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CHRIST THE LORD OF ALL
AN INTERPRETATION OF COLOSSIANS 1:15-20

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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June 1953

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE AIM OF PAUL'S LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT COLOSSAE	3
III. THE LORD OF CREATION, 1:15-17.	8
IV. THE LORD OF THE CHURCH, 1:18	16
V. THE LORD OF ALL BY VIRTUE OF HIS REDEMPTIVE WORK, 1:18b-20	24
The Risen Lord and the New Creation.	24
The Lord enthroned	28
The Lord of History.	32
The Lord of the Church and the World	34
Lord and God, all in all	37
BIBLIOGRAPHY	42

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

To the mind of Western Christendom the Christology of Paul's Letter to the Colossians, particularly of Colossians 1:15-20, is apt to seem strange and remote, for Christ's redemptive work is presented here in relation to the cosmos. The Western Church from early times has concerned itself more with Christ's person than with His work, tending toward a secular view of the universe and a lack of interest in the risen, exalted Lord.¹ In recent centuries Renaissance individualism also has hampered the Church with a distorted emphasis on personal relationship with God which obscures the wider implications of Christ's redemptive work for nature and history.² Although the Lutheran Church possesses in Luther's theology a rich source of insight into God's activity in the historical process, it has not fully utilized its heritage, due in part to Aristotelian influence.³

The Letter to the Colossians allows no room for a static conception of God; in striking terms it presents what all of

¹Otto A. Piper, "The Savior's Eternal Work," Interpretation, III (July, 1949), 286-7.

²Otto A. Piper, God in History (New York: Macmillan Co., 1939), p. 49.

³Jaroslav J. Pelikan, From Luther to Kierkegaard (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), pp. 75, 149.

Scripture witnesses: God mightily at work in the world through His Son our Lord. This view of redemption and history centers in Christ, whose atoning work reveals God's plan for the world and in whom all creation finds its purpose. Such a perspective also gives the members of Christ's body a richer conception of their role in God's economy of redemption and a greater sympathy for the revelations of science and the developments of history.⁴

The purpose of this thesis is to present an interpretation of Colossians 1:15-20 from the viewpoint of Christ's lordship, and to provide an introduction to the exegetical problems of the Letter to the Colossians.

⁴J. B. Lightfoot, St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon (Eighth edition; London: Macmillan and Co., 1886), p. 114.

CHAPTER II

THE AIM OF PAUL'S LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT COLOSSAE

Obviously Paul is pointing his letter toward a particular situation at Colossae caused by certain false teachers. The heresy troubling the congregation has a Judaic tinge, urging observance of ceremonial laws; it demands asceticism through abstinence of various kinds; and these elements are woven into an esoteric philosophy, a speculation concerned about spiritual beings. That the angels, 2:18, are objects of worship is not certain. As Theodor Zahn points out, the brief reference to *θεμεκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων* is not sufficient basis for elaborating a system of angel worship. The parallel use of *θεμεκεία* in 2:23 urges that 2:18 refers merely to an external religiosity aping that of angels.¹ In general the heretical group seems to assume an attitude of arrogance and proud exclusiveness, judging by Paul's repeated reference to "every man" as recipient of the Gospel, 1:28.

How can we account for this curious mixture of teachings? Lightfoot presents an extensive, carefully documented argument for a Gnostic-Essene heresy rooted in a dualism

¹Theodor Zahn, Introduction to the New Testament, translated from the third edition (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), I, 468-9. Additional grammatical and contextual evidence is cited.

which views matter as evil and therefore attributes creation to God only through the mediation of a succession of emanating demi-gods.² The difficulty is (and Lightfoot notes it) that the heresy sketched in Colossians cannot be identified accurately either with Essenism or with later full-fledged Gnosticism. Although some rudimentary elements of demiurgic doctrine probably were present, we dare not impose upon the Colossian congregation the speculative systems of later centuries. The terms used for members of the spirit world in 1:16 and 2:15 were derived from Judaism and were no doubt shared by the heretics; their source is not Gnosticism.³ The heresy outlined in the letter is a unique combination. F. Prat remarks, "If it be Essenism, it is not the Essenism of Palestine; and if it is Gnosticism, it is not the Gnosticism of the second century."⁴ Ernst Lohmeyer in his commentary on Colossians outlines an intricate theory of Hellenistic philosophic origin combined with Judaic ethical practice, but admits, "Über das geschichtlichen Auftreten dieser

²J. B. Lightfoot, St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon (Eighth edition; London: Macmillan and Co., 1886), p. 114.

³Heinrich A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians, and to Philemon, translated from the fourth edition (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1885), p. 232.

⁴Fernand Prat, The Theology of St. Paul, translated from the first edition (London: Burns, Oates, and Washburne, Ltd., 1945), I, 285.

'Philosophie' wissen wir nichts. . . ."⁵ Nor do we know how completely the heresy had infiltrated the Colossian congregation.

A number of interpreters have assumed that because so many terms occur which have striking parallels in Gnostic literature, the letter cannot be Paul's. It is quite probable that here as elsewhere in the New Testament terms are used which are common to the opponents' vocabulary, for polemic effect, such as σοφία, ἐπίγνωσις and possibly πλῆρωμα.⁶ And it must be noted that the content of the letter is by no means Gnostic. Ernst Percy asks pertinently that if there is a Gnostic influence upon the thought world of Colossians, then where are the distinctive Gnostic doctrines of redemption: pre-existence of souls, and the identification of Redeemer with souls?⁷ The concept of God as Creator and Redeemer in the form of the incarnate Logos is distinctly Christian;⁸ in the Letter

⁵Ernst Lohmeyer, Die Briefe an die Philipper, an die Kolosser, und an Philemon (Heinrich A. W. Meyer Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament. Eighth edition; Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1930), p. 8.

