A CRITICAL STUDY
OF THE EPISTLE OF ST. PAUL
TO THE COLOSSIANS

BY

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter I. THE CULTURAL BACKGROUND</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE COLOSSIAN HERESY</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. AN INVESTIGATION OF CRUCIAL CONCEPTS AND TERMS IN LIGHT OF THE HELLENISTIC BACKGROUND</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE FULLNESS OF TIME</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 75 |

The Christian Gnosis
The Christian Power
Christian Manumission
The Cosmic Christ
Iōn
Prototokos
Pleroma
The Christian Mystery
The Cult of The Stoicheia

In its beginnings, many religious and philosophical groups sought to draw it into their outlook. Many isolated Christian assemblies were threatened to assimilate into local cult expressions. In the local Christian church at Colossae a foreign element had attempted to infiltrate the thought of the young group. Paul's epistle was an attempt to reestablish what he was convinced was sound teaching. One may gather a good deal of information about this Colossian heresy from the epistle.
PREFACE

In undertaking an investigation of the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians, the writer soon realized that a distinctive approach should be taken. A linguistic and theological consideration would be of no value if the epistle were not seen against its cultural background. Paul expressed himself in a context of varied ideas. The age in which he lived and moved was teeming with intellectual activity. It was a period of history in which many schools of thought sought dominion over the mind of man. In this situation Christianity had its origin. In its beginnings, many religious societies threatened to check its influence. Other religious and philosophical groups sought to draw it into their outlook. Many isolated Christian assemblies were endangered by the threat of assimilation into local cult expressions. In the local church at Colossae a foreign element had attempted to infiltrate the thought of the young group. Paul's epistle was an attempt to reestablish what he was convinced was sound teaching. One may gather a good deal of information about this Colossian heresy from the epistle. And yet one may interpret the local problem accurately if it is seen as a local manifestation of an ecumenical situation.
In order to understand the unique religious condition of the age, a historical investigation of the contemporary culture has been undertaken. Only those features which would clarify the local status of the church at Colossae have been considered. Relevance has consequently been the norm for the selection of material for consideration. Clarity and conciseness have determined the degree of consideration. The characteristics which distinguish the apostolic age as Hellenistic have been noted. Prevailing moral and religious attitudes have been elucidated. The specific ideas of theosophy, gnosticism, and the mysteries have been clarified, when such clarification would aid in understanding the difficulty at Colossae. Following the chapter on the general religious situation, the author has undertaken an investigation of the particular problem in the church at Colossae. Throughout the investigation of the contemporary Hellenistic culture and the local heresy, an attempt has been made to capture the prevailing Zeitgeist.

Following the history of contemporary religious expressions and the particular heresy is an investigation of certain crucial terms and ideas. The author has provided a fresh translation of the scripture passages in question to express clearly the original intent of the apostle.¹ In most

¹Much of the dissertation is commentary on the writer's translation from the original Greek. Nevertheless, for sake of clarity, all Biblical citations are from the Revised Standard Version.
cases the central motif of investigation centers around Greek
terms. In other cases an idea may receive attention. In
all cases the integrating principle of interpretation has
been the historical background. It may seem that a good
deal of the epistle has been neglected. Actually the most
important features have been treated in the dissertation.
The concluding chapters, which have not received attention,
represent minute precepts of the Christian διδακτής.
Where the ethic was involved in the heretical controversy,
it did receive attention.

Not only may the Colossian heresy be comprehended in
relation to its cultural milieu, but also the apostle's mind
may be so understood. Paul's expressions and ideas were
reflections of the world in which he moved. He spoke of
knowledge, wisdom, power, mystery, and cosmological elements
in such a way that an investigation of the background of
Paul's thought becomes imperative.

The dissertation represents an examination of crucial
terms and ideas of Colossians in the light of the historical
background of the Hellenistic age.

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1New Testament scholars frequently distinguish the
basic message (κήρυκά) of early Christianity from the
crystallized ethical teaching (διδακτής). The reader is
referred to C. H. Dodd, Gospel and Law (New York: Columbia
University Press, 1951).
CHAPTER I

THE CULTURAL BACKGROUND

The scholarly world is rediscovering the Hellenistic age. For years New Testament Greek was taught as a variation of the classical Attic. Discovery of non-literary papyri led scholars to the conclusion that New Testament Greek was the koivn of the Hellenistic world and not a spiritual transformation of the classical Attic.¹ As late as 1930 an authority on classical Greek culture spoke of Socrates and Paul as being essentially the same type of gadfly and of Aeschylus and Paul as being contemporaries.² It would be as great a mistake to think of the Greek of the New Testament as being Attic as it would to think of Paul as a contemporary of Aeschylus or Sophocles. The world of the New Testament was not Greek in the classical sense. It was the Hellenistic world. The culture was essentially Graeco-Oriental. This can not be overemphasized. When, for example, Paul spoke of a Christian mystery, he did not make analogy to the Eleusinian


mysteries of Periclean Athens but to the mystery cults of his day. Paul's thought and language were those of his contemporaries, and his Greek speaking contemporaries were themselves products of a fusion of Oriental and Greek ideas.¹

What was the Hellenistic age?² It was one of the most interesting periods of man's adventure on this planet. In one sense it was a dangerous transitional period. A time in history "between collectivism and individualism, between a cramping πόλις and a universal state, between a political and a personal-ethical religion, between the religion of nature and that of revelation."³ It was a time of change and upheaval and of striking contrasts. It was an age which produce cosmopolitanism and individualism. It was a popularizing age with general education and a place in society for women. It was an age of experiment and syncretism, when man met the challenge of expanding frontiers.


²The term Hellenistic is to be distinguished from the expression Hellenic. While the latter refers to Greek culture in general, the former refers to Greek history, art, and culture after the time of Alexander the Great. Hellenistic is used in reference to a historical period. The title is given to the peculiar Greek culture from the third century B. C. to the third century A. D.

And yet the Hellenistic age was not an age of natural development. It was rather an attempt to reconstruct the society that had collapsed. That is the cause of its extended duration. The crisis that began in the third century B.C. did not really end until half a millenium had passed. It was no longer a matter of pulling down but of building up. It was necessary to construct "something which should be more appropriate to the needs of the age and humanity." Hence, one may understand the despair and the subsequent religious expressions of the age. No one as yet has expressed this sensitivity as well as Gilbert Murray.

... it is a rise of asceticism, of mysticism, in a sense, of pessimism; a loss of self-confidence, of hope in this life and of faith in normal human effort; a despair of patient inquiry, a cry for infallible revelation; an indifference to the welfare of the state, a conversion of the soul to God. It is an atmosphere in which the aim of the good man is not so much to live justly, to help the society to which he belongs and enjoy the esteem of his fellow creatures; but rather by means of a burning faith, by contempt for the world and its standards, by ecstasy, suffering and martyrdom, to be granted pardon for his unspeakable sins. There is an intensifying of certain spiritual emotions; an increase of sensitiveness, a failure of nerve.

The historical factors which contributed to this situation were the expansion of Macedonia under Philip, the expansion of Helenism under Alexander, and the marriage of

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East and West. Politically, the Hellenistic age was characterized "by a change from the racial exclusiveness of the ἱππόλυς to cosmopolitanism, and from small to large political units." Economically stagnant Hellas was suddenly faced in its expansion with new markets. City-state economy gave place to world economy. Alexander had opened to Greek enterprise a new world, and had set out by divine guidance (or so he thought) to Hellenize the Orient. What Alexander did not realize in promoting East-West relations was that there was a vast sea of human experience and knowledge which would flow from an area of greater pressure to that of lesser pressure. An historic significance of the Hellenistic age is not that Greece Hellenized the Orient, but that a peculiar Graeco-Oriental culture was produced. This was the legacy of Alexander who in 336 B. C. succeeded to the throne of Greece, in 334 B. C. crossed the Hellespont, and in 323 B. C. died with the world at his feet. Unless the significance of this is understood, the origins of gentile Christianity and Western history will not be understood. It is no exaggeration for a historian to say that "in his [Alexander's] brief career he probably did more to shape the future course of Western civilization, up to the nineteenth century, than any other one


2 "Alexander the Great," The Columbia Encyclopedia, 2nd ed.
man except Jesus of Nazareth." Indeed, because Alexander
added an Oriental heritage to the stream of Western thought
he made the legacy of Jesus possible in the Western world.

Hellenistic religion had antecedents in the Greek
background as well as in the Oriental. These expressions
received impetus after 323 B.C. There were mystery religions
in the classical age and cults with orgiastic experiences as
sensual as those of late antiquity. One author suggests that
Orphism paved the way not only for Christianity but for the
Hellenistic cults as well. By awakening the world to a sense
of sin and by promoting the idea of holiness the Orphites
promoted an austere faith. While Dionysian excesses would
lead one to suppose that the Hellenistic cults did not have
an alien origin, the native cult was unique for its time.
From the fifth century B.C. into the Hellenistic era there
was an association of the mysteries of Eleusis and the cult
of Dionysus. Scholarship has glamorized these cults. And
yet one knows little of their activity. Scholars today feel
that ideas of late antiquity have biased the interpretations
of early popular cults. In reality these pre-Hellenistic

1Talmon, op. cit., p. 466.

2S. Angus, The Mystery Religions and Christianity

3Martin P. Nilsson, Greek Popular Religion (New York:
Columbia University Press, 1940), p. 44.
cults are what one would expect to find in the Greek social organization. They are "the highest and finest bloom of Greek popular religion."

The social conditions of late antiquity reflect the attempts at reconstruction. The decline of the προλις and continuous wars brought precarious economic situations. Material resources were exhausted. The people had been taxed heavily, and consequently sought support from a declining institution. There were veterans with adjustment difficulties and widows who were demanding a voice for women. The rural economy had been shattered. Urban economy was not stable. Eastern wealth had only made the upper class wealthier.

There was what one could call a collapse of the middle class. Slaves were increasing in number. In all of this the Olympian religion simply collapsed. It had been associated with the προλις, and with the spirit of Hellas. The προλις had failed as an autonomous unit and Hellas had failed to evangelize the world. The people could turn to the popular religion or to the religious expressions newly arrived from the East. They chose the latter, and popular religion changed accordingly.

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1Ibid., p. 42.

2Ibid., p. 138.

