,” in *Plato and the Power of Images*, MNS 405, eds. Destrée and Edmonds (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 1–10, 2, concerning images in Plato is relevant here: “Is the relation of the image to that which it represents some kind of mimesis, reflection or refraction or inversion or perhaps even perspectival distortion?”

² Basil of Caesarea, *De spiritu sancto* 26.64: Ἀδύνατον γὰρ ἰδεῖν τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, μὴ ἐν τῷ φωτισμῷ τοῦ Πνεύματος. Καὶ τὸν ἐνατενίζοντα τῇ εἰκόνι, ἀμήχανον τῆς εἰκόνης ἀποχωρίσαι τὸ φῶς. Τὸ γὰρ τοῦ ὀραῖν αἴτιον, ἐξ ἀνάγκης συγκαθορᾶται τοῖς ὀρατοῖς.

³ Cf. Reinhard Feldmeier, “‘Der das Nichtseiende ruft, daß es sei’. Gott bei Paulus,” in *Götterbilder – Gottesbilder – Weltbilder: Polytheismus und Monotheismus in der Welt der*

first strophe of Col 1:15–20 was "given birth" by the historical contingencies referenced in the second strophe; without this reference, the ontological claims of the first strophe would be nearly "ineffable."⁴

Rather than getting beyond the εἰκὼν θεοῦ to an immediate vision of the divine, the reader of Colossians is left with the assertion that the image does indeed convey the "intrinsic quality" of its model, as Plato would put it (cf. *Crat.* 432d–433a). Along these lines, Hugo Grotius states in his *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*:

Adam was the *image of God*, though very superficially so; in Christ, it became perfectly apparent how wise, powerful, and good God is, just as we catch sight of the sun in the water. The one is the *image*, the other is the *shadow*, as in the case of the Law, Heb. 10:1.⁵

Adam imago Dei fuit, sed valde tenuis; in Christo perfectissime apparuit quam Deus esset sapiens, potens, bonus. Sic in aqua solem conspicimus. Aliud imago, aliud umbra, qualis in Lege, Heb. 10:1.

Of course, the use of *perfectissime* cuts against the grain of the metaphor of a 'reflection in water.' Nonetheless, Grotius' metaphor captures nicely the viewpoint of Colossians when read in the light of ancient image discourses: it is Christ as the *imago dei* through whom humanity can see God 'as though catching sight of the sun in the water.' Because it is not possible to gaze directly into

Antike, 2 vols., eds. Reinhard G. Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 2:135–49, 138–43.

⁴ Samuel Vollenweider, "'Der Erstgeborene vor aller Schöpfung' (Kol 1,15–20): Überlegungen zum Stellenwert der kosmischen Christologie für das Gespräch zwischen Schöpfungstheologie und moderner Kosmologie," chap. 4 in Vollenweider, *Antike und Urchristentum: Studien zur neutestamentlichen Theologie in ihren Kontexten und Rezeptionen*, WUNT 436 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 55–71, 62–63: "Traditionsgeschichtlich gesehen lässt sich die Behauptung wahrscheinlich machen, dass sich die Vorstellungen der Schöpfungsmittlerschaft Christi aus den Erhöhungsvorstellungen herausgebildet haben. Die frühesten Christen sprachen zunächst nur von der Erhöhung des auferstandenen Jesus zu gottgleicher Würde. Wenig später wurde im Zug einer Extrapolation das göttliche Wesen Christi bereits im Anfang wahrgenommen. Die zweite Strophe unseres Hymnus hat demnach gleichsam die erste gezeugt, und entsprechend darf es nicht verwundern, wenn die Aussagen der zweiten Strophe ihren Reflex in der ersten finden. [...] Die zeitenthoben anmutenden ontologischen Prädikationen der ersten Strophe weisen dergestalt auf kontingente Ereignisse zurück oder voraus, ohne die sie gar nicht sagbar wären." André Feuillet, *Le Christ sagesse de Dieu d'après les épîtres pauliniennes*, ÉBib (Paris: Gabalda, 1966), 269–70, makes similar remarks concerning Col 1:15–18a as an extrapolation of previous Pauline thought, or, in other words, of the content of Col 1:18b–20: "Certains de ces éléments pourraient être tenus pour de simples déductions des convictions antérieures de l'Apôtre: ἐν αὐτῷ cosmique dériverait de ἐν αὐτῷ salvifique, tout comme δι' αὐτοῦ cosmique est le pendant du δι' αὐτοῦ sotériologique; le titre de 'premier-né de toute créature' dériverait du titre de 'premier-né d'entre les morts' (= 'les prémices de ceux qui se sont endormis' de *1 Co.* xv,20)."

