

Colossian Problems  
Part 2:

**The "Christ Hymn"  
of Colossians 1:15-20**

F. F. Bruce

Perhaps in Paul's mind there was not the same measure of urgency in the theological situation of the Colossian church as there had been some years before in that of the Galatian churches. At any rate, in Colossians he does not launch an attack on the false teaching immediately after the prescript, as he does in Galatians. The fact that the church of Colossae had not been directly planted by him, as the churches of Galatia had been, and that he was personally unacquainted with most of its members may also have something to do with his procedure. However that may be, before he undertakes a refutation of the false teaching which was being urged on the Colossian Christians, he presents them with a positive statement of the truth which was being challenged by the false teaching.

Hengel has recently drawn attention to the important part that hymns or Spirit-inspired songs played in formulating the doctrine of Christ in the primitive church, even before the start of the Pauline mission.<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of Christ was the principal truth threatened by the false teaching at Colossae, and this is the doctrine Paul presents to his readers before dealing specifically with the false teaching. His presentation of the doctrine of Christ takes the form of the "Christ hymn" in Colossians 1:15-20.

Do these six verses really contain a hymn? Certainly one cannot recognize here the established forms of either Hebrew or Greek poetry. What is here is rhythmical prose, but it is rhythmical prose with a strophic arrangement such as is found in

much early Christian hymnody. As with the "Christ hymn" in Philippians 2:6-11, it is not of the first importance to decide whether Paul is composing the words *de novo* or reproducing an inspired composition already known to him (and possibly to his readers) and stamping it with his apostolic authority.

The strophic arrangement is indicated by the repetition of key words or phrases. There appear to be two strophes — verses 15-16 and verses 18b-20 — with verses 17-18a supplying a transitional link between them. Each strophe begins with ὅς ἐστιν ("He who is") and exhibits the key words πρωτότοκος ("first-born"), ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ("because in Him"), δι' αὐτοῦ ("through Him"), τὰ πάντα ("all things"). The first and last clauses of the transitional link begin with καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ("He indeed is"), the first summing up the preceding strophe and the last introducing the following strophe.<sup>2</sup>

### The First Strophe (1:15-16)

He who is the image of the invisible God,  
 Firstborn before all creation,  
 because in Him all things were created —  
     things in heaven and things on earth,  
     things visible and invisible,  
     whether thrones or dominions,  
     whether principalities or powers —  
 they have all been created through Him and for Him (author's translation).

This first strophe celebrates the role of Christ in creation, most probably in His character as the Wisdom of God. This early Christian theme, which exercised a major influence on the church's Christological thought, was not confined to the Pauline circle and probably did not originate in it. It finds expression in the prelude of Hebrews (Heb. 1:2b-3a), in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel (John 1:1-5), and in the Apocalypse (Rev. 3:14).

Christ, then, is introduced as "the image of the invisible God." That He is "the image of God" has been affirmed already by Paul (2 Cor. 4:4), in a context which appears to reflect Paul's conversion experience. Paul recognized the One revealed to him on the Damascus Road as Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Did he, in that same moment, recognize Him also as the image of God?<sup>3</sup> When Ezekiel received his vision of God, he saw enthroned at the heart of the rainbow-like brightness "a likeness as it were of a human form" (Ezek. 1:26). Paul had a similar experience when

he recognized "the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). He is not merely echoing someone else's form of words here; he is expressing what his own experience confirmed as true.

To call Christ the image of God is to say that in Him the being and nature of God have been perfectly manifested — that in Him the invisible has become visible. In another letter Paul had declared that since the creation of the world the "everlasting power and divinity"<sup>4</sup> of the unseen Creator may be "clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (Rom. 1:20). But now an all-surpassing disclosure of His "everlasting power and divinity" has been granted. "The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" has shone into His people's hearts through the same creative Word that first called light to shine forth out of darkness (2 Cor. 4:4-6).