Consequently, Hellenistic morals were, to say the least, confused. In reading a literary product of the age one is not always certain if the work is a piece of pornography or a religious tract.\(^1\) Slavery had brought leisure upon the upper class. The stage was low and amusements sadistic. Divorce was easily obtained and marriage unpopular. Abortion was widespread. Infanticide was common. The characteristic Greek maxim of moderation in all things was as easily applied to vice as to virtue. Paiderastia, the most shocking vice, eventually made male prostitution as common as female.\(^2\) In addition to this a historian includes "the frequency of suicide, stupid public and private extravagance, the audacious indency of the pantomine, the licence of the Floralia with its races of nude courtesans, the naumachiae . . . lewd pictures, and suggestive decorations."\(^3\) Paul's judgment on his world in Romans was not as severe as it could have been.

There was a pleasant side of the ancient society. There were alleviations of slavery as rights of men became motives of conduct. Popular interest had shifted from politics to ethics. There was, to be sure, a protest against widespread vice. There was a development of moral conscious-


\(^{2}\)Angus, *The Environment of Early Christianity*, p. 50.

\(^{3}\)Ibid., p. 51.
ness. The oecumenical spirit promoted a feeling of brotherhood and gave rise to noble and humane efforts. Above all, the idea of brotherhood was cemented by a sense of divine kinship. This made "personal responsibility ... almost a dogma."¹ This religious cosmopolitanism was nevertheless superficial. Greece had gained the world. But in the collapse of the πρὸξις as an autonomous unit it had lost its sense of social integration. It had gained the world and lost its soul.

Consequently, there was a change of religious attitudes and expressions. There was a rise of emotionalism and of the intense personal nature of religious experience. Mysticism became the "last word of Greek Philosophy."² Social relations were secondary to personal experience. Sin was recognized as such. Catharsis and suffering were sought. Prayer and asceticism were combined with inward analysis. There were moral protests against the self-indulgence of the times. And yet the individual could not keep his religion to himself. Ethics was a subject for the agora and the stoa. The philosophical schools, Stoicism, the New Platonic Academy, and Epicureanism, were regarded as

¹Ibid., p. 67.
²Ibid., p. 121.
religions.  

Religion followed the general trend of syncretism. At no place does this become more evident than in Hellenistic ideas of deity. Eclectic attitudes were leading toward a crude monotheism which stressed the goodness and providence of a transcendent deity. Such a god found no difficulty in revealing himself. The goddess Isis was pleased to make herself known to Apuleius as:

... nature, the universal mother, mistress of all the elements, primordial child of time, sovereign of all things spiritual, queen of the dead, queen also of the immortals, the single manifestation of all gods and goddesses that are.

This was an inclination toward monotheism.

Syncretism was not limited to ideas of God. It was an instinctive grasping after the possible help of truth from any and every source. The religious situation may be understood if seen as a syncretism which found various

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1 Albert Trever, in commenting on the impact of Hellenistic Philosophy on the "intellectual, moral, and religious outlook of the Roman people," has said: "Hellenistic philosophy had from the first a strong, popular, practical, and eclectic emphasis... and this emphasis became stronger in its attempt to win the practical and unphilosophical Roman mind. All alike gradually lost their metaphysical character and became more and more systems of ethics and ways of life." The Roman World, Vol. II of History of Ancient Civilization (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1939), p. 150.

2 Apuleius, op. cit., p. 238.
expressions. Two of these are evident; "a theosophical form known as gnosticism and a religious form known as the mysteries."¹

Gnosticism is a flexible term. It is used to include various phenomena. Although a specific heresy of the Christian church has been classified as such, the term has a wider scope. Early appearances of gnostic attitudes led scholars to speak of incipient gnosticism.² Other scholars spoke of pre-Christian gnosticism.³ Today gnosticism is recognized as antedating Christianity. Radical scholars have even suggested the complete dependence of Christianity upon gnosticism.⁴

The Orient had sent the Occident on a religious adventure. The quest for the γνωσίς ὸού which would ensure salvation became the occupation of a religious age. The term gnosticism originated from the Greek word for knowledge (γνωσίς). Gnosticism was an attitude toward knowledge expressing itself in a movement. Hence, it may be explained

⁴Ibid., p. 48.
in terms of the γυμοσ. It was not necessarily a religion or a philosophy. It was an outlook "prevailing mystical, magical, or philosophical according to the dominant admixture of its syncretism."¹ The knowledge in question was not an intellectual pursuit. It was the knowledge: the belief that the acquisition of such would ensure the neophyte of deliverance from the mundane. It was an attitude: the belief that God may be known through revelation and mystical experience. Γυμοσ was cosmological. It was a supernatural gift which would ensure a direct pathway in the mystical ascent of the soul in this life and the next.

The theosophical milieu of Gnosticism was Oriental in origin. Its main sources were Babylonia, Persia, and Egypt. It has recently been suggested that the Hellenistic cults were influenced by a syncretism of these ideas in the region of Phrygia.² The cult of the Phrygian moon-deity would lend itself to astral speculations. The Eastern worship of the Sun and divine reference to the seven planets could find full expression in the pantheon of Hellenistic deities. The first readers of Colossians were inhabitants of the Phrygian plain.


Theosophy is a religio-philosophical garb in which mystic and occult phenomena have consistently disguised themselves. The twentieth century cult is but a rebirth of historic theosophy. It differs in its stress of Buddhistic and Brahmanic elements. The recognition of theosophical elements in the gnosticism of Paul's time will prevent a misconception of mystery-influences. The mystery religions must be understood in the light of the contemporary theosophical cosmography. Oriental ethical dualism was readily accepted in Hellenic circles. Platonic metaphysical dualism had previously found acceptance. Attempts to solve this dualism expressed themselves in "mysteries, occultism, spiritualistic and psychic phenomena, in asceticism, divination, theurgy, which was nothing more than magic making a claim to be religion."¹

The gnostics recognized a cosmic hierarchy. In this earthly realm men were the sport of fate and chance. Above the earth there was a realm of refined substance. The seven planets, deified cosmic powers, ruled this upper sphere. They formed seven astral spheres. Beyond these principalities there was an eighth region. This upper sphere was the home of God. The Ὄγιος, or eighth region, was the reservoir of true freedom and absolute being. It was the ultimate home of all things. The astral sphere of the seven planets existed

as a series of emanations from the realm of this absolute. The realm of the emanations and the absolute was the totality of divinity. It was designated as the πλήρωμα (or fullness). The realm of man was an antithesis to the πλήρωμα. It was the νέωμα (or void). This was undoubtedly a reflection of contemporary dualism. It tended to make the νέωμα the creation of a semi-divine personified emanation. Daemons and inferior spirits inhabited the νέωμα. It was ruled by fate. It was the world of evil.

The gnostics sought relief within the framework of this cosmology. The daemons of the various spheres were either worshipped or pacified. In cult expressions they were sometimes defied. As a created being, man was in the same category as the cosmic powers. They too were created in time. Man was only a little lower than these angels. Hence the Mithraic votary could defiantly repeat his mystical formula: ἐγὼ εἰμί ὁ μῖν οὐκοπλανως ἄστρον.¹ The Orphic could boast that he was the child of earth and heaven, and as such he feared no cosmic power.² Much of the gnostic literature which has survived consists of magical chants. These were to be uttered by the souls to the demiurges in the πλήρωμα. If one possessed the proper γνῶσις, one could ascend to the


²Ibid.
In the Hellenistic mystery cults what would seem death became the ultimate blessing of life. The astral journey awaited one at death. In the meantime there were mystical means to transport one to "the heavenlies." Hence to become initiated into a contemporary cult was to die and be born again. Communion with the divine became possible in the present life. At times this union was accomplished through initiatory rites and sacraments. In the Mithraic and Cybelean cults the taurobolium (bath of bull's blood) was efficacious. In the Hermetic literature there was no magical rite. Revelation produced a desired mystical ascent with little external aid. Despite variation in ritual, the effect was universal. Apuleius' testimony would be typical of all cult experiences.

I approached the very gates of death and set one foot on Proserpine's threshold, yet was permitted to return, rapt through all the elements. At midnight, I saw the sun shining as if it were noon. I entered the presence of the gods of the underworld and the gods of the upper-world, stood near and worshipped them.1

Apuleius was in earnest when he said of his experience: "Well, now you have heard what happened, but I fear you are still none the wiser."² The initiates were sworn to secrecy. A non-initiate would know as little about mystery

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1 Apuleius, op. cit., p. 252.

² Ibid., p. 253.
thought as today a non-initiate would know about Freemasonry. The initiate could not be compelled to disclose his mystery teachings. He was protected by Roman law. Plutarch tells that Andocides and Alcibiades were implicated in a charge of profaning the mysteries.¹ Herodotus spoke of the Egyptian mysteries, yet added with hesitancy, "I know the truth . . . but I will hold my peace."² Because of this clandestineness one must approach the mysteries with reserve. Scholars are aware of the existence of the various mysteries. General characteristics are evident. Religious dogmas and ideas of παρισυνεκότη are not as clear.

Almost every general geographical area of the Hellenistic world produced a distinct mystery cult. The plains of Thrace and Phrygia produced primitive expressions. Thrace was the homeland of Dionysian and Orphic movements. Phrygia produced the Attis-Cybele cult. Attica brought forth the more refined Eleusinian mysteries. The Samothracian mysteries were popular. Josura, the goddess of the Syrians, had a wide following. In the Eastern Mediterranean area the cult of Aphrodite and Adonis (known in Phoenicia as Ashtart and


Eshmun and in Mesopotamia as Ishtar and Tammuz) flourished. Many within the Roman military embraced the cult of Mithra. They were responsible for its growth in the Roman Empire from Persia to Britannia. The cult of Isis and Osirus originated in the Nile Valley. It exhibited characteristics similar to the Persian cults. There were many small cults built around the gods of the classical era. In many isolated regions sects of which there is no knowledge probably flourished and died.

Eclectic tendencies created a confusion of deities and cult rites. There was a tendency toward divine pairs. A mother goddess and a suffering son (or lover) were the background of much contemporary myth. Initiates could belong to several cults. Many cults refused to recognize the initiation of chapters in foreign cities. It was necessary for Apuleius to be reinitiated into the Isis cult after traveling from Corinth to Rome. He did not mind, but even prepared himself for a third initiation. It was apparently a gratifying experience.

The mystery cults were purely individualistic. Various techniques were employed to the end of individual salvation. The sacramental drama, the parade, the initiation with lights and cymbals were evidence of the symbolic character of these techniques. Much light has been shed on the apparatus used by the various cults. However, the symbolic implications of the rituals are not always clear.
The initiation consisted of things viewed, things said and actions performed. In this respect the emphasis was upon attitude and not teaching. The esoteric teachings were developed to give meaning to the mystical experiences.