⁶Lightfoot, op. cit., pp. 98-100.

⁷Ernst Percy, "Zu den Problemen des Kolosser- und Epheserbriefes," Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche, XLIII (1950-1951), 194.

⁸Floyd V. Filson, The New Testament against Its Environment (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1950), p. 36.

to the Colossians it appears against the hazy backdrop of a heresy difficult to classify.

A number of points are certain, shown by the letter itself. The false teaching is a pagan syncretism of Judaic, speculative, and ascetic elements closely interwoven, as Paul's antithesis, 2:8-23, indicates. Phrygia at this time was fertile soil for such bizarre religious hybrids.⁹ The deceit of their wisdom, 2:8, consisted in building a religious system not on Christ but according to their own crude notions, and in relying upon visions rather than holding fast to Christ, 2:18-19. Their Judaism demanded observances abolished by the reality of Christ, 2:16-17. And their asceticism, 2:21-23, is a deluded attempt to bridge the gap between creature and Creator. These known factors in the heresy, seen through Paul's eyes, have the common denominator of threatening the Colossian Christians' hold on Christ, the Head of the Church.

Paul's strategy in his letter is not a systematic refutation. He simply places in bold contrast the utter pre-eminence of Christ, leaving only meager traces of the false teaching.¹⁰ The hub of Paul's presentation is 1:15-20, in which he shows how completely superior Christ is to all things, spiritual and physical. The section is not a philo-

⁹Prat, op. cit., p. 286.

¹⁰Lohmeyer, op. cit., p. 3.

sophical excursus; its purpose is to show how inferior the imitation religion of the heretics is in establishing a relationship with God. There can be no man made ladders, whether mystic or ascetic, up to heaven.

Ultimately Paul is concerned about the spiritual life and growth of his readers. He prays that they might increase in wisdom, 1:9, but only in order that they might lead a life worthy of the Lord, 1:10. Their spiritual insight is surely not theoretical, for Paul's teaching concerning the profound implications of Christ's lordship is aimed at one result: "As therefore you received the Lord, so live in him . . . ," 2:6.¹¹ The third and fourth chapters of the letter show how this life in communion with the exalted Christ works out in every member of His body, in every stratum of society.

The context of the first chapter reveals Paul's hearty thankfulness for their spiritual progress, and his continual prayer that they might receive deeper insight into God's will through the working of the Spirit. Their fulness of wisdom is to find expression in every sort of good work, including especially that of thankfulness to God for their rescue from the Devil's power and for their share in the blessed kingdom of Jesus Christ their Lord.

¹¹Revised Standard Version.

CHAPTER III

THE LORD OF CREATION, 1:15-17

The point of departure for Col. 1:15-20 is that God has rescued us from Satan's rule of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son, verse 13. Our participation in the inheritance is due entirely to God's action, verse 12, through Christ, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, verse 14. Paul's description is highly comprehensive, condensing in such terms as *ἐρρύεατο*, *Βασιλεία* and *ἀπολύτρωσις* the entire Old Testament hope of full redemption in Christ.¹ In order that this redemption may not seem to be an incidental event, nor our entrance into Christ's kingdom merely a subjective experience, Paul points out the wider implications of the Savior's redeeming work.²

Who is the King into whose realm we have been placed? In answer Paul suspends verses 15-20 by means of relative clauses in verse 15 and in verse 18, to show Christ's full lordship over the universe and over the Church.

¹Ernst Lohmeyer, Die Briefe an die Philipper, an die Kolosser, und an Philemon (Heinrich A. W. Meyer Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament, Eighth edition; Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1930), p. 51.

²Otto A. Piper, "The Savior's Eternal Work," Interpretation, III (July, 1949), 290.

Christ is the *Εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ἁοράτου*. The Greater God who is beyond comparison, Isaiah 40:18, is revealed from eternity in His Son. *Εἰκὼν* in general Greek usage excludes mere imitation. H. Kleinknecht says of the classical usage, ". . . nicht nur eine Abschwächung, gleichsam eine schlechte Nachbildung einer Sache, sondern das Inerscheintreten geradezu des Kerns, des Wesens einer Sache."³ Gerhard Kittel sums up the New Testament meaning, "Im NT ist durchweg in dem 'Bilde' das Urbild selbst, die abgebildete Gestalt selbst, als in ihrem Wesen sichtbar gedacht."⁴

As used in verse 15 the term echoes the *ἰοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ* of verse 14, connoting a bond of closest intimacy between the Father and the Son, who from eternity has been *πρὸς τὸν Θεόν*, John 1:1. The Son as *Εἰκὼν* is God in the fullest sense of the term, and yet there is a distinction between the original and the image, for the original makes possible the image.⁵ The *Εἰκὼν* is the person through whom God has expressed Himself in relation to the universe. John 1:18 describes the culmination of this revelation in the incarnate Logos, who has given the

³Gerhard Kittel, Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1935), II, 386.

⁴Ibid., p. 394.

⁵Piper, op. cit., p. 293.

authoritative unfolding of the God whom no one has ever seen:

ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο . εἰκῶν thus includes the connotations of *χαρακτήρ* , the accurate impression of God, and of *ἀπαύγασμα* , the active effulgence, as described in Hebrews 1:3. The statements in the following verses concerning Christ's lordship are made within the framework of His relationship with the Father and of the Father's relation through Him to the world.