In addition to being the image of God, Christ is said to be the "Firstborn before all creation." This rendering is designed to clarify the force of the genitive phrase "of all creation." To construe the wording as though He Himself were the first of all created beings is to run counter to the context, which insists that He is the One by whom the whole creation came into existence. The construction *πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως* is similar to that in John 1:15, 30, where John the Baptist says of Jesus *πρωτός μου ἦν*, "He was first in respect to me."<sup>5</sup> In Colossians 1:15 *πρωτότοκος* with the genitive has the same force that *πρωτός* with the genitive has in John 1:15, 30; it denotes not only priority but primacy.

The title "Firstborn" perhaps echoes the language of Psalm 89:27, where God says of the Davidic king, "I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth." But it belongs to Christ not only as the Son of David but also as the Wisdom of God. In the wisdom literature of the Old Testament wisdom is at best the personification of a divine attribute or of the holy law, but when the New Testament writers speak of Wisdom in personal terms, they consciously refer to One who is alive, one whose ministry on earth was still remembered by many. To all those writers, as to Paul, Christ was the personal (not personified) and incarnate Wisdom of God. They were not so much arguing that the personified wisdom of the Old Testament is actually Christ as they were testifying that Christ (who lived on earth as Man, who died and rose again, "whom God made our wisdom" [1 Cor. 1:30]) is the One who was before all creation, the preexistent Christ.

The idea of preexistence is not unknown in Jewish thought. It is seen, for example, in later discussions about the Messiah<sup>6</sup>

and in the preexistent Son of Man in the Parables of Enoch.<sup>7</sup> But such preexistent beings were, to the minds of those who discussed them, largely ideal. Here preexistence is predicated of Jesus who had lived and died in Palestine within the preceding half-century. This is not the only place in the Pauline letters where the preexistence of Christ is stated or implied, and Paul is not the only New Testament writer to teach such a truth.

Paul speaks of Christ not only as preexistent, but also as cosmic, that is, he finds in Christ "the key to creation, declaring that it is all there with Christ in view."<sup>8</sup> Whatever other figures in Jewish literature may have preexistence ascribed to them, none of them is credited with such cosmic activity and significance as are here predicated of the preexistent Christ. Paul had already used language of this kind; in 1 Corinthians 8:6 he said that Christians acknowledge "one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him." And in Romans 8:19-21 he showed how the redemption secured by Christ works not only to the advantage of its immediate beneficiaries, "the sons of God," but through them to the whole creation.

Not only is Christ's primacy with regard to creation asserted; it is "in Him" that all things were created. When the Revised Version appeared in 1881 with this rendering in place of the King James Version's "by Him," some critics, like B. W. Newton, charged the revisers with encouraging the "deadly" error of the immanence of the Word in the world by thus "reversing the translation of their Protestant predecessors."<sup>9</sup> But if Newton and others had studied the matter a little further, they might have discovered why Paul wrote ἐν αὐτῷ here, and why the revisers translated the phrase "in Him." The reason is that Christ is identified with the beginning "in" which, according to Genesis 1:1, "God created the heavens and the earth."<sup>10</sup> This is not mere surmise; He is expressly called "the beginning" in Colossians 1:18. Perhaps one could say that here He is viewed as the sphere within which the work of creation takes place, as in Ephesians 1:4 the people of God are said to have been chosen "in Him" even earlier, before the world's foundation. God's creation, like His election, is accomplished "in Christ" and not apart from Him.

When the preposition is changed, and creation is said to have taken place "through him" (δι' αὐτοῦ), as it is at the end of verse 16, He is denoted as the Agent by whom God brought the universe into being. This is in line with the testimony of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which affirms that through the Son (δι'

οὐ) God made the worlds (Heb. 1:2), and of the Fourth Gospel which states that "all things came into being through him [through the *Logos*, who is identified with the Son), and apart from him none of the things that exist came into being" (John 1:3).

This is to be distinguished from Philo's doctrine of the function of the *logos* in creation. It is easy to see affinities between Pauline language and Stoic terminology, but Paul's thought is derived not from Stoicism but from Genesis and the Old Testament wisdom literature, where wisdom is personified as the Creator's assessor and master-workman. However, for Paul, "master-workman" is no longer a figure of speech but a description of the actual role of the personal, preexistent Christ.