Paucity of doctrine was matched in many instances with a dearth of moral teaching. Since the experience was the important thing, purity of character was frequently neglected. A contemporary tells of the religious zeal of the priests of the Syrian goddess which was equally matched by sexual perversity.\textsuperscript{1} Apuleius also speaks of a profligate baker's wife whose religious connection actually sanctioned drunkenness and promiscuity.\textsuperscript{2}

Σωτηρία in the mysteries was deliverance from the tyranny of Fate. Fate was omnipotent. It laughed at men's aspirations. It made sport of men's adventures. Death was its most appalling visitation. Aeschylus' statement that "things are as they are; the chain of fate doth bind them"\textsuperscript{3} is echoed in Apuleius: "But no one can prosper however wise he may be, if fortune should rule otherwise: he can never cancel or modify the fate predestined for him by providence."\textsuperscript{4}

Salvation meant freedom from fate and its consequence. It has been said that "the element prized above all others in

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{1}]Apuleius, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 173.
\item[\textsuperscript{2}]Ibid., p. 184.
\item[\textsuperscript{3}]Aeschylus \textit{Agamemnon} 1. 66 f.
\item[\textsuperscript{4}]Apuleius, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 176.
\end{itemize}
σωτηρία is the assurance of a life which death cannot quench.¹

This deliverance implied a complete religious experience. There were underlying ideas of redemption, regeneration, and enlightenment. These became the possession of the initiate by identification with the experience of the god. Hellenistic mythology boasted a score of gods who had conquered death. In the initiation the neophyte relived the experience of his god. Because his deity had experienced victory over fate's most appalling visitation, so also would the initiate.² Hence, the initiation liturgy of Mithra urged the candidate to:

Gaze upon the God . . . and greet him thus: Hail, Lord, ruler of the water . . . potentate of the spirit. Born again, I depart, being exalted: and having been exalted I die: born through that birth which gives life, dissolved into death, I go the way which thou has appointed.³

That was the essence of ἡ ἐγκαταστασις in the mysteries: initiation, communion, revelation, and deification. This assured one of γνωριμία and final deliverance from the theosophical hierarchy.

¹Kennedy, op. cit., p. 199.

²In a pre-taurabolium formula of the Attis cult, the priest called upon the initiate to: "Be of good cheer . . . the god has been saved: thus for you also there shall be salvation from your troubles." Ibid., p. 208.

³Ibid., p. 178.
Despite the universal appeal of the mystery cults, only a few found satisfaction in their fellowship. The majority of the populace tenaciously retained their national religion. The intellectuals fled to the philosophical schools. All classes felt the impact of current theosophical ideas. Astrology represented those theosophical ideas outside of gnosticism and the mysteries. Fate was feared by all. There was a growing sense of pessimism. Despite efforts of the mysteries, religious life was destitute.

This was the general background of Colossians. A problem arises. Was Paul's thought a synthesis of these expressions? Did he follow the eclectic tendencies of the day? Or was his reply to the specific difficulty at Colossae an antithesis of contemporary thought? Perhaps it was unique in being neither or both. There are scholars who would call Paul's religion a "paganism redivivus."1 Christianity has been referred to as one of many mystery religions. Other authorities would seek the origin of Pauline thought in the religion of Jesus. The traditional view of the church has interpreted the cultural background as a Praeparatio Evangelica. Paul himself regarded the appearance of Christ as being in "the fullness of time" (τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου).2 The reader should keep in mind

1Carus, op. cit., p. 129.

2Gal. 4:4.
these varied interpretations. Whatever the degree of dependence or independence, Paul's argument in Colossians was unique. It was a specific answer to a specific problem.

It was expressed in specific terminology.
CHAPTER II

THE COLOSSIAN HERESY

A critical situation existed in the church at Colossae. This was the initial factor in the writing of the epistle. This error has been called a heresy. This is a clumsy word. Originally, the Greek ἁμαρτία meant a self-chosen opinion. In time it came to refer to a school of thought. It is used in the New Testament for a sect or faction.¹ In patristic literature it was first associated with doctrinal divergence. The etymology of the word does not limit its use. The present association with doctrinal error does. Heresy implies heterodoxy. Heterodoxy implies orthodoxy. Orthodoxy implies catholic conceptions and one is at a loss to find such in the church at that time.² It does not appear that the heretics had violated catholic orthodoxy. Paul's refutation is aimed at an error which would promise to lead Christians to a fuller maturity. The errorists preached a ἀγαθὸς ἠλλαθέναι which would lead

¹See, Acts 5:17; 15:5; 24:5; 28:22; I Cor. 11:19; Gal. 5:20; II Pet. 2:1.

²The expression catholic is used in this dissertation to imply universal acceptance. Unless the term is so designated it does not refer to the Roman Catholic Church.
to a τελεσίγνος. Errorists is a more expressive term. Colossians or Colossianism would also be suitable.

Paul's use of the singular would lead one to believe that the party was small. Perhaps there was but one errorist. It may have been that the error existed at Colossae only.

Reference to Laodicea and Hierapolis may have been made because of Onesimus. One has little reason to believe the situation existed beyond Colossae. If it did it was no farther than Laodicea or Hierapolis.

The geographical milieu of Colossae would favour a cult expression within the church. The cult of Cybele originated in Phrygia. The religious environment of Anatolia was complex. Magic was widespread in the part of Asia. Natural phenomena favoured local daemonic superstition. There were many hot mineral springs in the area. One such opening was known as Plutonium. It emitted lethal sulfuretted hydrogen fumes.

Direct references to the error are open to various interpretations. Scholars are not agreed as to the implications of such expressions as philosophy or angel worship.

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1 Cf., 1:28; 2:10; 4:12. All Biblical references without book titles are from Colossians.

2 Cf., Col. 2:8; 16-23; Gal. 1:7; 4:17; 5:12; II Cor. 2:17-3:1.

3 Cf., 2:1; 4:13.

4 Cf., Acts 19:19; Gal. 5:20; II Tim. 3:8.

5 Cf., 2:8, 18.
One may note this about the error. It was presented with subtle rhetoric.\(^1\) Paul considered it a philosophy based upon human tradition and cosmological elements (\(\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma\epsilon\iota\sigma\iota\varsigma\)).\(^2\) The errorists stressed the superiority of a religious life marked by ceremonial observance, asceticism, and mystical experience.\(^3\) Cosmological consciousness had resulted in a worship of elemental spirits (\(\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma\epsilon\iota\sigma\iota\tau\omicron\nu\omicron\omega\omicron\) or angels.\(^4\)

That is the minimum of interpretation. Whether the asceticism was due to Judaistic influences (and whether the Judaistic influences were Essene or Pharisaic) is another problem. Certain conclusions, however, can be made. No matter how many elements constituted the syncretism, the error was essentially one. Even Lightfoot, who would see the error as the result of two concurrent invasions, would emphasize this.\(^5\) The various elements\(^6\) were theosophic speculation, gnostic attitudes toward matter and \(\gamma\nu\nu\omega\varsigma\).\(^7\)

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\(^1\) Cf., 2:4.

\(^2\) Cf., 2:8, 20.

\(^3\) Cf., 2:11, 16, 18, 21-23.

\(^4\) Cf., 2:8, 18.

\(^5\) J. B. Lightfoot, St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon (London: Macmillan and Company, 1904), p. 73.

\(^6\) Cf., 1:19; 2:8, 9, 15.

\(^7\) Cf., 1:9, 10; 2:21.
and religious exclusiveness through mystery initiation. These various elements seemed to find expression in asceticism and religious observances.

Paul had received news of this situation through Epaphras. Because both Paul and Epaphras were hopeful, one may conclude that the error was in a conciliatory stage. Scholars for some time held the heresy to be primitive, undeveloped gnosticism. It was the error that was incipient, not the gnosticism. In an attempt to stay the tide of error, Paul wrote the epistle to the Colossians. His reserve may have been due to this premature condition of error. It may have been that the Colossians were personal strangers.

Paul's task was to make meaningful the work of Christ. To the Colossians this must have a cosmological reference. He must present a Christian antithesis to the pagan νοησίς. The gospel must be compared with the Colossianist's mystery. Above all, Paul's cosmology must be contrasted to the errorists. Particular points of reference must be expounded.

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1 1:24-29.
2 Cf., 1:7, 8; 4:12.
3 1:3-8.
4 Cf., Gal. 1:6-9 with Col. 2:1-5.
5 Cf., 1:8; 2:1.
Finally a new integration must be given to Colossian ethics. Morality does not lie in things, "Do not handle," "Do not taste," "Do not touch." It exists in relation to persons. Those scholars given to much speculation have had an interesting time with Colossae's heresy. F. C. Baur and his disciples orientated all problems of critical introduction to their peculiar theories of apostolic history. Consequently, they interpreted the epistle as a second-century gnostic attack by the Valentinus school upon Ebionism. Baur felt that the idea of reconciliation was not Pauline. This, to Baur, was an obvious reference to the doctrine of the return of emanations. The conception of the church as the bride of Christ was in line with gnostic divine pairs. Later gnosticism developed the idea of pairs of aeons or emanations, male and female, which would return eventually to the οὐδόκουσ. In this sense the πληρωμα which Christ represented was not the totality of deity. It was the totality of aeons.

What Baur did not take into account was the capability of the early church to express itself in speculative terms. Moffatt points out that this was possible at any time after 40 A. D. Although gnostic terms which became popular in

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the second century are used, gnostic ideas are not. Since Paul was a favourite of the Cerinthian and Valentinian schools, late gnostic vocabulary was undoubtedly influenced by the apostle. What one finds in the epistle is a refutation of gnostic theosophy. One does not find a vindication of gnostic ideas. There was no teaching of emanations by Paul. The πλήρωμα, which was pleased to dwell in Christ was that of θεότητας. The Pauline idea of reconciliation was not metaphysical but ethical. The marriage relations between Christ and the church were limited by the idea of subordination. ¹ Paul does not fight fire with fire. Regardless of the degree to which Paul was influenced by gnostic ideas, the epistle to the Colossians was essentially an anti-agnostic polemic.

Baur's ideas of authorship were not accepted. However, scholars retained the attitude that the heresy if not Ebionism was something of Judaistic origin. Peake believed the heresy to be purely Pharisaic. In an attempt to prove his hypothesis he produced a treatise on angelology in the Jewish heritage. ² Zahn worked along similar lines. He thought of the heresy as being purely a cult of asceticism. It was of Judaistic origins, but not similar to the Galatian difficulty. To Zahn, angel worship was the veneration of the

¹1:18.
type of life lived by the angels. In time scholars turned to Hellenistic Judaism. Mystical elements were not Pharisaic. While gnostic features of the heresy were evident, the observance of food, days, and circumcision were too distinctive to overlook. Nevertheless, the first readers were gentiles. The errorists, if Jewish, were either a minority or alien group in the church. There were Jewish settlements in the general area. According to Josephus, Antiochus The Great had transplanted two thousand Jewish families to Lydia and Phrygia. This was in 200 B.C. The number had probably grown. Lightfoot, from a reference in Cicero to confiscated Jewish gold, came to the conclusion that there were eleven thousand adult male Jews in the area. There were also women, children, and slaves. Lightfoot also tells of a Phrygian coin with a motif of an ark and dove with the inscription NWE.