The first sphere of the Son's lordship is creation: *πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως* . It may well be asked here why the redemptive work of Christ is grounded in the act of creation. Lohmeyer replies,

Es ist der Kern des Gedankenganges, dass Schöpfung und Erlösung unlöslich zusammengehören als die doppelten Funktionen einer und derselben Gestalt; weil der Erlöser auch Mittler der Schöpfung ist, ist die Erlösung absolut erfüllt und unerschütterlich begründet.⁶

πρωτότοκος in verse 15 has the primary meaning of priority in time, but gains the flavor of pre-eminence through Old Testament usage, as Lohmeyer points out, "Alles Erstgeborene ist in AT deshalb geweiht; der Älteste ist in Recht und Religion, Familie und Volk, Herr seines Geschlechtes, sein Bewahrer und Erhalter."⁷ Psalm 89:28 (Septuagint: 88: 28) is an illuminating parallel which some rabbinic sources

⁶Lohmeyer, op. cit., p. 54.

⁷Ibid., p. 56.

consider Messianic:⁸

καὶ γὰρ πρῶτότοκον
 θήσομαι αὐτόν, ὑψηλὸν παρὰ τοῖς
 βασιλευσίν τῆς γῆς . The particu-
 lar connotation of this passage becomes clearer through the
 use of πρῶτότοκος in Col. 1:18, but here it serves
 to emphasize Christ's sovereignty over against the created
 world.⁹

He holds this position of first in rank because He ex-
 isted before all creatures, as πρῶτο- signifies and
 as πρὸ πάντων in verse 17 explicitly states. When
 the world began, the Son was already there, John 1:1: ἐν ἀρ-
 χῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος .

All creation is subordinate to the Son because it was
 created in Him. πρῶτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως, verse 15,
 has caused doubts concerning Christ's deity, beginning al-
 ready in Arian controversy.¹⁰ Bauer observes that in 1:15
 (as well as in 1:18) it remains uncertain, ". . . ob und
 inwieweit auch das τόκος noch empfunden wirt."¹¹

⁸Hermann Strack and Paul Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch (Muenchen: G. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1926), III, 258.

⁹J. B. Lightfoot, St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon (Eighth edition; London: Macmillan and Co., 1886), p. 197.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 146-8.

¹¹Walter Bauer, Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur (Second edition; Gieszen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1928), col. 1166.

Paul's explanation lies in verse 16: *ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα*. As H. Cremer interprets,

. . . not that He is included as part of the creation, but that the relation of the whole creation to Him is determined by the fact that He is *πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως*, so that without Him the creation could not be.¹²

The *ἐν αὐτῷ*, verse 16, presents the mediate agency of Christ, carefully expressed: it is more than *διὰ*, denoting highly personal involvement, and less than *ἐκ*, showing that God remains Creator.¹³ Perhaps the closest insight into this mystery is John 1:4, where the Logos is designated as the ultimate source of all life: *ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν*. Meyer suggests,

In Him lay, in fact, the potency of life, from which God made the work of creation proceed, inasmuch as He was the personal principle of the divine revelation, and therewith the accomplisher of the divine idea of the world.¹⁴

The emphasis of verse 16 is that all creatures came into existence in the Son: *τὰ πάντα ἐν οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι*. The phrases *ἐν οὐρανοῖς* and *ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς* are a Hebraism equivalent to "whole universe;"

¹²Hermann Cremer, Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek, translated from the second edition (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1878), p. 556.

¹³Lohmeyer, op. cit., p. 56.

¹⁴Heinrich A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians, and to Philemon, translated from the fourth edition (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1885), p. 227.

they are not identical with *θεατα* and *ἀόρατα*, which refer to material and immaterial creatures.¹⁵ Paul gives special prominence to angelic powers, which are part of Christ's realm of creation, and the repeated *εἴτε* shows that he is not concerned about defining categories of angels; he views them only from the point of view of Christ's complete lordship.¹⁶ According to Werner Foerster, *ἐξουσίαι* and *ἀρχαί* in this abstract sense of "Mächte überirdischer Art" are not found in Hellenism or pagan Gnosis, but have their roots in Judaism. He further states that we cannot distinguish between *ἀρχαί* and *ἐξουσίαι* because of their use with different classes of spiritual beings (1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 3:10), nor is it possible to make a distinct category of *θεόνοοι* and *κυριότητες*.¹⁷ In Paul's usage *ἐξουσίαι* represent the fallen aspect of creation with its enslaving power, and yet they belong to Christ's realm of creation, so that they can neither separate Christians from Christ nor provide a way to Him.¹⁸ Paul's reference in Colossians to angelic beings seems polemically pointed, underscoring that whatever the heretics claim for the inhabitants of the spirit world, all of these are under

¹⁵Lightfoot, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-50.

¹⁶Lohmeyer, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

¹⁷Kittel, *op. cit.*, II, 568-9.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 570.

the rule of Christ, for all were created in Him.

The tense of $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\tau\iota\sigma\tau\alpha\iota$, verse 16b, is significant, denoting the abiding result, the preservation of the universe. In contrast to John 1, which employs aorists in speaking of creation, Paul here emphasizes the continuing relationship of creatures with Creator,¹⁹ as he states expressly in verse 17: $\tau\acute{\alpha}\ \pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha\ \acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\omega}\ \sigma\upsilon\nu\epsilon\sigma\tau\eta\kappa\epsilon\nu$. Christ continues to be the principle of coherence which, as Lightfoot puts it, makes the universe "a cosmos instead of chaos,"²⁰ as He upholds all things by his word of power, Hebrews 1:3. From this latter passage is clear, however, that Christ must not be viewed as a cold, mechanical principle of existence; the world is the object of His personal concern, as $\phi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\omega\nu$ implies.²¹

On the other hand the creation exists for Christ, verse 16b: $\tau\acute{\alpha}\ \pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha\ \delta\iota'\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\omega}\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\omega}\ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\tau\iota\sigma\tau\alpha\iota$. Since the universe was created in the Son, it is destined to

¹⁹Fernand Prat, The Theology of St. Paul, translated from the first edition (London: Burns, Oates, and Washburne, Ltd., 1945), I, 291.