Thus Christ through whom the divine work of redemption has been accomplished (Col. 1:14) is the One through whom the divine act of creation 'was effected in the beginning. His mediatorial relation to the created universe provides a setting to the plan of salvation which helps his people appreciate the gospel all the more. For those who have been redeemed by Christ the universe has no ultimate terrors; they know that their Redeemer is also Creator — the Origin and Goal of all.

Probably with special reference to the "Colossian heresy" Paul then emphasized that if all things were created by Christ, then those powers for which such high claims were made in that heresy must have been created by Him. "Thrones, principalities, authorities, powers, and dominions" probably represent the highest orders of the spirit world, but the variety of ways in which the terms are combined in the New Testament warns against attempting to construct a fixed hierarchy from them. The point is that the most powerful angel princes, like the rest of creation, are subject to Christ as the One in whom, through whom, and for whom they were created.

The concept of Christ as the Goal of creation plays an essential part in Pauline Christology and soteriology. To this concept Jewish parallels have been adduced; for example, the third-century Rabbi Yohanan offered the opinion that the world was created with a view to Messiah.<sup>11</sup> But for Paul, Messiah had come; He is identical with Jesus who, not more than 30 years earlier, had been crucified in Jerusalem and who had appeared to Paul himself on the Damascus Road as the risen Lord. Any understanding of Paul's Christology which fails to reckon with his personal commitment to Jesus, crucified and exalted, would be

the kind of understanding that is dismissed in this letter as being "according to the elemental forces of the world, and not according to Christ" (Col. 2:8).

### **The Transitional Link (1:17-18a)**

He indeed is before all things,  
and they all cohere in Him;  
He is also the head of the body, the church (author's translation).

The teaching of the first strophe is recapitulated in a twofold reaffirmation of the preexistence and cosmic significance of Christ: "He indeed is before all things, and they all cohere in Him." The phrase "before all things" sums up the essence of His designation as "Firstborn before all creation" and excludes any possibility of interpreting that designation to mean that He Himself is part of the created order (albeit the first and chief part). Since the phrase *πρὸ πάντων* occurs elsewhere in the New Testament to denote priority in importance, this denotation, as well as the idea of priority in time, may well be present here.

The statement "all things cohere in Him" adds something to what has been said about His agency in creation. What has been brought into being by Christ is maintained by being in Him. The best known parallel to this comes, as stated earlier, in the prelude of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the Son is not only the One through whom the worlds were made but also the One who upholds all things by His almighty and enabling Word (Heb. 1:2b-3a). The Greek verb *συνίστημι* is found as a Platonic and Stoic term. According to Philo, the material of the human body "coheres (*συνέστηκεν*) and is quickened as into flame by the providence of God."<sup>12</sup> The Greek translator of Ben Sira, using a synonymous verb, says that by the Word of God "all things hold together (*σύγκειται*)" (Sir. 43:26). But to Paul the living Christ, who died to redeem His people, is the Sustainer of the universe and the unifying Principle of its life.

Thus far the doctrine of Christ has been set forth in terms that Paul shares with other New Testament writers -- terms which indeed may have belonged to a widely used Christian catechesis or confession, even if Paul stamped them here with the imprint of his own experience and thought. But now he went on to make a contribution to apostolic Christology which is distinctively his own. Christ, he wrote, is also "the Head of the body, the church."

Those who believe that verses 15-20 constitute an already existing hymn incorporated into the argument of this letter conclude that "the church" is a gloss added by Paul to make plain the sense in which "the body" is to be understood. This may be so. But it is also widely supposed that in the original form of the hymn the body was the *κόσμος*.<sup>13</sup> Christ is certainly presented in this letter as Ruler of the *κόσμος*— as Head, in particular, "of every principality and power" (2:10). But when "Head" and "body" are used as correlative terms, as they are here in 1:18a, the physiological analogy is to the fore, and it is not established that the physiological analogy ever figured in Christ's headship over the *κόσμος*.

Where the *κόσμος* was viewed as a body, as in Stoicism, it is animated by the divine world-soul and not by a power functioning as head of the body. And if it be maintained that the original hymn was not only pre-Pauline but pre-Christian, and that it was the *κοσμοκράτωρ*, or the Gnostic redeemer, and not Christ, who was originally presented as head of the body (the *κόσμος*),<sup>14</sup> one would still ask for evidence that the head-body relationship was current in that realm of thought.