Lightfoot's thesis is significant. He found in the Judaistic cult of the Essenes the origin of Colossianism.

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2 2:10, 16.
4 Josephus Antiquities xii. 3, 4.
There were direct similarities in thought between the errorists and the Essenes. As well as that, there were germinal aspects in Essenism with gnostic potentials. There was a similarity in exclusiveness of knowledge. In both, theological speculation terminated in the origin of evil and a cosmology. Asceticism was a feature of both cults. Lightfoot found no difficulty in the fact that the Essenes were a small communistic sect which discouraged propagation and encouraged monasticism. He quotes Philo as claiming the Essenes were represented in the Diaspora.  

Weiss had arrived at the same conclusions. According to him, asceticism was the result of Colossian theosophy but the Jewish Torah the norm. Hence, the heresy must have been allied to Judaism. Essenism was the most practical solution. To Weiss there was no other conclusion. Holtzman also believed the errorists to be theosophists of the Essene school. Lipsius and Nitzsch looked upon the heresy as a connecting link between Essenism and Cerinthian gnosticism.

Those of the Essene school of interpretation have overlooked a good deal. There is no mention in the Colossian

1 Ibid., pp. 71-111; 347-417.
4 Ibid.
church of the typical Essene features: ablutions, marital abstinence, communism, abolition of slavery, monasticism, initiatory hierarchy, labor of the priest, or of their peculiar jurisdictional procedure.¹ There is no evidence of angel worship in Essenism. It is not known if the Essenes forbade the use of meats or wine. The greatest argument against an Essene cult at Colossae was put forth by Lightfoot himself. "All along its frontier, wherever Judaism became enamoured of and was wedded to Oriental mysticism, the same union could produce substantially the same results."² Lightfoot was right in this statement. The "same results" produced everywhere, however, were not universal Essenism. Instead what was produced was a Hellenistic Judaism. Its influence in the heresy can not be denied. The direct influence of Essenism can.

Abbott,³ Machen,⁴ Conybeare and Howson,⁵ Schaff,⁶


²Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 93.


Farrar,¹ and Moule² regarded the heresy as an incipient gnosticism. These men were correct in claiming a non-Christian origin for gnosticism. Schaff was probably wrong in his belief that the gnostic heresy of the second century had its origin here.³ The mistake in searching for the heresy was as evident in those who held the incipient gnosticism theory as in those who held the Essene. The error defies classification.

Attempts to label the heresy have been futile. Many represent narrow approaches to the subject. The situation at Colossae may only be understood as a whole. It was a Hellenistic attempt at syncretism. Because of this, the error must be understood in the light of the contemporary religious situation. Failure to realize this has given birth to undue speculation. Gnosticism, theosophy, and mystery attitudes were as much a part of the Colossian error as asceticism and angel worship. Terminology and ideas were borrowed from any and every available source. Christianity was utilized as a springboard of religious experience.

The writer would suggest what he feels to be an appropriate designation for the heresy. The cult of the

στοιχεῖα is perhaps the best available term. The gnostic-mystery error found varied expression in a hierarchy of στοιχεῖα.¹ It is an inclusive term, and yet some hesitancy is expressed in selecting it. Designations for the heresy have created exclusive labels. Within this broad classification the errorists expressed themselves widely.

The subsequent history of the Colossian error is unknown. Nevertheless, one may know the religious history of the Colossian area. Paul's letter to Timothy at Ephesus is a rebuke of antinomianism. Studies in Hellenistic morals would indicate that dualism did not always lead to the asceticism which was in existence at Colossae. Licentiousness was as frequent a manifestation.² Consequently, the difficulty at Ephesus may have had an origin similar to the heresy at Colossae. This would indicate widespread dualistic teaching in Asia. In I John 2:22, 23, 4:3 and II John 7 one finds an outgrowth of the docetism hinted at in Col. 1:22. It is very likely that the Epistles of John circulated in Asia with the Apocalypse. In Rev. 3:14 John uses language reminiscent of Col. 1:15-18. It may have been that John's rebuke of Laodicea was partly for their retaining of heretical tendencies. It may have been that the heresy persisted at

¹ Στοιχεῖα is an untranslatable technical expression. To avoid repetition, it is not discussed here but in Chapter III. An acceptable translation would be elemental spirits.

²Apuleius, op. cit., pp. 172-173.
Laodicea. One further development at Laodicea should be mentioned. It may have reference to the error at Colossae.

Around 344 A.D. a council was held at Laodicea. It was a minor council, but from it one learns of concurrent heresy.

Canon Thirty-five: It is not right for Christians to abandon the Church of God and go away and invoke angels.

Canon Thirty-six: It is not right for priests or clergy to be magicians or enchanters or mathematicians or astrologers, or to make safeguards as they are called, for such things are prisons of their souls: and we have enjoined that they which wear them be cast out of the church.

It may be that primitive Phrygian magic, Babylonian astrology, and Jewish piety had persisted in the Colossian era.

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1Lightfoot, op. cit., pp. 65-66. A deliberate play on words was made in Canon Thirty-six which is not evident in translation. The Greek word for the Jewish phylactery was φυλακτήριον. The Greek word for prison was φυλακή. The council condemned the "safeguard" as a "prison" of the soul.
CHAPTER III

AN INVESTIGATION OF CRUCIAL CONCEPTS AND TERMS
IN LIGHT OF THE HELLENISTIC BACKGROUND

The Christian Gnosis

Consequently, we, from the day in which we heard, do not cease praying for you, making petition that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding, to walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, in every good work, bearing fruit and growing by the knowledge of God.¹

A compound variation of the gnostic expression is used here. Paul employs ἐπίγνωσις for the knowledge of his will and the knowledge of God. The prefix ἐπί is of significance. It is used with γνῶσις in I Cor. 13:12 to signify a full and complete knowledge. There it is contrasted to the limited knowledge expressed in γνῶσις. Γνῶσις is used in Rom. 1:21-28 to describe the natural realization of God. For the full acknowledgement of God, ἐπίγνωσις is employed. Trench pointed out the intensification of the compound word.² Lightfoot held that the

¹1:9-10.

intensified compound was used "especially of the knowledge of God and of Christ as being the perfection of knowledge."¹

It is used with reference to Christ and God in Eph. 1:17; 4:13; II Pet. 1:2. It appears with reference to Christ alone in II Pet. 1:8; 2:2. There is another interpretation of ἐπιγνῶσις. Radford and Robinson believe that it is a limitation of γνῶσις.² They would hold the compound to mean knowledge directed toward particular objects. 

Γνῶσις would mean knowledge in the abstract. The former would be a partial recognition of divine truth and the latter a full comprehension. While this theory shows cogency, it is not likely that Paul would limit himself. It was his purpose to make an analogy between a pagan and a Christian γνῶσις. Consequently, Paul's γνῶσις would be an intensified experience. In contrast to the errorist's γνῶσις, it would be a deeper and more intimate knowledge.

To Paul, the knowledge of God's will was in wisdom and understanding. The association of γνῶσις and σοφία occurs elsewhere in Paul. In Rom. 11:33 and Col. 2:3 the two appear. They were associated in the LXX.³ Paul would

¹Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 136.


To advance this theory these scholars contrast 2:3 with 1:9-10. The compound expression occurs many times in Acts. (Acts 3:10; 4:13; 27:39; 28:1).

distinguish the two yet retain the literary association.
Wisdom is beyond knowledge, yet somehow related. Thayer
noted the peculiar association of the pair. "Where γνῶσις
and σοφία are used together the former seems to be knowl-
edge regarded by itself, the latter wisdom as exhibited in
action."¹ Knowledge may be the cause of conceit² but wisdom
could not. Augustine explained this sensitive relationship
by associating wisdom with things eternal and knowledge with
things mundane.³ And yet, Paul would have his readers know
that there was something beyond γνῶσις. Knowledge was an
integral part of the Christian message, but it was knowledge
of His will. And that knowledge was in spiritual wisdom.
That was a blow to the gnostics who would seek γνῶσις as
an end in itself.

The end toward which Paul prayed was not wisdom alone.
It was also spiritual understanding. Σοφία and σύνεσις
occur together in the LXX. To Aristotle they were the two
intellectual virtues.⁴ It may be that Paul found influence
in both sources. Unlike Aristotle, Paul did not hold σύνεσις
to be a partial approach to σοφία. Instead, understanding

¹Joseph H. Thayer, A Greek–English Lexicon of the New
²I Cor. 8:1.
³Augustine De Div. Quaest. ii. 2.
⁴Aristotle Nic. Ethics. i. 13, vi. 7.
was the virtue expressed through a wise personality. The word was limited in scope, but it was not a step in the cultivation of wisdom. Understanding is insight. Wisdom is the orientation of goals to the highest goal. The latter precedes the former. Consequently, in Paul's hierarchy of values one finds knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. These were all values, and yet differing in importance. Paul's concern was not in establishing a psychology but an axiology. Hence, Paul's use of the term spiritual was not in the medieval conception. It was used to distinguish his teaching from that of the errorists. Paul's values were spiritual by virtue of their divine association. The errorists taught a show of wisdom in ascetic observances.¹ This was the "offspring of vanity nurtured by the mind of the flesh."²

The use of gnostic expressions necessitates explanation. Either the vocabulary is a vehicle of gnostic ideas or it is employed to contrast Pauline thought with gnosticism. Paul was convinced that there was a divine wisdom for the mature.³ And yet, this was essentially the teaching of the

¹2:23.
²Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 137.
³I Cor. 2.
heretics. Paul could match their zeal. His desire also was for a full maturity. Whereas the gnostic maturity would be achieved in the γνῶσις Ὑιοθετήσατε, Paul would emphasize a potential, maturity by the γνῶσις Ὑιοθετήσατε. Knowledge of God occurs here in the simple instrumental dative. It is best translated by the knowledge of God. Hence Paul would lay a basis of Christian behavior. The gnostic elements at Colossae would contend that the chief end of life found expression in the knowledge of God. Paul would reply that knowledge was instrumental. Christian growth would be possible by the knowledge of God. More important than knowledge would be spiritual wisdom and understanding. This was the true γνῶσις.