⁵ Hugo Grotius, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*, 9 vols. (Paris: Grotius, 1646, in 2 vols.; Groningen: Zuidema, 1829), 7:116.

the sun, one is left to see the sun through the medium of water, and though the contours might be blurry, the ‘intrinsic quality’ of the sun – its light – is conveyed in the image.

B. Inclusion in the Image: A Positive Estimation of the Discrepancy between Model and Image

It is often remarked in scholarly literature that for Plato and those authors who stand in his tradition (Plutarch, Philo), an εἰκών is (merely) the copy (*Abbild*) of a prototype (*Urbild*) and therefore has a *deficient* ontological status vis-à-vis the transcendent reality it depicts. While this is not incorrect, this perhaps does an injustice to images and the positive claims that Plato et al. make regarding images.⁶ Once again: as Plato points out clearly in the *Cratylus*, an image is not a duplicate. One might ask whether an exclusive focus on the deficient character of an image vis-à-vis its model in interpretations of Plato and the Platonic tradition might not be grounded in an unjustified demand placed on images to be something other and more than what they really are. Instead, we might do better to take seriously the claims that an image is not a duplicate and that an image is a good one if it bears the “intrinsic quality” of its model. The implication of this insight is that an image need not bear all the attributes of its model in order to be an image; or, to invert the formulation, we should expect that an image bears some qualities that are not directly linked to the “intrinsic quality” of the model, but which are other, secondary, and unimportant as far as its evaluation as an image is concerned. This way of thinking about images could address, for example, the concern that calling the *man* Jesus of Nazareth the “image of the invisible God” would somehow exclude women from the divine image.⁷ If one reads Colossians with the distinction

⁶ The positive value of images for Plutarch, for example, has been examined closely by Rainer Hirsch-Luipold in the monograph *Plutarchs Denken in Bildern: Studien zur literarischen, philosophischen und religiösen Funktion des Bildhaften*, STAC 14 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).

⁷ A similar concern is raised by Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 81–115, who notes that “concretion” is a necessary trait of religion and that the historical concretion of Christianity, which includes the circumstance that Jesus was male, cannot be done away with. For Hampson, the cost is clear: the male concept of God in the West “has served to undermine a sense of women as also made in the image of God” (45). I cannot claim that the reflection I offer above is a solution to Hampson’s concerns; I hope, however, that it could at least be a helpful beginning to potential answer. The importance of considering Hampson’s concerns is expressed poignantly in her own words: “Christian feminists too are of course deeply conscious of these things. The concretion of the Christian religion drives them to its edge; indeed makes them wonder whether there is a

between image and model in mind, then one could at least consider that the male sex of this "image of the invisible God" could be understood as accidental rather than essential and "being renewed according to the image" could be read as a gender-neutral matter.⁸

Along the same lines, one may point out that it is not necessary for an image to bear a natural resemblance to its model. As we have already seen, thinkers such as Plutarch, Paul, and the author of Colossians are not interested in the outward appearance of an image. We recall Plutarch's remark that living animals are more fitting images of the divine than are lifeless anthropomorphic statues carved of stone and wood, for animals have within them the principle of life and motion and a basic kind of cognition. When Paul speaks of being conformed to the image of Christ, he speaks of Christ as the source of a radically different mode of human existence whose distinguishing mark is an irrevocable proximity to God; even the juxtaposition of a *σῶμα ψυχικόν* and a *σῶμα πνευματικόν* in 1 Cor 15 is not motivated by a difference in the appearance of these respective *σώματα*, but rather what their respective nature means for entrance into the kingdom of God (cf. 1 Cor 15:50). Colossians, too, is not at all interested in the outward appearance of Christ as the *εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου*, nor in the way humans might resemble 'the man' Jesus Christ; instead, the concern is that they lay aside the practices and behaviors that divide humanity from itself (Col 3:5–9) and act in a way befitting of the love and peace of Christ (Col 3:10–17).