²⁰Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 154.

²¹Otto Michel, Der Brief an die Hebräer (Heinrich A. W. Meyer Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament, Eighth edition; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1949), p. 41. He notes the Hebraic flavor of the expression and cites Luther's interesting interpretation: "Mit diesem and cites Luther's interesting interpretation: "Mit diesem Worte wird eine gnädige und sozusagen echt mütterliche Fürsorglichkeit gegen die pflegebedürftigen Geschöpfe, die er ins Dasein rief, anschaulich gemacht."

be placed under His lordship; outside of Christ it has no ultimate meaning or purpose.²² At this point the connection with redemption, verse 14, again appears. As Piper observes,

Once it has been realized that our redemption is not an incidental historical event, but rather the end of God's eternal purpose, the whole world process is given a perspective. God made this world that man should come into most intimate connection with his Creator, and thus the whole universe exists for him who is to do the work of redemption.²³

The plan of redemption and the role of the universe in it are unfolded through Christ's lordship over the Church, verses 18-20. Paul's transition is verses 17-18a, which summarizes the relationship of Christ to the universe with a repeated *αὐτός*, emphatically declaring that the very One who is *πρὸ πάντων*, and even now the sustaining Lord of the universe, -- He it is who has assumed the position of Head of the body, the Church.

²²Piper, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 293.

CHAPTER IV

THE LORD OF THE CHURCH, 1:18

The particular relationship of Christ with the Church is summed up in the much-disputed phrase, *κεφαλή τοῦ σώματος*.¹ While in Paul's earlier epistles the Head-Body concept was approached from the viewpoint of the members' function, the emphasis here is on Christ's function as the ruling, life-giving Head of His body, the Church. The redemptive basis of this special relationship is summarized in verse 18: *ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχή, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν*. As the first *πρωτότοκος* clause introduced Christ's rule over creation, so the second unfolds the other sphere of lordship.

Also in the realm of the Church Christ claims first place. He is the Beginner,² the first of a series; *ἀρχή*

¹Cf. Heinrich Schlier's article on *κεφαλή* in Gerhard Kittel, Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1938), III, 676 ff., where he explains the term as Gnostic. A summary of interpretations of the Pauline *σῶμα* concept is given by Otto Michel, Das Zeugnis des Neuen Testaments von der Gemeinde (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1941), pp. 45-54. Cf. also Ernst Percy, Der Leib Christi in den paulinischen Homologumena und Antilegomena (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1942), especially pp. 47-54 for his defense of *σῶμα* in Ephesians and Colossians as directly related to the use of the term in earlier epistles.

²Walter Bauer, Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur (Second edition; Gießen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1928), col. 176.

therefore is closely joined to the following *πρωτότοκος*.³
ἔκ τῶν νεκρῶν particularizes the Savior's priority
 and unfolds the secret of His pre-eminence: He is the Lord
 of the Church because He became the first to leave the ranks
 of the dead⁴ and rise to fulness of Life.

Implicit in Christ's resurrection is His battle against
 the powers of death and His victory over them. The struggle
 involved becomes evident when we view sin not merely as mis-
 steps, but as a slavery of guilt, John 8:34, and when the
 participants are seen to be not merely men and their Creator,
 but also Satan and his enslaving hosts. Karl Heim points
 out,

Solange wir nur Gott und die Menschheit als die beiden
 Partner ansehen, zwischen die sich Christus als Mittler
 hineinstellt, können wir den furchtbaren Kampf nicht be-
 greifen, den Christus auszukämpfen hat.⁵

Although this perspective of Christ's mission does not, as
 Heim and others claim, provide the "zentralen Inhalt" for un-
 derstanding Christ's work,⁶ the fierce reality of Satan's
 power is vital for grasping the significance of our rescue

³Heinrich A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians, and to Philemon, translated from the fourth edition (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1885), p. 234.

⁴Bauer, op. cit., col. 363.

⁵Karl Heim, Jesus der Weltvollender (Berlin: Furche Verlag, 1937), p. 92.

⁶Ibid., p. 93.

from the "dominion of darkness," verse 14.⁷

Satan, who accuses men night and day before God, Revelation 12:10, holds them under the bondage of the law, which condemns, Romans 7:10-13, and which therefore is "the power of sin," 1 Corinthians 15:55. Through Adam's sin death has come upon all, for all have sinned, Romans 5:12. This dread tyranny which settled upon mankind Paul describes simply: *ἐβασίλευσεν ὁ θάνατος*, Romans 5:14.

To defeat the rule of death Christ shared human flesh and blood, ". . . that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage," Hebrews 2:14-15. The battle and victory are outlined in Colossians 2:13-15, where Paul shows that life is possible through forgiveness of sins in Christ, who ". . . canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross." The ruler of this world is cast out, as the Savior declared, John 12:31, because the cross has erased the condemnation of the law and disarmed the powers of darkness, Colossians 2:15.

Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night, . . . (Rev. 12:10).⁸

⁷Revised Standard Version. All Scripture quotations infra are from this version unless otherwise noted.

⁸Authorized Version.

Christ is the only one who has faced the full power of death and conquered, for He alone had not fallen out of fellowship with God,⁹ and in Him alone lay the full divine power, Colossians 2:9; 1:19. Since Christ has erased the guilt of sin, the sting of death is gone, through Christ's resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15:54-56. And because God gives us the victory through His Son, He, the Prince of life, Acts 3:15, has become Lord of the Church.