But if the identity of the church with the body of which Christ is the Head is implied or expressed in the original hymn, is Paul then dependent on an existing composition (viz., this supposedly pre-Pauline hymn) for this insight? Whereas the portrayal of the church as the body of Christ appears in his earlier letters (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Rom. 12:4-5), the portrayal of Christ as Head of the body is found first in Colossians and Ephesians. It seems unlikely to this author that this development of Paul's earlier thought first took shape in someone else's mind. More probably the hymn was composed within the circle of the Pauline churches, under the influence of Paul's own teaching.

Another possibility has been ventilated, however. Benoit suggests that it was only the first strophe celebrating Christ's role as the creative Wisdom, that circulated independently before it was incorporated in this letter, and that the second strophe was constructed (by Paul himself?) on the model of the first.<sup>15</sup> Since the transitional link, which leads from the first strophe into the second, would have no point apart from second strophe it would have been constructed at the same time as the second strophe. This writer does not know if this consideration has any bearing on the presentation of these verses in the 26th edition of the Nestle-Aland *Greek New Testament*, where verses 15-18a

(the first strophe plus the transitional link) are set as poetry, but verses 18b-20 (the second strophe) as prose.

This, however, is not the occasion for entering further into Paul's doctrine of the church as the body of which Christ is the Head, apart from repeating what has been suggested from Patristic times, that the seed may have been sown in his mind when the risen Lord addressed him on the Damascus Road, crying out from heaven about the injuries being inflicted on His body on earth.<sup>16</sup>

### The Second Strophe (1:18b-20)

He is the beginning,  
 Firstborn from the dead,  
     that He might be preeminent in all things,  
 because in Him it was decreed that all the fullness should  
     take up residence  
 and that through Him, [God] should reconcile all things  
     to Himself,  
     having made peace through the blood of His cross — [through  
 Him], whether those on earth or those in heaven (author's  
 translation).

As the first strophe celebrates Christ's role in the old creation, the second strophe celebrates His role in the new creation, especially with regard to His work of reconciliation. In relation to the old creation and the new He holds the rank of "Firstborn." The new creation is the resurrection order; over it, as over the old order, He is "the Beginning." He is not only "the Beginning" in whom heaven and earth were first created, but also by His rising from the dead He is proclaimed the One in whom men and women who died in the first Adam are "made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22).

The *risen* Christ is Head of the body, which is the church. His resurrection marked His victory over all the forces that held men and women in bondage. On that first Easter morning He brought new hope for humanity. Now Christ is "the Firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29); He is "the Firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20); His own resurrection is the harbinger of the great forthcoming resurrection-harvest of His people. He who has been "designated Son of God in power . . . by the resurrection of the dead" (Rom. 1:4) exercises universal primacy; the divine purpose is thus fulfilled "that He should be preeminent in all things" (Col. 1:18).

The fact that the designation "Firstborn from the dead" appears independently in Revelation 1:5 (expanding the title

"Firstborn" in a quotation from F's. 89:27)<sup>17</sup> suggests that it may have had a wider currency in first-century Christianity. The same consideration applies to the title "the Beginning," which is given to Christ at the beginning; of the letter to the Laodicean church in Revelation 3:14, in the fuller form "the Beginning of God's creation" (probably by way of an allusion to wisdom's self-introduction as "the beginning of His way" in Prov. 8:22). Is there further significance in the fact that the church to which these words were addressed was situated, like the Colossian church, in the Lycus Valley? The question must be left unanswered, but at least it may be asked.

In the following words of the hymn the statement that God has decreed the preeminence of Christ over every order of being, both in this age and in the coming age, is repeated in different terms. These terms may have been calculated to appeal with peculiar force to the Colossian Christians in their present situation. "In Him it was decreed that all the fullness should take up residence." The impersonal rendering "it was decreed" has been adopted provisionally. But the verb is not impersonal: εὐδόκησεν means "decreed," "decided," "was well pleased," and implies a subject. Who or what was well pleased? When the good pleasure is God's, there are analogies for the omission of His name. For example, "He was well pleased" could mean "God was well pleased" (as in the KJV: "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell"). On the other hand, an explicit subject for the verb is offered in the clause itself; "the fullness was well pleased to take up residence in Him" (as in the RSV: "in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell"). It cannot be decided with certainty whether ὁ θεός (understood) or πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα (expressed) is the more probable subject. Benoit, for example, prefers ὁ θεός;<sup>18</sup> on the other hand Kasemann declares this construction to be "not permissible"<sup>19</sup> (but on exegetical and theological, not on grammatical, grounds).