A concerted attempt to understand the *εἰκὼν* concept of Colossians – and the Corpus Paulinum – in this way could provide a new basis for viewing the way in which ministers in word and sacrament execute their office *in persona*

place for them within it. They attempt a translation. But the biblical material may simply not be amenable to what they would say. [...] [Women] need to find images with which, and person with whom, they can in their religion form some association, or perceive a reflection of themselves. Men generally fail to realize that there are women in the pews in pain – and others have left. Women are disrupted in their worship by the masculinity of the religion to the point that it ceases to be for them a vehicle through which they can love God" (85).

⁸ Critical for this reading would be a close study of the relation between Gal 3:28 and Col 3:9–11; is the absence of *οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ* in the latter a conscious omission, or is it perhaps grounded in the differing situations each of the letters attempts to address? Galatians, for example, responds to the viewpoint that circumcision were necessary for integration into the people of God; it is evident that such a viewpoint poses a problem for women. And in Colossians, we are dealing with the Image *as* mediator of creation who logically and temporally precedes the differentiation of the sexes as it is portrayed in the creation account of Gen 1. The results of such a study could give us an indication whether the image concept of Colossians provides a *Sachkritik* of the *Haustafel* in Col 3:18–4:1. If "male" and "female" are merely secondary qualities, then how could it be considered "fitting in the Lord" (*ἀνῆκεν ἐν κυρίῳ*), who is Christ (Col 1:3), for wives to submit themselves to their husbands (Col 3:18)? To work out the precise relation between the image concept and the *Haustafel* would be prime material for a further study.

vel imagine Christi. In the declaration *Inter insigniores*, which concerns the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Church, the ordination of women is rejected because, among other reasons, women cannot reproduce the image of Christ, for “Christ himself was and remains a man” (*Christus ipse fuit et permanet vir*) because the “Word became incarnate according to the male sex” (*Verbum incarnatum est secundum sexum virilem*). The priest’s natural resemblance to Christ in this manner is considered necessary because the priesthood as a whole has a sacramental character, and “the entire economy of the sacraments is grounded in natural signs” (*tota enim sacramentorum oeconomia in signis naturalibus fundatur*) that can be grasped by the human mind, for, as laid down by Thomas Aquinas, “sacramental signs represent on the basis of a natural similarity” (*signa sacramentalia, ut ait S. Thomas, ex naturali similitudine repraesentant*). If the priest performing the eucharist had no part in the male sex, then “it would be difficult to perceive in that very minister the image of Christ” (*difficile in eodem ministro imago Christi perspiceretur*).⁹

Of course, the concept of an “image” is not the only factor at work here; the Thomistic understanding of a “sign” is a linchpin in the theory. And yet, if it could be possible to disentangle the “image” and “sign” concepts from one another in this matter, then perhaps the issue could be reconsidered. What it means to appear “in the image of Christ” before others has, on the basis of the image discourse of the New Testament era, no connection to matters of outward appearance. If embodying the characteristics named in Col 3:12–17 suffices as a mark of renewal according to Christ’s image, then one would indeed have a basis on which to permit the ordination of women as persons who can execute an office *in persona vel imagine Christi*.

C. All Things Hold Together in Him

The exhortation of Col 3:9–10 to “remove the old human with its practices and put on the new human who is being renewed according to image of the one who created him,” which occurs between catalogues of practices that are either to be discarded (3:5–8) or emulated (3:12–17), might seem more immediately actionable than the affirmations of Col 1:15–18a which are reminiscent of ancient cosmological speculation. Considering the modern uncoupling of cosmology and ethics, what should anyone make of the claim of Col 1:17b that “all things hold together in him”?

We might say that the significance of the claim that “all things hold together in him” (Col 1:17b) lies not only in a different reference point vis-à-vis the Greco-Roman tradition, but also in the fact that it is a fixed point of reference

⁹ *AAS* 69 (1977), 98–116, 109–10. *Inter insigniores* was reconfirmed by the papal encyclical *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* in 1994 (*AAS* 86 [1994], 545–48).