In Hellenistic mystery initiation, apotheosis was frequently associated with γνῶσις. Such an idea was not implied by Paul.\(^1\) Knowledge is neither cold reasoning nor passionate union in the Divine. It is a means of Christian growth. It would foster no cult exclusiveness. It would be desired of all of Christ's followers.\(^2\) Such an interpretation of γνῶσις was a radical departure from contemporary thought. It was a reinterpretation of the pagan idea within the Christian Weltanschauung. Paul was convinced that this

\(^1\)Murray, op. cit., p. 195.

\(^2\)4:12.
attitude did not rest upon a vain deceit. It had more than just an appearance of wisdom. Against the sensual pagan background Paul would call his spiritual. It was an ever enlarging concept. It would grow from spiritual experience to experience and yet be ever satisfying.

The Christian Power

Being strengthened in all dynamic power according to his mighty glory, unto all endurance and long-suffering with joy, giving thanks to the Father who made us competent for the portion of the lot of the saints in light: Who delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transplanted us into the kingdom of the son of His love.

The Hellenistic was associated with certain occult powers. Hence a cult magician priest would invoke his deity by an incantation similar to the following: "I am he to whom . . . thou didst grant the of thy mighty name." A dependence existed between power and knowledge. In time power became an epiphany of the cult deity. The God himself could be a manifestation of the ultimate in power. It was by power that the gnostic initiate became divine. Through the instrumentation of priests the power could be channeled. Occult sciences developed around alchemy and theurgy. Power became mysterious and esoteric. Certain properties were believed to have sympathy with other properties.

This was a mundane application of ideas of astrology. Power in the physical realm was but a reflection of astral power. Power was the adherent quality of the universe. It was sometimes personified in daemons and local spirits. Inhabitants of the earth were the sport of these capricious powers. Some ostracized them. Others included them in the nature of things. The great mass feared them and sought refuge in charms and mystical formulae.

In the New Testament several terms are translated power. The expressive quality of the Greek is evident in terms used for power. Δύναμις has reference to that "power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature."¹ Κράτος has a fuller meaning of force, strength, power or might.² It has been translated "omnipotent action."³ Εξουσία as it is used here refers to authority. Paul's terminology is precise. It is the omnipotent action (Κράτος) of God's glory which would strengthen one in dynamic power (Δύναμις). It is this power that would give divine reference to experience. In a world teeming with a host of evil powers, it is this that would bring joy.

Paul accepted the idea of daemons and authoritative powers within the context of experience. But he was not

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¹Thayer, op. cit., p. 159. ²Ibid., p. 359.
³Radford, op. cit., p. 160.
content to remain the sport of capricious powers. On the contrary, he saw in his faith a deliverance from the powers of darkness. The realm of light was that of the Christian. In a world which feared evil spirits, Paul preached a transcendent religious experience. In this way he could speak of joy and of love. In the epistle he subjected the daemonic authorities to Christ's rule. Paul's reference to the hierarchy of thrones, lordships, magistrates, and authorities as being created by Christ would carry this further. This does appear to be an inconsistency on the part of Paul. He referred to the authorities of darkness in a dualistic sense. Nevertheless, he spoke of these authorities as being created by Christ in time and space. Several possibilities suggest themselves. Paul may have held an ethical dualism. He may have looked upon the cosmos in the light of a metaphysical dualism. At times Paul seemed to deny any dualism at all. It is not likely that Paul advocated a cosmological theodicy such as Origen's. It is more likely that Paul held to an ethical dualism. There were realms of light and darkness but not in a metaphysical sense. Christ had created all things visible and invisible. Therefore, there could be no gnostic division of πλάσμα and κένωμα. Nevertheless

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1:16-17.

Cf., 1:13; 2:15.

1:13-17.
evil's existence could not be denied. Paul did not explain the existence of evil in a monistic universe. It is just here. If Paul seems to be inconsistent, he is. There is a realm of light and a realm of darkness and yet Christ created all things and He is the principle by which everything coheres. But one must realize Paul's situation. His contemporaries thought in terms of authorities. Paul also did. That was not at all out of line with his message. But the errorists also held to an ethical and metaphysical dualism. In this scheme, Christ was reduced to insinificance. Hence Paul taught a monistic universe with this world, if not this world's realm of darkness, potentially good.

To Paul the significance of power was not in a Christian theurgy, but in the conception of deliverance and redemption. The Christian experience is a change of environment. The reference to being taken from one situation to that of another found cogent expression in the word μεθοδομή. The author has translated the expression as "transplanted." Paul may have employed the term to make analogy to the frequent shifting of population from one geographical area to another. Mass population shifts were common under Hellenistic monarchies. As Lightfoot has

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1:12-14.

2:15f.
stated: "He . . . settled us as free colonists and citizens in the kingdom of his Son."\(^1\) These expressions become meaningful when one realizes the situation which necessitated a deliverance. The iron bands of fate are despiriting. A loss of personal freedom is a great loss. It is unfortunate to be under the whims of various spirits. To be the puppet of fate is even more discouraging. Paul’s religion may be described as a protest against "the meaninglessness of events."\(^2\) This revolt was not limited to the powers of this realm but extended to the \(\sigma\tau\omicron\\omicron\iota\omicron\kappa\nu\\omicron\omicron\sigma\iota\) of the upper regions. It is from the total world outlook that deliverance was sought. The apostle’s message has been described well. "Paul maintains that as Christ’s people we have escaped all lower jurisdiction. Christ is above all angels; he has conquered all powers, and since we belong to him we are free."\(^3\)

**Christian Manumission**

"... in whom we have redemption, the remission of sins."\(^4\)

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\(^1\)Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 139.

\(^2\)Nilsson, Greek Piety, p. 114.


\(^4\)1:14.
Freedom in Christ was expressed by redemption. The word was an adequate expression of deliverance. In Luke 1:68 and 2:38 it was used for the liberation of a nation and city. Paul uses the word for the means of justification. It was frequently used in reference to the deliverance from the condition and power of sin. As such, redemption was expiated by Christ's death. One finds a similar expression here. One is not sure, however, of its immediate significance. Redemption was, to be sure, a forgiveness of sins. That would not be relevant, though, to the preceding ideas. Deliverance from daemonic authorities would seem to be expressed. The forgiveness of sins was secondary to this. Hence, redemption was viewed by Paul as being a liberation from mundane powers.

Paul's readers were probably familiar with the expression. Deissmann would trace the idea through the contemporary practice in temple-slave relations. Archaeological inscriptions abound which would lead one to believe that Paul's metaphor was influenced by the customs and technical formulae of sacred manumission in the Hellenistic world. Provision was made in ancient law for the freeing of slaves. One manner in which this could be accomplished

\[1 \text{:} 25.\]

\[2 \text{Adolph Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1927), pp. 319-320.}\]
was through a temple rite. If a slave was to have financial means and religious tendencies, he could arrange with a temple priest for his purchase. The master would then take the slave to the temple and the priest would purchase him on behalf of the god. The slave would then become a free man to the world and yet a slave to the god. The transaction would be concluded by a blood sacrifice as the final price to be paid. Ἀπελυγμός is used by both the cults and Paul. By nature man is a slave. He is a slave to the dreaded powers of the universe. He is a slave to sin, passions, and death. If a Jew, he is a slave to the law. If a gentile, he is a slave of his gods. But in Christ the condition is different. The situation may be compared to that of the slave who has been set free. In the early church there was an idea that the blood of Christ was one part of a divine transaction. Paul, in drawing analogy of Christian freedom with sacred manumission, may have carried over this idea.

The Cosmic Christ

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every created thing or being; because in Him were created all things in the heavens and upon the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones, or lordships, or magistrates, or authorities—all things through Him and unto Him have been created.

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1I Pet. 1:8.
2Cf., Eph. 1:7; I Cor. 6:20.
And He is prior to everything and in Him all things cohere. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the first-born from among the dead; that He, in everything, might be holding the primary place—for in Him was pleased all plenitude to dwell, and by Him to reconcile to Himself all things, having made peace by the blood of His cross, by Him, whether they be things on earth or in the heavens. And you who once were strangers and enemies in mind by evil deeds, even now he has reconciled by His fleshly body through death, to present you before Him, holy, unblameable, and beyond impeachment.¹

This lofty Christology is no speculative outburst. It is an integral part of Paul's argument. Neither does it represent a radical departure from Pauline Christology. A concurrent epistle reflects similar ideas in Christ's relationship to God.² Indeed a germinal aspect may be found in II Cor. 4:4. The relation of Christ to the cosmos has its antecedents as well. In Colossians, Christ is seen as the agent of creation. This had been expressed in I Cor. 1:6. That Christ is the principle of universal cohesion is a logical development. Paul's conception of Christ as the ultimate goal of all things may have been expressed in I Cor. 15:28 and Rom. 11:36. The cosmic Christ proclaimed is in order with the natural evolution of the apostle's thought.

There were circumstances in the Hellenistic world favorable to apotheosis. Rulers and kings of consequence were considered deities. Philosophers recognized the divine

¹Phil. 2:5f. ²Acts 14:8-18.
element in man. Individuals of personal merit and accomplishment were frequently venerated. ¹ This was the cultural milieu in which Paul thought. Yet this was not the impetus in his Christology. He was motivated in his conclusions by the claims of the errorists. The most significant of these false conceptions was that of metaphysical dualism. From this teaching the errorists would develop their ideas of the evil nature of matter and the need of emanations. References to the worship of angelic mediators would lead one to believe that Christ was worshipped as such. To the errorists Christ was an aeon. This would place Christ somewhere in the hierarchy between good and evil. Hence, Paul was faced with two alternatives. He could compromise and secure his Christ a comfortable position in the syncretism of the day. Or, he could express his deepest sentiments on the value of Christ and risk survival. He chose the latter. His message had an immediacy of appeal which was established by its unique quality. It would therefore be fallacious to view Paul's Christology as a product of contemporary cosmology. It stood above it. It salvaged Christianity from the stagnation of gnosticism and gave to it a timeless character. There is not to deny historical influences of other schools, such as Philo, upon his Christology. Nor was Paul's Christology

¹Acts 14:8-18.
the "faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." Paul's Christ was distinct. This was the genius of Paul and his message.