A one-word summary of this process is Paul's designation of Christ as *ἀπαρχή*, 1 Corinthians 15:20. By virtue of His resurrection He has become the leader and inclusive representative of those who will be raised at His second coming, 1 Corinthians 15:23. The risen Christ thus prefigures all those predestined to be conformed to His image; He is ". . . the first-born among many brethren," Romans 8:29. From the viewpoint of creation and man, Christ has become the last Adam, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive," 1 Corinthians 15:22. While through one man's transgression the tyranny of sin and death ruled over all, so through the one man Jesus Christ those who receive His gift of righteousness will share the victorious life, *ἐν ζωῇ βασιλεύσουσιν*, Romans 5:17. The *πρωτότοκος* is He who shares His victory over death and fulness of life with the members of the Church, His body.

⁹Heim, op. cit., p. 199.

At this point the significance of κεφαλή τοῦ σώματος, verse 18, becomes apparent, and Christ's rule over the Church is set apart from His lordship over creation. While Christ is from eternity transcendent Lord over the universe, He stands in a singular, most intimate relationship with the members of His body.¹⁰ Paul places the reality of this connection in contrast to the deceit of the heretical speculations, Colossians 2:8-12, showing that in Christ the members at Colossae have fulness of life. "For in him dwells the whole fulness of deity bodily, and you have come to fulness of life in him. . . ." Colossians 2:9-10. He in whom "the totality of divine powers and attributes" resides¹¹ imparts the abundance of his grace and life to the members of the body, John 1:16, so that the body also can be designated τὸ πλήρωμα, ". . . the fulness of him who fills all in all," Ephesians 1:23.

Such a connection with Christ is outside of ordinary human experience. It is established only by God, in His manner and by His means, Colossians 2:11-12:

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in

¹⁰Fernand Prat, The Theology of St. Paul, translated from the first edition (London: Burns, Oates, and Washburne, Ltd., 1945), I, 294.

¹¹J. B. Lightfoot, St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon (Eighth edition; London: Macmillan and Co., 1886), p. 179. He appends an extensive essay on the history of πλήρωμα, pp. 255-71.

the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

That the union of the believer with Christ is spiritual by no means weakens it. Rather there is in baptism the incorporation into the highest reality: a vital connection with Christ's death and resurrection through membership in the Church, His body. Faith, created by the power of Him who raised Christ from the dead,¹² enables the members of the body to know the immeasurable resurrection power of Christ their Head, Ephesians 1:19; Philippians 3:10.

One aspect of Christ's function as source of the Body's life is that He fills it ". . . with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding," Colossians 1:9. While the heretics prate about *γνώσις*, Paul points to *ἐπίγνωσις* in Christ, urging that they should have ". . . all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," Colossians 2:2b-3. The full significance of *εἰκὼν*, 1:15, begins to dawn at this point. Paul's use of the term is never speculative; by *εἰκὼν* he does not merely relate the fact that the Father is showing His image in the Son. Rather, the *εἰκὼν*

¹² τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ Θεοῦ, subjective genitive. For the interpretation as objective genitive, cf. Lightfoot, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

τοῦ Θεοῦ , who has entered the world as the incarnate Logos, has been given to the world that it might know what God wills and works.¹³ He who is in the bosom of the Father has appeared in the flesh to unfold the unseen God, John 1:18.

But the revelation of God in Christ has a twofold result as it confronts men. An illuminating passage is 2 Corinthians 4:4-6, which shows the reason for the cleavage: ". . . the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of Christ, who is the likeness [*εἰκὼν*] of God." Satan blinds with unbelief those who confront Christ so that they miss completely His connection with the Father, as John 1:15 dramatically records: "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not."

To the members of the Church God reveals His will and work, - in Christ and through the Gospel proclamation. Paul states significantly in 2 Corinthians 4:5 that the sum and substance of his preachment is to proclaim not himself, but *Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν Κύριον* . This comprehensive title sums up the content of the previous verse concerning Christ's majesty as revealer of God and shows that to preach Christ as Lord is to present to men a unique insight into the splendor of God: "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the knowledge

¹³Kittel, op. cit., II, 394.

of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," 2 Corinthians 4:6. Ultimately, the *μυστήριον* hidden for ages but now revealed to the saints is unfolded through the indwelling of the risen, exalted Savior: ". . . Christ in you, the hope of glory," Colossians 1:27.

To the members of Christ's body belongs this singular *ἐπιγνώσις*, the insight by faith into God's works and ways. The large dimensions of its revelation are compacted in the closing verses of the Christological section, Colossians 1:18b-20.

CHAPTER V

THE LORD OF ALL BY VIRTUE OF HIS REDEMPITIVE WORK, 1:18b-20

The Risen Lord and the New Creation

The ultimate purpose of Christ's resurrection is summed up in verse 18b: *ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρῶτεύων*. The use of *γένηται* combined with *πρῶτεύων* clearly indicates that Christ has taken a position of pre-eminence because of His rising from the dead.

The meaning of *ἐν πᾶσιν* is crucial for the interpretation of verses 18-20. Although numerous attempts have been made to restrict *πᾶς* in verses 18 and 20,¹ the context urges a widely inclusive meaning, since the term is used in verse 15, twice in verse 16, and in verse 17, - each time intentionally unrestricted in meaning. Lightfoot interprets *ἐν πᾶσιν* : ". . . not in the Universe only but in the Church also."² He thereby connects the phrase to the words immediately preceding, to indicate that Christ's lordship over the Church has been added to His rule over

¹For a summary of various interpretations of. T. K. Abbot, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), pp. 221-4.