to a particular historical event and thus possesses an inherent dynamism. In the other examples of the cohesive force of the cosmos – e.g., in Empedocles, Plato, the Stoics – the uniting principle of the cosmos is understood as a given. That is, it is either a foundational act at creation's inception or a particular cycle of life or a basic, immovable rationale undergirding all of existence, and therefore something that merely subsists and is granted in and with existence itself. In the case of the Son who is praised in Col 1:15–20, this is different. It is the very connection of the first strophe (creation of the cosmos in, through, and unto Christ) with the second (reconciliation of all things to Christ) and the fact that Col 1:15–20 is introduced with the promise of "redemption, the forgiveness of sins," which demonstrates that the very power that holds the universe together is not only given in the person of the Son, but also in a particular *life*, and thus a particular *action*.¹⁰

What is it, in the view of the author of Colossians, that holds the world together, preventing it from dissolving into chaos and destruction? Or in other words, what is it that humans cannot lose without losing their very selves? It is that very life which one glimpses in Jesus of Nazareth, the Son who is the image of the invisible God. The qualities manifest in Jesus' life and death, such as the wisdom of his teaching, his obedience to the Father, and his sacrificial love for his fellow humans,¹¹ are those qualities that prevent the world from descending into chaos and destruction. Insofar as Christians attempt to follow after Jesus – and in this way place their trust in him (Col 1:4) – they choose to embrace a pattern of living in the world which, though perhaps appearing weak and foolish on the surface, is actually the source of life. Redemption is found in the forgiveness of sins made possible by the Son (Col 1:14), and it is forgiveness which puts an end to the vicious cycle of retaliation among us and therefore fosters life.¹² Contrary to appearances, it is radical, self-sacrificial

¹⁰ There exists here an affinity with the notion of Empedocles that Love and Strife are responsible for the constitution and dissolution of the world, yet what the Empedoclean notion lacks is the historical particularity inherent in the Christ-event.

¹¹ Cf. Hugo Grotius, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*, 6:482, who in commenting on 2 Cor 4:4 asserts that what Jesus said and did in his lifetime revealed him to be God's image: *Nimirum quia sicut ex imagine hominis species cognoscitur, ita ex iis quae egit et locutus est Christus, Dei potentia, sapientia, sanctitas, bonitas, Hebr. 1:3.*

¹² When Christians, as a group, confess faith in the forgiveness of sins with the words of the Apostles' Creed, they not only acknowledge God's forgiveness of their own sins but also confess the value of forgiving others. The social component of this conception of forgiveness is relevant for considering how the readiness to offer love and forgiveness to others helps to preserve humanity's common life. Cf. the remarks offered by Slavoj Žižek, *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism? Four Interventions in the (Mis)Use of a Notion* (New York: Randomhouse, 2011), 50, concerning the viewpoint that atonement consists in self-effacing love rather than a kind of repayment: "[Is] Christianity [...] a flawed religion? Or is a different reading of the Crucifixion feasible? The first step out of this predicament is to recall Christ's statements, which disturb – or, rather, simply *suspend* – the circular logic of revenge or

obedience to the Father and radical, self-sacrificial love towards others that “holds the world together.” This runs counter to what our ‘naked eyes’ tell us: is not the world rather “red in tooth and claw” and at odds with love as “creation’s final law”?¹³ Does not the world belong to those who “rashly grasp” at what they want?¹⁴ Is it not the case that whoever would survive in this world must engage in the self-seeking destruction of others and that any attempt to halt such abuse with morals and laws is merely the invention of the weak for the sake of protecting themselves against the strong?¹⁵ According to the Pauline tradition, that way of seeing the world would be Adamic humanity *in nuce*. The alternative to this is the mode of life glimpsed in the “last Adam” (1 Cor 15:45). In the same way that this “last Adam” is a “life-giving spirit” (πνεῦμα

punishment destined to re-establish the balance of Justice: instead of ‘An eye for an eye!’, we get, ‘If someone slaps your right cheek, turn to him your left also!’ The point here is not stupid masochism, humble acceptance of one’s humiliation, but the endeavor to *interrupt the circular logic of the re-established balance of justice*. Along the same lines, Christ’s sacrifice, with its paradoxical nature (it is the very person *against whom* we humans have sinned, whose trust we have betrayed, who atones and pays the price for our sins), suspends the logic of sin and punishment, of legal or ethical retribution, of ‘settling accounts’, by bringing it to the point of self-relating. The only way to achieve this suspension, to break the chain of crime and punishment/retribution, is to assume an utter readiness for self-erasure. And *love*, at its most elementary, is nothing but such a paradoxical gesture of breaking the chain of retribution. So the second step is to focus on the terrifying force of someone accepting in advance, and pursuing, his own annihilation – Christ was not sacrificed by and for another, he sacrificed *himself*:”