Before which of the two constructions can be considered the more probable, the meaning of πλήρωμα in this sentence must be examined and determined. So far as Paul's intention is concerned, its sense is scarcely in doubt; it is repeated more fully in Colossians 2:9: "It is in Him [i.e., Christ] that all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form." If, then, Colossians 1:19 is construed to mean that "in Him all fullness of deity was well pleased to take up residence" (the double aorist, εὐδόκησεν and κατοικῆσαι perhaps pointing to the time of His resurrection or

exaltation),<sup>20</sup> this is tantamount to saying that God Himself, in all His fullness, was pleased to dwell in Him. No substantial difference exists, then, in meaning between the two constructions.

This is so, as has been stated earlier, "so far as Paul's intention is concerned." This leaves open the possibility that in the original hymn, if it were an independently existing composition, the sentence had a different meaning from what has been placed on it by its being incorporated into the argument of this letter. But one should ask for evidence that the original meaning was different, before accepting that it was so; and such evidence is hard to obtain.

No doubt the word *πλήρωμα* had a special sense (or senses) in Gnostic terminology, but it does not follow that the present occurrence originally bore that special sense (or senses). The word is used by Paul and other New Testament writers in a variety of senses. Conceivably it may have been used in a technical sense by the false teachers at Colossae, and there may be some allusion to that technical sense here; but nothing can be established as a matter of fact on the bare ground of its being conceivable. In the mid-second century the Valentinians used *πλήρωμα* to denote the totality of aeons (divine entities or emanations), and the word may have borne some such meaning in incipient forms of Gnosticism in the mid-first century. But it is necessary to insist no information on the Colossian heresy is known apart from inferences drawn as cautiously as possible from the argument and wording of this letter. It would make sense — one can say no more than that — if the Colossian heresy thought of a hierarchy of powers among which the divine fullness was distributed and which occupied the intermediate realm between the supreme God and the world of humanity. In that situation, any communication between God and the world, in either direction, would have had to pass through the spheres in which those powers exercised control. Those who thought in this way would see the point of treating such powers with due respect. The nature of the Colossian heresy is the subject of the next article in this series, but if it was anything like this, then it is undermined in one simple affirmation: the totality of the divine essence and power is resident in Christ. Christ is the One and all-sufficient Intermediary between God and the world of humanity, and all the attributes of God are disclosed in Him. There is no good reason to suppose that the hymn at any stage bore a different meaning from what it bears in the context of the Letter to the Colossians.

It was God's good pleasure, moreover, to "reconcile all things to Himself" through Christ. The fullness of divine energy is manifested in Him in the work of reconciliation as well as in that of creation. In the words that follow in Colossians 1 this reconciling activity is applied particularly to redeemed humanity, but first its universal aspect comes into view. In reconciliation as in creation the work of Christ has a cosmic significance; it is God's eternal purpose (as stated in Eph. 1:10) that all things should be summed up in Him.

If "all things" (both in heaven and on earth) were created through Him, and yet "all things" (whether on earth or in heaven) are to be reconciled to God through Him, it follows that "all things" have been estranged from their Creator. Paul had spoken of the creation as involuntarily "subjected to futility" but also as destined to "be set free from its bondage to decay and [to] obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:20-21). Since the liberty of the children of God is procured by the redemptive work of Christ, the release of creation from its bondage to decay is assured by that same redemptive work. That earlier argument of Paul's is akin to his present one, but here not simply subjection to futility but positive hostility is implied on the part of the created universe. The universe has been involved in conflict with its Creator, and needs to be reconciled to Him; the conflict must be replaced by peace. This peace has been effected by Christ, through the shedding of His blood on the cross.