Paul uses startling language. His Christ is ante omnia, etiam tempus, ab aeterno. He is considered in relation to God and to the cosmos. As God's agent in creation He is prior to everything. His pre-eminence extends to physical and moral creation. He is the head of the church as well as the creator and sustainer of the physical universe. These ideas were expressed in the contemporary philosophical vocabulary. In relation to God, Christ was the Εικών. In relation to creation He was the πρωτότοκος. In relation to the universe He was the πλήρωμα. Εικών (image) and πρωτότοκος (first-born) were widely used in Alexandrine thought. Πλήρωμα (plenitude) was essentially a gnostic word. Paul's mystical expressions approach Johannine thought. There is an affinity of idea between Col. 1:15-17 and John 1:3. Although Paul does not employ the expression, his Christology approaches λόγος conceptions. Paul's use of πρωτότοκος is not unlike John's favourite expression ὁ μονογενὴς υἱός.1

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1 Jude 3.


Icon

\( \varepsilon\iota \kappa \omicron \nu \omega \nu \) denotes several things. It is used for likeness, image, resemblance, and revelation of character or virtue. In Matt. 22:20 it is used for an effigy on a coin. The writer of Hebrews employs it as a synonym for character.\(^1\) Paul refers to man as the image of God.\(^2\) This is, however, a reference to man specifically and not generically. The use of \( \dot{\alpha} \nu \nu \nu \rho \omicron \nu \mu \nu \) instead of \( \dot{\alpha} \nu \theta \rho \omicron \pi \mu \nu \sigma \) would limit the idea of man as the image of God to the male.\(^3\) Because Paul implies that man, or probably the husband, is the image of God and the woman, or wife, is not, one may infer that he held image to mean in this case intelligence. Paul would deny to women the greater measure of wisdom and intelligent understanding.\(^4\) There was yet a deeply spiritual association with the term \( \varepsilon\iota \kappa \omicron \nu \omega \nu \). Paul saw immortality as bearing the image of God.\(^5\) This was the ultimate in spiritual attainment and was assured

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\(^1\)Heb. 1:3.

\(^2\)1 Cor. 11:7.

\(^3\)The distinction between \( \dot{\alpha} \nu \nu \nu \rho \omicron \nu \mu \nu \) and \( \dot{\alpha} \nu \theta \rho \omicron \pi \mu \nu \sigma \) in the Greek is similar to the distinction between \( \textit{vir} \) and \( \textit{homo} \) in the Latin.


\(^5\)1 Cor. 15:49.
by divine promise.\textsuperscript{1} In a sense the image of God was a transformation already realized.\textsuperscript{2} And yet it was a process of religious development from one degree of glory to another.\textsuperscript{3}

The use of εἰκῶν in Colossians was that of revelation of divine character. In one sense Christ was the image of God in potentiality. In a greater sense He was the image of God in representation. "It is the nature of Christ as the image of God to radiate the divine glory for men to see."\textsuperscript{4} This was closer to the Fourth gospel than to Nicene orthodoxy. It was not a matter of metaphysic (as was the idea of the πληρωμα) but of epistemology. The truth which Paul would proclaim was that which John was later to echo: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known."\textsuperscript{5}

The term εἰκῶν appears in the LXX in the early sections of Genesis.\textsuperscript{6} These anthropomorphisms of the priestly writer provide the background of the personal God of Hebrew thought. He is always anthropopsychic and anthropopopathic.\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{1}Rom. 8:29. \textsuperscript{2}3:10.

\textsuperscript{3}II Cor. 3:18. \textsuperscript{4}McCasland, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 87.

\textsuperscript{5}John 1:18.

\textsuperscript{6}Cf., Gen. 1:26; 9:6; 5:1; 5:3.

Man and God were somewhat alike. During the intertestamental period there was a radical development in Jewish literature about the image of God. In Sir. 17:1-3 and Wisd. of Sol. 2:23 there is in \( \text{εἰκὼν} \) an association of the attribute and being of God. In Wisd. of Sol. 7:26 the personification of Wisdom is seen as the image of God.

For she is a breath of the power of God, and a clear effluence of the glory of the Almighty. Therefore can nothing defiled find entrance into her. For she is an effluence from everlasting light, and an unspotted mirror of the working of God, and an image of His goodness.

Philo was influenced here. To him, the \( \text{λόγος} \) was the image of God. It was as well "the seal with which God has stamped His image upon the personality of man."\(^1\) It is reasonable to assume that Paul was influenced by both the Apocryphal Wisdom literature and Philo. Christ was to Paul as Wisdom was to the writer of the Wisdom of Solomon. He was the image of God, as was Philo's \( \text{λόγος} \). Origen took up where Philo left off. The Alexandrine Christian understood \( \text{εἰκὼν} \) to mean resemblance in all respects.\(^2\) Christ was likened to God as a child's resemblance to its father. Some ante-Nicene writers came to the conclusion that the image was invisible as was God. On the contrary, the image is contrasted to God in this respect.

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\(^1\)McCasland, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 93.

\(^2\)Origen \textit{De Principiis} 1. 2.
Christ was anticipated in pre-Christian thought as Wisdom and Word. But his significance was in the historical fact that the "Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The Εἰκόν of God was no metaphysical abstraction. It was a historical fact. Hence Christ could affect man's reconciliation to God. It was in His fleshly body through death that he could present man to God.\(^1\)

**Prototokos**

The expression πρωτότοκος also had an Alexandrine heritage. Philo used the word because it was an excellent description of the archetypal idea which existed prior to and outside of the material world. The λόγος to Philo was the first-born of all creation. Paul's idea was an advancement of this conception. Alexandrine philosophy and Hebrew messianic conceptions met in the idea of πρωτότοκος. The Messiah was to be "the first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth."\(^2\) This may very likely be why Paul does not use the expression λόγος. Christ was a sufficient term in the Messianic context of thought. There is a curious use of the term λόγος in Colossians.\(^3\) There Paul refers to the word of God, which was the mystery hidden for ages, which was Christ. Since Paul does not use λόγος

\(^1\)1:22.\(^2\)1:24-29.\(^3\)Heb. 1:1-9.
as John, it would seem that he felt Christ to be a more adequate expression. In a definite Jewish tone the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews echoes Paul's ideas and uses the expression \( \pi\nu\sigma\tau\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\sigma\nu\) in reference to the Messiah.\(^1\)

There is a potency to the expression first-born of all creation. It is seemingly prior to all things. That is why the references to Christ's pre-eminence logically follow. While reference to priority is indisputable, reference to the eternalness of Christ is not. Even the trinitarian theologians in the Arian controversy retreated at this passage. Though they insisted that Christ was \( \pi\nu\sigma\tau\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\sigma\nu\) and not \( \pi\nu\sigma\tau\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\nu\omicron\sigma\omicron\nu\) they were driven to admit the passage was a reference not to the eternal Christ but to the pre-existent Christ. The first-born of all creation could easily refer to the first of many created things or beings. His pre-eminence seems, however, to lie in a cosmological reference. He is not only before all things, but in Him all things hold together. Paul's Christ was in the tradition of the \( \lambda\omicron\omicron\omicron\sigma\). As such He was "in the beginning" and pre-existent. Whether Jesus was "very God of very God, begotten not made, [and] . . . of one substance with the Father" was not even considered by Paul.\(^2\)

\(^1\)Radford, op. cit., pp. 174-175.

\(^2\)This is a selection from the Nicene creed. Schaff, op. cit., p. 699.
Christ was seen as the source, the agent, and the ultimate goal of the universe. His priority extended beyond the physical to the spiritual realm. The hierarchy of thrones, lordships, magistrates, and authorities was a reflection of current theosophy. That these powers existed was irrelevant. What was important was that every element of the universe existed in behalf of Christ. Christ, to Paul, was no mere man. Christ was the one who:

God has highly exalted . . . and bestowed . . . the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."¹

Paul's use of this expression was precisely that of his contemporaries. It referred to the plenitude of divine attributes. The πληρώματα was the totality, expression, and embodiment of those powers which constitute the divine complement. Paul and the errorists differed on the nature of the πληρώματα. The errorists felt that divinity resided in a series of emanations. These were the true reality. The πληρώματα was diluted but it was quite distinct from the Κένωμα which was the void. There is no dispute of Paul's use of the term. The plenitude of deity resides totally in Christ.² Two inferences would follow from Paul's πληρώματα.

Since this plenitude dwelt in Christ bodily, there could be no conception of the evil nature of matter, and, if Christ was the plenitude of divine attribute, He alone would be worthy of worship. Hence Paul would have a basis for rebuking asceticism and the worship of cosmic mediators.¹ The basis of ethical behavior would receive a complete reorientation, for, if in all things Christ was to have pre-eminence, all things would be done as unto Him.²

The πληρωμα could not remain a metaphysical presupposition. Not only was all fullness of deity in Christ, but in Christ one may find fullness of life.³ For it was the purpose of Christ to reconcile everything unto Himself. There was a dual aspect to this. It was not only atonement for human sins but the reunion of the disintegrated universe in Christ. One is not sure of the scope of this reconciliation. Origen felt that it should include the Devil and his angels. Alford and Meyer held the idea to pertain to animals and physical entities as well as living creatures.⁴ Abbott points out that reconciliation implies enmity. Since this could only exist in rational creatures reconciliation would be unnecessary beyond this realm.⁵ What Paul proclaimed was


³2:9.

⁴Abbott, op. cit., pp. 221-224.

⁵Ibid.
the superiority of Christ. He was not advocating a theodicy. He was not writing proof-texts for theological works. He was insisting on a Christocentric universe. Consequently he adopted current ideas concerning spirits of evil and a hierarchy of powers. The relation of these powers to Christ was that of subordination. They were vestiges of a discarded cosmology. Paul did not deny the existence of these daemonic authorities. But he claimed that Christ had stripped them of power. 1 This was the completion of Paul's ideas of reconciliation begun in I Cor. 2:6-8 and 15:24-28. In the first of these the decline of the powers of the world was mysteriously associated with the cross. In I Cor. 15 Paul developed an eschatology which is essentially the basis of the Colossian text. What Paul anticipated would be a time when God would be "everything to everyone." 2

Reconciliation was not limited to the far distant future. Christians had already experienced a reconciliation of mind. 3 As far as humanity was concerned it was operative immediately. This experience occurred in many individuals. These individuals constituted the church. The church was one body. As Christ was the center of the universe, He was the head of the body. The church was one, with both head and

1 I Cor. 12:15. 
2 I Cor. 15:28. 
3 1:21-22.
body. Consequently the experience of reconciliation in the church was one experience. Christ was the fullness of God. The church was the body of Christ. Consequently, as Christ was the fullness of God, the church was the fullness of Christ. This was implied in 2:9, 10. In Ephesians one finds the actual statement that the church is the Κοινωνία of Christ.¹

The Christian Mystery

Now I am rejoicing in my sufferings for you and I am filling up that which is lacking of the tribulations of Christ in my flesh for his body, which is the church. Of this I became a slave according to the stewardship of God which to me was given on your behalf to complete the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from infinity, but now manifested to his saints. It was to them that God did will to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the gentiles—which is Christ in you the hope of glory. Him we proclaim admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, in order that we may present every man fully mature in Christ. Unto this also I labor agonizing according to the working which he works mightily in me.