¹³ See Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, a poem commemorating his deceased friend Arthur Henry Hallam. In Canto 55, the poet asks, “Are God and Nature then at strife, / That Nature lends such evil dreams?,” and proceeds to say in Canto 56: “Man, her [sc. Nature’s] last work, who seem’d so fair, / Such splendid purpose in his eyes, / Who roll’d the psalm to wintry skies, / Who built him fanes of fruitless prayer, / Who trusted God was love indeed / And love Creation’s final law – / Tho’ Nature, red in tooth and claw, / With raving, shriek’d against his creed – / Who loved, who suffer’d countless ills, / Who battled for the True, the Just, / Be Blown about the desert dust, / Or seal’d within the iron hills? / No more? / [...] O life as futile, then, as frail! / O for thy voice to sooth and bless! / What hope of answer, or redress? / Behind the veil, behind the veil” (*In Memoriam A.H.H. as Written by Alfred Lord Tennyson MDCCCXLIX* [London: Bankside Press, 1900], 59–61).

¹⁴ Goethe, *Faust II*, 4662–4665 (*Anmutige Gegend*): “Säume nicht, dich zu erdreisten, / Wenn die Menge zaudernd schweift; / Alles kann der Edle leisten, / Der versteht und rasch ergreift” (*Faust: Der Tragödie erster und zweiter Teil. Urfaust*, 16th ed., ed. Erich Trunz, [Munich: C.H. Beck, 1996, reprint 2014]).

¹⁵ This is the central question in the debate between Callicles and Socrates in Plato’s *Gorg.* 483b–e, where Callicles advances the two-pronged claim that (1) “nature herself displays” (ἡ δὲ γὰρ [...] φύσις αὐτῇ ἀποφαίνει) that it is just (δίκαιον) that the strong have advantage over the weak, and (2) that those who make laws are the weaker sort of people, who legislate only to serve their own interest, to protect themselves against the strong, and to punish the strong for attempting to do what is – in the latter group’s view – right by nature.

ζωοποιῶν) in contrast to the "first Adam," so too does the author of Colossians affirm that it is the life of the Son "in whom all things hold together."

One might say, further, that the ethical dimension of the letter demonstrates the necessity of the second strophe of the hymn for the knowledge of God and how this bears upon ethics. As noted multiple times, the scope of both strophes is cosmic. Yet there is no intrinsic connection between a 'cosmic God' and a particular ethical code. One might say rather that an all-encompassing deity constitutes the realm of a *coincidentia oppositorum* (to borrow a term from the Scholastic Nicolas of Cusa), and that the deepest wisdom entailed by the existence of such a cosmic God is to return to the view of Heraclitus and Empedocles that "being is many and yet one."¹⁶ If this is the case, then how ought one to know what "the good" is and therefore what the basis of one's ethics ought to be? Are not all such distinctions trivial when seen against the backdrop of the sublimation (*Aufhebung*) of such contradictions in God?¹⁷

¹⁶ *Apud* Plato, *Soph.* 242d–e: τὸ ὄν πολλά τε καὶ ἓν ἐστίν.