Even if Paul was not the first author of these words about the reconciliation of all things, his use of them as part of his argument implies that he understood them in accord with his general teaching about reconciliation. It is difficult to interpret his teaching along the lines of anything like universal reconciliation as that phrase is commonly understood today. He did not anticipate Origen in the view that fallen angels benefit by the saving work of Christ. Instead, Paul thought of the saving work of Christ as denuding hostile spiritual powers of all vitality and potency.<sup>21</sup>

The peace effected by the death of Christ may be freely accepted, or it may be imposed. The reconciliation of the universe spoken of here includes what would now be distinguished as pacification. The principalities and powers whose downfall is described in Colossians 2:15 are certainly not depicted as gladly surrendering to divine grace but as being compelled to submit to a power greater than their own. Everything in the universe has been made subject to Christ even as everything was created for

Him. By His reconciling work "the host of the high ones on high" and sinful human beings on earth have been decisively subdued to the will of God and must subserve His purpose. As the parallel Christ-hymn of Philippians 2:6-11 indicates, the Father's good pleasure is that all "in heaven and on earth and under the earth" shall unite to bow the knee at Jesus' name and confess that He is Lord. As Hengel has pointed out, the hymn to Christ "served as a living medium for the progressive development of christological thinking" in the earliest church, and it also "created community in the union of ἀγαλλίασις in praise and spirit-filled διδασκαλία; indeed, the unity of the earthly and the heavenly communities became evident in the singing."<sup>22</sup> Few exercises can so effectively promote the spirit of unity as joint celebration of the person and work of Christ.

### Editor's Note

This is the second in a series of four articles delivered by the author as the W. H. Griffith Thomas Memorial Lectures at Dallas Theological Seminary, November 1-4, 1983.

### Notes

1 Martin Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1983), pp. 78-96.

2 The strophic arrangement followed here is that suggested by Pierre Benoit, "L'hymne christologique de Col 1, 15-20," in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults*, ed. Jacob Neusner, 4 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 1:226-63.

3 See Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), pp. 137-62.

4 With the θεϊότης ("divinity") revealed in creation maybe contrasted the ethnic ("deity") embodied in Christ (Col. 2:9).

5 A. W. Argyle compares the construction of the Septuagint in 2 Kingdoms 19:43 (not found in the Hebrew of 2 Sam. 19:43): πρωτότοκος ἐγὼ ἢ σὺ, "I was born before you" ("πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως [Colossians 1:15]," *Expository Times* 66 [1954-55], pp. 61-62).

6 An example is the messianic interpretation of Psalm 72:17 as "Before the sun his name was Yinnon" (Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 98b).

7 See Maurice Casey, *The Son of Man* (London: S.P.C.K., 1979), pp. 99-112.

8 Archibald M. Hunter, *Interpreting Paul's Gospel* (London: SCM Press, 1954), p. 60.

9 B. W. Newton, *Remarks on the Revised English Version of the Greek New Testament* (London: Houlston, 1881), p. 65.

10 See C. F. Burney, "Christ as the APXH of Creation," *Journal of Theological Studies* 27 (1925-26):160-77.

11 Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 98b.

12 Philo *Who Is Heir of Divine Things?* 58.

- 13 See E. Schweizer, "Die Kirche als Leib Christi in den paulnischen Antilegomena," *Neotestamentica* (Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1963), pp. 293-316
- 14 See Ernst Kasemann, "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy" in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM Press, 1964), pp. 149-58.
- 15 Benoit, "L'hymne christologique de Col 1, 15-20," pp. 248-50.
- 16 See Augustine *Sermon 279.1*.
- 17 The phrase in Revelation 1:5 is ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν as compared with πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν here, but the meaning is the same.
- 18 Benoit, "L'hymne christologique de Col 1, 15-20," p. 256.
- 19 Kasemann, "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy," P. 158.
- 20 Probably κατοικήσαι should be construed as an ingressive aorist. It is not questioned that God was in Christ before His resurrection, but the risen Christ is the subject of this second strophe.
- 21 Because of His saving work they have been rendered "weak and beggarly" (Gal. 4:9).
- 22 Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, pp. 95-96.

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