²J. B. Lightfoot, St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon (Eighth edition; London: Macmillan and Co., 1886), p. 156.

creation.³ To be sure, Paul's line of thought has proceeded from the realm of creation to the realm of the Church. But is it not possible that *γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν* here is climactic, describing the beginning, in some sense, of Christ's rule over all things? If *τὰ πάντα* in verse 20 is taken in an unrestricted sense (as Lightfoot does, p. 158), then verse 18 is affected, because the *ὅτι* clause goes on to include verse 20, which evidently describes the consummation of the world. Thus the whole strophe, verses 18b-20, takes on an eschatological perspective, beginning with the resurrection and concluding with the reconciliation of all things. In this alignment of Christ's redeeming work, the resurrection is the climax of His earthly mission and the entrance into a distinctly new phase of His lordship. The resurrection marks more than the extension of Christ's pre-existent lordship into the area of the Church, as Otto Piper explains,

. . . the redemptive activity of the Son is not simply His cosmic work as applied to the life of mankind, but rather . . . that in it the Son reaches a position which He had not held in His preincarnate state.⁴

The simple witness of the text states that Christ is Lord of all by virtue of His redemptive work.

³Ibid.

⁴Otto A. Piper, "The Savior's Eternal Work," Interpretation, III (July, 1949), 296.

How this took place involves a number of considerations. First is implied that Christ's redemption is directed not only toward human beings, but toward creation generally, and this in turn presupposes that all creatures were affected by Adam's fall into sin. In reality, the final purpose of creation can be understood only in relation to Christ. There can be no divorce of the two, as Karl Heim warns:

Wenn wir die beiden Dinge auseinandernehmen und nebeneinander oder gegeneinander stellen, auf der einen Seite die Schöpfungsordnung und auf der anderen Seite die Botschaft, die Christus bringt, so haben wir uns damit der Führung durch Jesus entzogen.⁵

The key to nature's involvement in the redemptive work of Christ lies in the prominence of man within creation. The universe, in a sense, exists for man, the crown of creation, who was created to live in intimate communion with his Creator within space and time.⁶ Thus the universe shared Adam's fall, was subjected to transitoriness, and now groans together with the sons of God, waiting for the final redemption, Romans 8:18-23. The course of the universe cannot be separated from the destiny of man.⁷

⁵Karl Heim, Jesus der Weltvollender (Berlin: Furche Verlag, 1937), p. 258.

⁶Gerhard Kittel, Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1938), III, 1032.

⁷Ibid., p. 1034.

Christ's entrance into the world was God's redemptive rule breaking into time and space to release creation from bondage. The Savior's miracles, particularly His acts of healing, are illustrations of God's saving purpose in its full scope. Matthew 8:16 ff. records how the Savior cast out demons and healed the sick in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases."⁸ Christ points John the Baptist to the works which attest His Messiahship: ". . . the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up . . .," Matthew 11:5. His casting out of demons "by the finger of God," Luke 11:20, proclaimed the personal intervention of God to break the shackles in which Satan held the world. As W. Grundmann puts it,

Die Wunder Jesu sind ein Stück der hereinbrechenden Gottesherrschaft, die Jesus mit seiner Person in Verkündigung und Handeln bringt, sind Gottesherrschaft, die den dämonisch-satanischen Machbereich überwinden und zurückdrängen.⁹

He came to destroy the works of the Devil, 1 John 3:8.

The decisive act of Christ in restoring all things is His rising from the dead, for with the resurrection of the Second Adam, life has broken upon the order of creation, 1 Corinthians 15:20 ff. J. Jeremias remarks,

⁸ Revised Standard Version. All Scripture quotations infra are from this version unless otherwise noted.

⁹ Kittel, op. cit., II, 303.

Paulus bringt mit der gegenüberstellung Adam/Christus denselben Gedanken zum Ausdruck, der Jesu Selbstzeichnung als *bār nāschā* zugrunde liegt, dass nämlich Jesus der Erstling der Neuen Schöpfung Gottes ist. Wie am Anfang des *κίωv οὐτος* Adam als erster Mensch steht, so steht Christus am Anfang des *κίωv μέλλων* als der Anfänger der vollendeten, erlösten Schöpfung Gottes.¹⁰

Karl Heim shows that the Platonic separation of idea world and world of events must not be allowed to shrivel the implications of Christ's resurrection, for this event contains in it the final victory over demonic opposition which had disrupted the relationship between creature and Creator.¹¹ Such is the eschatological perspective of Hebrews 1:2, which describes the Son whom God ". . . appointed heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."

The Lord enthroned

The resurrection and ascension of the exalted Christ mark the entrance into this phase of lordship by pointing to His sonship and divine power. Romans 1:4 gives singular expression to the new status: ". . . designated [*ὁρισθέντος*] Son of God in power . . . by His resurrection from the dead [*ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν*], Jesus Christ our Lord." *ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν* is parallel to the firstborn concept of Colossians 1:18, signifying that Christ's sonship was

¹⁰Ibid., I, 143.

¹¹Heim, op. cit., pp. 186-7.

mightily demonstrated by a "Totenauferstehung," a resurrection such as that when dead persons rise.¹² The inverse of this thought is Colossians 1:19, which points to the divinity in Christ as the power through which He rose and completed the act of redemption: *ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι*. That *ὁ θεός* is the understood subject of *εὐδόκησεν* seems clear from the preceding verse, which describes the culmination of the divine purpose in Christ's earthly mission.¹³ It pleased God to have the plenitude of divine power reside in His Son¹⁴ in order that He might rise and become Lord of all.