For I wish you to know of the great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding unto the knowledge of the mystery of God, of Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden.²

The mystery atmosphere pervades this passage of Paul. Technical words are used (ἐπίγνωσις, μυστήριον, τέλειος). The readers were without a doubt disposed to

¹1:23. ²1:24-2:3.
thinking along such lines. And yet there was a distinction of idea and terminology. Greek, according to one authority, lacked a fixed vocabulary. Words were flexible. Paul uses γνῶσις in I Cor. 12:8 as one of many diverse gifts. Even the expression πληρωμα, which the writer has had occasion to note, occurs with many meanings in the New Testament. 1 Every missionary is obliged to use the word-tools at hand in a new community. Paul utilized every effective vehicle for Christian truth. Frequently, as in the case of the expression μυστήριον, an intentional paradox is implied.

Paul was not afraid of the word μυστήριον. It carried with it the connotation of a secret either hidden or revealed. Paul was desirous of establishing a basis of understanding with those who had been deluded with "beguiling speech." 2 There were, apparently, features of the contemporary mysteries worth retaining. As far as the apostle Paul was concerned there were elements in the esoteric teachings which were not entirely useless. The idea of a closely knit fellowship would be retained. 3 The idea of exclusiveness would be discarded for a universal concern. 4 Reconciliation would be reinterpreted. A Christocentric cosmos would replace a series of emanations.

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1Cf., I Cor. 10:26, 28; Rom. 11:25; 13:10; Gal. 4:4.
32:2.
41:28.
Moral reorientation and eventual Christian triumph would replace the return of emanations. The Christian mystery would have an ethic. It would not be unto the suppression of the flesh, but unto Christ.\textsuperscript{1} Even such a crude rite as the \textit{taurobolium}\textsuperscript{2} was not to be ignored. An analogy was drawn in the "blood of the cross," although the reference was casual with little pagan similarity.\textsuperscript{3} Both Paul and the mysteries had a wisdom for the wise. Both desired their followers to possess the knowledge of God as well as wisdom and understanding.\textsuperscript{4}

The word \textit{μυστήριον} was used many times by Paul. In Rom. 11:25 it appears with the same connotation as it has here. In the synoptics\textsuperscript{5} it is a divine secret. In I Cor. 15:51 the \textit{Parousia} is referred to as a mystery. In the light of I Cor. 13:2 it may be concluded that Paul considered this mystery a personal revelation. Paul felt his ministry to be a revelation of that which God had ordained from eternity.\textsuperscript{6} That mystery which absorbed Paul above all others was that which was "now disclosed [and] \textsuperscript{13:17.}

\textsuperscript{2}The \textit{taurobolium} was an initiatory rite practiced by the \textit{Magna Mater} cult of Phrygia. It was adopted by other Hellenistic sects as well. It consisted of a baptism in the blood of a bull.

\textsuperscript{3}I Cor. 1:20.  \textsuperscript{4}Cf., 1:9-10; 2:2-3.


\textsuperscript{6}Cf., I Cor. 2:7; Rom. 16:25.
made known to all nations."\(^1\) The one secret purpose which overshadowed all others was the inclusion of the gentiles in the household of faith.\(^2\) This is the mystery of God: "Christ in you [gentiles]."\(^3\) For this Paul strove with all the energy in him.\(^4\) This was why he was imprisoned.\(^5\) There is no question about this fact in Ephesians.\(^6\) It illustrates Paul's teaching in Colossians. The difference of emphasis is due to the lofty doctrine of the church in Ephesians. The distinctiveness of the church was that "the gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."\(^7\) This is the mystery of Christ. In Colossians it is not used to promote a doctrine of the church. It is used to combat a gnostic–mystery exclusiveness.

It was in this sense that the term mystery was a paradox. It had been a divine secret, but it was not revealed. The errorists had obviously promoted an esoteric teaching with the mystery confined to a narrow circle. Whereas among the Jews Paul had to contend with national exclusiveness, the difficulty now centered around intellectual

\(^1\)Rom. 16:26. \(^2\)Cf., 1:27; Eph. 2:19; 2:11–14. 
\(^3\)1:28. \(^4\)1:29. \(^5\)4:3. 
\(^6\)Cf., Eph. 1:9, 10; 3:1–6, 9. 
\(^7\)Eph. 3:6.
exclusiveness. Paul responded with the universal plea of Christianity.\(^1\) The gospel was proclaimed to every man. Every man was warned. Every man was taught in all wisdom that every man may be presented fully mature. The most stinging rebuke lies in the use of the word mature \((\tau\varepsilon\lambda\iota\omicron\varsigma)\). It was the word used in the mysteries for the condition of full initiation. The initiate had represented the most exclusive position in gnosticism. He had received the \(\gamma\nu\omega\omicron\varsigma\). Paul would contend that religious maturity was for all. Hence, one should recognize no hierarchy of spiritual personalities. Nor was there to be distinction in secular station, for Christ was "all and in all."\(^2\) Because of this universality Christianity became of world importance. The mystery cult of the Colossian errorists dwindled to insignificance in its provincial narrowness.

The Cult of The Stoicheia

You see to it that no one gets a hold of you through theosophy and empty deceit, by way of tradition of men, according to the elemental spirits of the cosmos, and not according to Christ. For in him, in his body, dwells all the plenitude of deity, and in him you are complete, for he is the head of all rulers and authoritative powers. In him also you were circumcised, not in the removing of flesh from the body, but in circumcision not made by hands, the circumcision of Christ; and, having been buried with him in baptism, you were raised with him through faith of the working of God who raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in the offenses and uncircumcision of your

\(^1\)Cf., 1:24-29; 2:1-3; 4:3.

\(^2\)3:11.
flesh, he made alive with him, having blotted out the handwriting in the decrees which were against us, taking it out of our midst and nailing it to the cross, having stripped the rulers and authorities he made public show of them, triumphing over them in it.1

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in regard to meat and drink, or in respect of feast or new moon or sabbaths, these are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance is of Christ. Let no one defraud you by insisting on false humility and worship of cosmic mediators, trusting in visions, inflated by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast the head from whom all the body, through the joints and ligaments, is nourished and knit together and grows with the growth of God. If you, with Christ, died to the elemental spirits of the cosmos why, as if alive in the world, are you decree-ridden. You may not handle, you may not taste, you may not touch. These are things subject to corruption in the using; things according to the injunctions, and teachings of men. These, indeed, have an appearance of wisdom in volitional worship and humility and severe treatment of the body, but they are of no value in the satisfaction of the flesh.2

If, therefore, you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right-hand of God. You mind the things above, not the things on earth. For you died, and your life has been hid with Christ in God. When Christ, our life, appears, then also you will appear with him in glory.3

The general tone of the apostle is altered from this passage to the conclusions. Somewhat of a literary climax had occurred in the previous passage.4 Paul had expressed the positive aspects of his gospel. He then stated the reason for his epistle and treatise. It was given that the

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12:8-15.  
2:16-23.  
Colossians might not be led into error by "beguiling speech." With this he exhorted his readers to be firmly rooted and established in the faith. He then turned upon those individuals who would threaten such a development. Paul warned of three expressions of one error. The error was a philosophy which was actually a theosophy. It was based upon a human tradition. Its metaphysical presupposition was the hierarchy of cosmic elements known as the στοιχεῖα. Because of this, φιλοσοφία has been translated theosophy. References to cosmic mediators and the use of στοιχεῖα point to the existence of a theosophical cult at Colossae.

Paul makes it plain that the false teachers are advocating doctrine contradictory to that revealed to him. The tradition of men is not a condemnation of the authority of reason. It is a rebuke of that particular tradition based on the στοιχεῖα of the universe. It is an antithesis to what was revealed through him. Paul uses the expression tradition (παράδοσις) in reference to what he had received and delivered. The teaching of the heretics was not a legitimate παράδοσις.

Στοιχεῖα was derived from a root word meaning row, rank, or series. Hence στοιχεῖα meant originally "any

1 Cf. 2:4.
2 Cf., 1 Cor. 7:10, 25; 9:14; 11:2, 23; I Thess. 4:15.
first thing, from which others belonging to some series or composite whole take their rise; an element, first principle.\textsuperscript{1} It specifically had reference to (1) the letters of the alphabet, (2) the physical elements, (3) the heavenly bodies, and (4) the rudiments of any art, science, or religion. In the latter sense it referred to the basic ceremonial observances of Judaism.\textsuperscript{2} The word occurs in Galatians with this meaning.\textsuperscript{3} There is no reason to assume the same meaning for its use in Colossians. Lightfoot held that \textit{στοιχεῖα} belonged to the classification of material things. It was a reference, supposedly, to the rudimentary instructions of Judaism. He based this conclusion on the context of tradition (and of learning) and on references in Galatians. Abbott adopted the same view. He held that the Colossian \textit{στοιχεῖα} referred to the "A. B. C. of religious instruction."\textsuperscript{4} However, he noted another theory that was equally cogent. The word sometimes referred to personal elemental spirits. These were sometimes, even in Judaism, associated with angels and stars. Abbott also felt the idea of

\begin{enumerate}
\item[{\textsuperscript{1}}}]{Thayer, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 589.}
\item[{\textsuperscript{2}}}]{Ibid.}
\item[{\textsuperscript{3}}}]{Gal. 4:3, 9.}
\item[{\textsuperscript{4}}}]{Abbott, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 247.}
\end{enumerate}
στοιχεῖα as instruction to be inconsistent with the context of days and seasons.\(^1\)

It may even be that the στοιχεῖα referred to in Galatians was originally associated with astral phenomena.\(^2\) Thayer mentions an astral association in the Judaistic στοιχεῖα in the origin of sacred seasons.\(^3\) There is, however, a difference in the στοιχεῖα of Galatians and that of Colossians. In Galatians it is associated with Judaism, in Colossians with Hellenistic theosophy. In the latter context, planets and stars were regarded as the home of spiritual beings. They animated them and, under the influence of astrology, mysteriously influenced the situation of earth. Hence the planets and astral spirits were feared or worshipped. The term στοιχεῖα was applied to these spirits and soon was applied to all daemons. The association of the rudiments and the planets is well explained by Murray.