¹⁷ One may borrow a contrasting example from another religious and cultural space, namely the *Bhagavad Gita*, in order to demonstrate that the mere notion of cosmic divinity is not sufficient in determining a particular ethical code, but rather must first be supplemented by other considerations. The *Bhagavad Gita* is an episode in the Sanskrit epic *Mahabharata*. It details the conversation between Arjuna of the Pandavas and his charioteer Krishna, who turns out to be the supreme God Brahman (cf. 10:12–13). A civil war which pits two sides of a family against one another puts Arjuna in a position where he is about to initiate a battle and kill his distant relatives, the Kauravas. He breaks down, for he realizes that to kill family is wicked, and thus he cannot do it (1:26–47). Krishna reproaches him for this "weakness" (2:2–4) and lectures him on duty, action, reality, nonattachment, etc., telling him that he should fight. Throughout the episode, Krishna attempts to convince Arjuna of the 'higher wisdom' of his viewpoint (2:11, 18–19, 57–58; 3:25), a "royal knowledge" (9:2; cf. 4:1–2), even asserting that disregarding the Holy Vedas, which have informed Arjuna's ethics, is a mark of wisdom (2:41–47). Such a higher wisdom "permits all action" (4:34–37) and those who have attained it are not defiled by any action (5:10). This is all grounded in the metaphysics of Sankhya and the notion that Brahman is the substrate of all existence and the hidden unity of all persons, such that there is no distinction between a wise brahmin and a dog (5:18–19), for they exist in him and the wise yogin exists in Brahman (6:30–32). Krishna transcends Being to such a degree that he is the very paradox that all things exist and do not exist in him (9:4–10), who is all things (10:19–40), who lives "situated in the hearts of all creatures, just as [he] is the beginning, middle, and end of all creatures" (10:20, cf. 10:32), in whose "body [dwells] the entire universe of moving and unmoving things, and whatever else [one] desire[s] to behold" (11:7), the "primeval person" (11:8). This culminates in Krishna declaring: "I am time run on, destroyer of the universe, risen here to annihilate worlds. Regardless of you, all these warriors, stationed in opposing ranks, shall cease to exist. Therefore go to it, grasp fame! And having conquered your enemies, enjoy a thriving kingship. They have already been hewn down by me: Savyasachin, simply be the instrument. Kill Drona, kill Bhisham [...] and the other heroes as well: they are killed by me. Don't waver – you must fight! In battle you shall overcome your enemies" (11:32–34). To this, Arjuna replies, "And how should [all beings] not bow down to you, Great One? To the original creator, greater even than Brahma, infinite lord of gods, home of the world. You are the

The ethical vision cast by Col 1:15–20 and developed in the letter forms a sharp contrast to such a view. The One who is the “beginning” of true humanity is the same person who was nailed to the cross: Jesus of Nazareth. It is perhaps no coincidence that some of the admonitions of the author of Colossians not only reference the Image explicitly named in the first strophe of the hymn, but also the event of the cross and resurrection which are central to the second strophe (cf. Col 2:12–15, 20; 3:1, 3, 5). That is, not only does God’s vision for creation established from the beginning play a role in discerning ethical guidance (cf. Col 3:9–11), but also the life, death, and resurrection of the Son, captured well in the words of Alessandro Sacchi:

“In the domain of theology, the importance of our text consists in the attempt to interpret redemption, and hence the entire person of Christ, in a cosmic key. This means that salvation does not appear first and foremost as the establishment of a relation with God, but rather as a return to universal order and peace through the elimination of the tyranny of man over man, and therefore of an egotistical use of things that renders the world inhospitable and unruly. [...] Through the cross, which represents the most radical negation of egoism and human self-sufficiency, there has been sent into the world a love that is stronger than human sin, and having been inscribed into the very order of things, it is universal and irreversible.”¹⁸

imperishable – being, non-being, and what is beyond. You are the original god, the primeval person; you are the receptacle of all this – knower, known, and ultimate condition. Infinite form, the entire universe was composed by you” (11:37). At the end of the episode, Arjuna goes to war and “after eighteen days of carnage” (W.J. Johnson, “Introduction,” in *The Bhagavad Gita*, Oxford World’s Classics, ed. Johnson [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994, reprint 2008], vii–xix, xix), Arjuna and the Pandavas emerge victorious.

¹⁸ Alessandro Sacchi, “La riconciliazione universale (Col. 1,20),” in *La cristologia in San Paolo: Atti della XXIII settimana biblica*, ed. by the Associazione Biblica Italiana (Brescia: Paideia, 1976), 221–45, 240: “In campo teologico l’importanza del nostro testo consiste nel tentativo di interpretare la redenzione, e quindi tutta la persona di Cristo, in chiave cosmica. Ciò significa che la salvezza non appare anzitutto come l’instaurazione di un rapporto con Dio, ma come un ritorno all’ordine e alla pace universale, mediante l’eliminazione della sopraffazione dell’uomo sull’uomo, e quindi di un uso egoistico delle cose che rende il mondo inospitale e ribelle [...]. [M]ediante la croce, che rappresenta la negazione più radicale dell’egoismo e dell’autosufficienza umana, è stato messo nel mondo un amore che è più forte del peccato dell’uomo, ed essendo iscritto nell’ordine stesso delle cose, è universale e irreversibile.”

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