The question immediately rises: How can Christ, pre-eminent from eternity, become Lord? The *ὀρισθέντος* of Romans 1:4 and the *γένηται* of Colossians 1:18 clearly state the fact. Also Philippians 2:6 ff. shows that God bestowed a name upon His Son, denoting a position which He had not held before. Hebrews 1:3, echoing Psalm 110, describes Christ's enthronement and share in the exclusively

¹²William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), p. 10.

¹³Heinrich A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians, and to Philemon, translated from the fourth edition (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1885), p. 237.

¹⁴Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 157. Cf. Meyer, op. cit., p. 237, for interpretation of *πλήρωμα* in 1:19, as "charismatic riches."

divine prerogatives of lordship: *ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης*. Thus on the basis of the completed sacrificial atonement the Savior enters a status which is more than merely a return to the Father.¹⁵ Yet Christ did not become Son of God, nor actually become Lord at His ascension, for these titles He claims from eternity, as Colossians 1:15-20 abundantly testifies. Rather Christ's majesty as Son and Lord is revealed to men through the incarnate Christ in successive stages. Michel explains,

Was Christus als Gottes Ebenbild besitzt und bezeugt, wird durch sein Erdendasein bewährt und bestätigt, durch seine Erhöhung dagegen vollendet und verwirklicht.¹⁶

The enthronement furthermore implies that the kingdoms of this world have fallen under His domain. The Messianic prophecy of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Daniel 2:34-35, portrays the destruction of the Image (world powers) by a stone not made with hands (Christ coming from outside of history). And the result is world dominion: ". . . But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth."¹⁷

All this appears fantastic unless it is clearly seen

¹⁵Otto Michel, Der Brief an die Hebräer (Heinrich A. W. Meyer Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament, Eighth edition; Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1949), p. 42.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁷Heim, op. cit., p. 213.

that Christ's lordship is now but not yet. Hebrews 2:8, following a reference to Christ's lordship over the universe, incisively expresses the tension of the Church: ". . . As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him." Christ's world lordship remains a *μυστήριον* seen by faith; the present lies between the exaltation and the consummation of His rule over all.¹⁸ "For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet," when the demonic forces which have been subjugated by the resurrection will be disempowered in the final destruction of death, 1 Corinthians 15:25-26. The Savior who did not vainly display His power during His ministry, nor after His resurrection, has chosen also to withhold for a time the full revelation of His complete lordship.¹⁹

Yet there is a direct connection between enthronement and final reconciliation, as Heim indicates,

Hier aber herrscht ein viel festerer, unzerreißbarer Zusammenhang als der zwischen Anfang und Ende. Es ist die notwendige Einheit zwischen der Sache und dem, was zu ihrem Wesen gehört, was also notwendig da sein muß, wenn die Sache selbst da ist.²⁰

Colossians 3:24 focuses on this future realization in the return of the exalted Christ: "For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life

¹⁸Michel, op. cit., p. 71.

¹⁹Heim, op. cit., p. 64.

²⁰Ibid., p. 71.

appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

The Lord of History

Although the principal concentration of the Church is directed toward the Second Coming, the present time and all of history have rich meaning through relationship to Christ's work. Scripture views history as the account of man's relation to God,²¹ and therefore all history finds its meaning in the Savior of the world. In contrast to the Greek conception of pointless, repeated cycles of time, the New Testament reveals a linear, continuous redemptive activity whose midpoint is the cross.²² Floyd V. Filson says of the New Testament witness,

It finds the significance of what he did so great that his work cannot be confined to one time and place. It ends with a view of Christ as the Son and Logos who acts for God in the entire range of his gracious purpose, from the original creation to the central redemptive activity in history and on to the new creation.²³

The Savior's death and resurrection are single acts within time, but are the culmination of God's saving activity in the Old Testament among His people Israel which foreshadowed the

²¹Leonhard Goppelt, "Heils offenbarung und Geschichte nach der Offenbarung des Johannes," Theologische Literaturzeitung, IX (September, 1952), 515.

²²Oscar Cullmann, Christ and Time, translated by Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), pp. 51 ff.

²³Floyd V. Filson, The New Testament against Its Environment (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1950), p. 35.

coming Messianic kingdom.²⁴ All subsequent world events occur in the light of Christ's enthronement and cast a shadow toward the consummation.

In the New Aeon, therefore, where God's redemptive work has expanded beyond a single chosen people to embrace all men, it is clear that what happened in Christ is decisive for the destiny of the cosmos. Ephesians 1:9-10 records the *μυστήριον* of God's will revealed in Christ: *κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν αὐτοῦ, ἣν προέθετο ἐν αὐτῷ εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν Χριστῷ, τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς*. The phrase *ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν Χριστῷ* indicates a gathering together of all things in Christ,²⁵ an alignment of the whole redemptive activity of God in the world around the crucified and risen Christ.²⁶ From Christ outward, all events take their place in God's redemptive plans. Stauffer remarks concerning these insights from the Letter to the Ephesians, "Erst mit Christus ist die Einheit

²⁴Otto A. Piper, God in History (New York: Macmillan Co., 1939), pp. 22-3.

²⁵Walter Bauer, Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur (Second edition; Gießen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1928), p. 87, translates Eph. 1:10: "Alles zusammenfassen in dem Christus." A discussion of various interpretations is given by George Stoeckhardt, Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, translated by Martin S. Sommer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1952), pp. 57-71.