But behold a mystery! The word στοιχεῖα had long been used for the Greek A. B. C., and in particular for the seven vowels δενείων. That is no chance, no mere coincidence. The vowels are the mystic signs of the planets; they have control over the planets. Hence strange prayers and magic formulae innumerable . . . . In all the religious systems of later antiquity, if I mistake not, the seven planets play some lordly or terrifying part.\(^4\)

\(^1\) Cf., 2:16; Gal. 4:10.


\(^3\) Thayer, op. cit., p. 589. \(^4\) Murray, op. cit., pp. 175-179.
It is very likely that through Judaistic influence these spirits were associated with angels. They would easily lend themselves to a hierarchy, since there were archangels in the Old Testament. A few Hellenistic Judaistic sects may well have introduced angel worship to the gentile world. Since the heavens controlled men's destinies, the planets (personified as angels) would be regarded with awe. In many gnostic cults there were spirits for each of the seven planetary spheres. In the mystical ascent of the initiate there were magical passwords to give to each of the spirits that guarded the planets.\(^1\) If the journey awaited one at death, the planetary spirits should be worshipped now. That these elemental spirits were associated with angels and that they were worshipped seem evident from an inscription discovered at Miletus.

The archaeological discovery was a tablet with the following design. There was a row of five symbols, a row of thirty-seven vowels, a row of five and one-half ovals with inscriptions within, and one final line at the bottom. There were originally seven occult symbols. The row of thirty-seven vowels probably contained fourteen more. There were, no doubt, seven ovals originally. Each inscription within the ovals began with the series of seven vowels arranged in alphabetical permutation. The central motif of

\(^1\)Nilsson, Greek Piety, p. 113.
the oval inscription was a prayer.

O Holy One
Keep
The city
Of the Milesians
And all
That dwell therein

The concluding line read:

Archangels, keep the city of the Milesians
And all that dwell therein.

Deissmann recognized an association of archangels and heavenly bodies among the ancients. He did not, however, make an association of such here. Because planets were associated with the elemental vowels, it is very likely that the seven ovals are representative of the seven planets. There is other evidence that archangels were given mystical vowel associations. A papyrus in the British Museum dating from the fourth century lists seven occult formulae with the seven archangels. The names consist only of vowels, and are arranged alphabetically according to the στροφέζημα of the seven planets.

1. ἀναμανά
2. ἀναμανδα
3. ἀναμαναθαν
4. ἀναμανάθανα
5. ἀναμανάθανα
6. ἀναμανάθανα
7. ίχθυνα

1Deissmann, op. cit., pp. 453-455. 2Ibid. 3Papyrus 124. Ibid., p. 456.
The Hellenistic dualism, of which angel worship was one manifestation, produced a rigid asceticism as well. One religious critic of the time expressed disdain at extreme expressions: "A strange notion, this, that divine immanency instead of doing men good, enfeebles or disorders their senses."¹ Most expressions were not pleasant austerities. They were rigorous self-denials and self-punishment. Flagellation was common among priests.² Those of the laity followed trite observations of food and dress. A strange notion! And yet the logical ethical pattern in a cosmology which recognized matter as evil. Asceticism at Colossae expressed itself in regulation of foods and drink and a host of minute observances. The ascetic tendency is not surprising but the particular norm for ascetic behavior is. It was essentially Jewish. Hebrew regulations as to days, seasons, and tabu were advocated as well as the insistence on circumcision.³ However, this was not at all unusual in an eclectic culture which took religious features from every available source.

Paul's reply to the Colossian dualism as it was expressed in both angel worship and asceticism, can be summed up in one phrase: "For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily, and you are come to fulness of life in him."⁴

This monism abolished the authority of cosmic elements and established in Christ the sole object of faith. It established as well the fullness of the individual. He was complete. He had experienced, mystically, the vicissitudes of the Christ. He had been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him as well. It is this personal identification that is essential in Paul. As the believer had been buried with Christ, so should he count himself dead to the authority of the mundane. As he had been raised with Christ, so should he seek the things that are above. Paul pictured the attempts at justification under the law as a bond which stood against mankind. The debt was great, but it was set aside and nailed to a cross. In this way the astral rulers and authoritative powers were triumphed over and made an open show. Consequently, the errorists had no truth to proclaim. The minute legal observances were nailed to the cross and the elemental spirits mocked in the event. It is a paradox that the cross which had been a tragedy had become a triumph. Christ had been obedient unto death, and God had also highly exalted Him and given Him a name above every name.  

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1 Cf., 3:1-5; Rom. 6.  2 2:14.
3 Phil. 2:5.
CHAPTER IV

THE FULLNESS OF TIME

Paul's reply to the errorists was specific. His familiarity with similar Hellenistic cult expressions was such that he could intelligently evaluate Christianity in the contemporary Weltanschauung. As far as Paul was concerned there was a Christian \( \psi_{\nu} \omega_{\omega} \omega_{\omega} \), a Christian \( \mu_{\nu} \sigma_{\sigma} \rho_{\rho} \rho_{\rho} \), and a Christian cosmology. There was a distinction, however, between the errorists' teachings and the apostle's. These distinctions have been considered. The problem that yet remains is the originality of Paul's thought in this epistle. Were Paul's ideas a reinterpretation of the errorists'? Were they a synthesis of contemporary thought? Or were they an antithesis to the errorists' teachings and contemporary theological speculation? Did dependence on terminology necessitate dependence on ideas? Or did a common terminology provide an adequate basis of understanding?

In some respects Paul's Christianity approached a synthesis of contemporary thought. In a greater sense Paul's Christianity was an antithesis to contemporary ideas; particularly those of the errorists.
Paul's thought reflected his intellectual background. It was Paul's claim that his teaching was that which had been delivered to him. And yet he was a true mystic. He believed himself the recipient of divine revelation. Nevertheless, Paul unconsciously attributed to revelation some elements of his teaching derived from Christian tradition. It may be argued that he as easily received contemporary thought. Like the errorists, Paul's Christianity was not so much the religion of Christ as it was a religion about Christ. One authority who has emphasized entire Hellenistic dependence in Pauline thought has quoted Augustine as saying: "The very thing which is now called the Christian religion existed among the ancients." In quoting Augustine, Carus would advocate a theory once popular but today widely discredited. He claimed the traditional features of Christianity to be of Pauline origin. Consequently, he could find in Jesus' religion nothing which was traditionally Christian. It is evident, however, that the basic message and teaching of Paul followed to a large degree the and the of the early church. Paul's teachings were as

\[\text{Cf., 1:26; I Cor. 2:7, 10; Gal. 2:1; Eph. 1:9.}\]

\[\text{Carus, op. cit., p. 20.}\]

typically Christian as Christ's. Nevertheless, the Christology of Col. 1:15f was a radical development beyond anything found in the synoptics.

And yet there was something which made Paul's teaching an antithesis to, and not a synthesis of, contemporary thought. That was the contrast between Paul's Christ and the Hellenistic saviour-gods. The Christ of Col. 1:15f was not God (or a god). Paul did not refer to Him as such. For Paul there was one God. Christ had been, to be sure, in the form of God. He had emptied Himself of certain divine prerogatives. There is, however, nothing in Paul's Christ that approached the Hellenistic apotheosis. Then, too, the theosophical attitude, such as one finds at Colossae, was rejected by Paul. This attitude regarded Christ as nothing more than one of many emanations. In rejecting this Christology, Paul did not make the error of accepting contemporary ideas of saviour-gods.

Paul's terminology was a deliberate attempt to establish a common ground of understanding. In both his theological and cosmological considerations, Paul expanded and at

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1 Cf., I Cor. 9:4 and Matt. 10:10; Rom. 12:4 and Matt. 5:11, 43, 44; Rom. 13:7 and Matt. 22:21; Rom. 14 and Mark 7; Rom. 2:1 and Matt. 7:1; I Cor. 11:1; I Thess. 1:6; II Cor. 10:1; 8:9; Phil. 2:5-8.

2 I Cor. 8:6.

3 Phil. 2:5.

4 Phil. 2:7.
times transcended the technical terminology he employed. The vocabulary was retained often in irony.

Indeed, there is little agreement among scholars on the interaction of pagan and Christian ideas and terminology in early Christianity. There was, of course, no direct borrowing of mystery ideas such as one finds at Colossae in Pauline thought. Open hostility existed between Christianity and the cults. Goodenough and Hyde concluded that even technical expressions were taken from the general Hellenistic milieu. Consequently, there was a general pooling of religious ideas and terms. In such a situation it would be impossible to note specific instances of contrast or assimilation. This was no doubt true of Christian thought in the subapostolic age. Harnack believed the greatest influx of Greek thought to have come after 130 A.D. It was likely that a distinction of ideas and terminology was definitely made in Colossians.

Paul's epistle to the Colossians illustrates an earlier Pauline statement. "When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son." Eusebius coined an expression that

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3Gal. 4:4.
was been applied to the Hellenistic cultural background of Christianity. He called it a Praeparatio Evangelica.\(^1\)

Indeed it was, but not as the patristic writers had assumed. They looked upon the pagan world as totally destitute. The Hellenistic world was a Praeparatio Evangelica because it was conditioned for the truth of the evangel. As one critic has said: "Christianity did not wake into being the religious sense, but it afforded that sense the fullest opportunity of being satisfied."\(^2\)

Perhaps Paul realized this fact in writing to the Colossians. He handled delicately a difficult subject. His tender affection was displayed toward the sincerity of the Colossians.\(^3\) The atmosphere of Rom. 8:22 pervades the epistle. The whole creation had been "groaning in travail" until the present time, when the mystery of God had been revealed.\(^4\)

That Christianity answered the demands of the age is evident in its survival.\(^5\) One of these demands was

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\(^1\)Willoughby, op. cit., pp. 1-3.


\(^3\)1:3-8.

\(^4\)1:26.

\(^5\)Walker, op. cit., p. 11.
There was a demand for a catholic faith. Perhaps the reason for this was that "there has probably been no time in the history of mankind when all classes were more given up to thoughts of religion or when they strayed more fervently after high ethical ideals." Christianity met this universal demand in the idea of the church. But the most appealing feature of the church was the personality around which it centered.

The Christ of Colossians was more than Paul's answer to a particular heresy within the church. Christ was the reply to the universal question of Seneca. "Ubi enim istum invenies quem tot saeculis quae rumus?"

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2Willoughby, op. cit., p. 3. 3Col. 1:18.

4"Where shall he be found whom we have been seeking for so many centuries." Angus, The Environment of Early Christianity, p. 226.

Asenathur, Asenathur.


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