²⁶Gullmann, op. cit., p. 91.

der Geschichte wiedergewonnen, jetzt erst kann die Heilsgeschichte Universal geschichte werden.²⁷ The conflicts, the contradictions within history and within the universe can be resolved only in the saving purposes of God in His Son, the Lord of all.²⁸

The Lord of the Church and the World

A serious consideration of Christ's complete lordship over the Church and over the universe inevitably raises the question of the relationship between the two kingdoms. Otto Perels, in a penetrating article, has shown the danger of the two extreme points of view:

Überbetonung der Grenze zwischen Kirche und Welt führt zur Aufgabe des Anspruchs Christi auf alle Bereiche und damit zur Verweltlichung. Verwischung dieser Grenze führt zur Geringsachtung der Heilsgaben Christi an seine Kirche und zur Rechtfertigung weltlicher Anliegen als solcher und damit ebenfalls zur Verweltlichung.²⁹

Luther's distinction between the Kingdom of Power and the Kingdom of Grace remains valid. Yet, as Karl Heim shows, there is danger of misusing the concept:

Wir engen die Führergewalt Christi ein, wenn wir ihm nur die Vollmacht zur Vergebung zuschreiben, aber glauben,

²⁷Kittel, op. cit., p. 438.

²⁸Otto A. Piper, "The Savior's Eternal Work," Interpretation, III (July, 1949), 291.

²⁹Otto Perels, "Kirche und Welt nach dem Epheser- und Kolosserbrief," Theologische Literaturzeitung, VII (July, 1951), col. 398. He comments on the viewpoints of Gullmann and Barth.

wir könnten die Naturordnung ohne ihn aus eigener Vernunft durchschauen.³⁰

To this Colossians 1:15-20 gives full support.

On the other hand, there is the serious danger of losing the distinctive nature and calling of the Church. An interpretation of Christ's lordship which tends in this direction is that of Oscar Cullmann, in Königsherrschaft Christi und Kirche im Neuen Testament, and more recently in Christ and Time. Cullmann views the area of Christ's lordship as two concentric circles, the inner one the Church, the outer one the world, with Christ at the center of both.³¹ The members of the state participate in Christ's kingdom, but unconsciously.³² And the distinctive characteristic of the members of the Church is that they are conscious of their participation:

. . . darin vor allem unterscheiden sie sich als Kirche von allen übrigen Gliedern des Regnums Christi, die im Dienste dieser Herrschaft stehen können, ohne es zu wissen.³³

Leonhard Goppelt criticizes,

Diese Formel verschweigt das Entscheidende. Christus ist in ganz verschiedener Weise Herr über beide Bereiche. Seine Herrschaft ist nicht gesetzliches Weltregiment,

³⁰Heim, op. cit., p. 259.

³¹Cullmann, op. cit., pp. 187-8.

³²Oscar Cullmann, Königsherrschaft Christi und Kirche im Neuen Testament (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1946), p. 34.

³³Ibid.

sie ist streng soteriologisch bestimmt. Die Herrschaft Christi über die Welt ist die negative Kehrseite seiner Herrschaft über die Gemeinde.³⁴

Although Gullmann mentions the outreaching expansion of the Church, he minimizes the antipathy of the world, and emphasizes principally the Christians' struggle with demonic powers.³⁵ Perels contends that these spiritual battles must be seen in all their fierceness and that the responsibility to witness dare not be weakened; world and Church are opposites:

Der Reichtum der Kirche wird verkleinert, bei ihr wird das "noch nicht" betont. Das Unter-Christus-Sein der Welt wird isoliert von der Tatsache, dass sie noch Finsternis ist und durch die Kirche zu Christus gerufen worden muss. Bei der Welt wird das "schon" betont.³⁶

Although the members of the world stand under the same King as do the members of the Church, a very definite distinction must be made between the two kingdoms, more than the factor merely of conscious or unconscious participation. Perels points the way toward a view which takes in account God's judgment upon sinners and maintains the true meaning of Christ's atoning work:

So sehr die Klammer zu betonen ist, die in Christus alle zusammenfasst, ist festzustellen, dass nach NT ein relativer, vorläufiger Dualismus innerhalb dieser Klammer besteht. Sonst wird auch hier das Eschaton preis-

³⁴Goppelt, op. cit., col. 517.

³⁵Gullmann, Königsherrschaft Christi und Kirche im Neuen Testament, pp. 42-3.

³⁶Perels, op. cit., col. 398.

gegeben. Bis bei Gottes jüngstem Gericht alles ihm untertan wird, besteht ein grundsätzlicher Unterschied zwischen der geschaffenen, aber im Ungehorsam abgefallenen Welt und der durch Christi Kreuzesblut erlösten Kirche. Nur in ihrem Bereich sind die *ἀγιοί*, wirkt das *πνεῦμα*. Und es ist nicht Demut, sondern Ungehorsam, wenn sie ihrer eigentlichen Aufgabe an der Welt entzieht, die Salzkraft verliert. Es geht hier nicht nur um die Schriftgemäße Verkündigung von der Kirche, sondern um die Bedeutung des Heilswerks Christi.³⁷

In this connection Perels notes that in Colossians, the section 1:15-20 which speaks of the all-inclusive lordship is followed very quickly by a reference to the specific relationship of "Christ in you," verse 27.³⁸ In conclusion Perels observes that the two dangers which lurk in our view of Christ's lordship, coarse dualism and vitiated atonement, are best avoided by maintaining a balanced doctrine of the Holy Trinity:

Die Einheit der Trinität bewahrt vor jedem grundsätzlichen Dualismus. Die Unterscheidung in der Trinität lässt Raum für die Lehre vom Sündenfall, für einen relativen Dualismus und damit für eine echt heilgeschichtliche Verkündigung von dem Werk Christi und der Sendung seiner Kirche.³⁹

Lord and God, all in all

The completion of Christ's lordship and the consummation of the cosmos are portrayed in the final verse of the section, 1:15-20: *καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ ἀποκατάλλαξις τῶν*

³⁷Ibid., col. 399.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., col. 400.

πάντα εἰς αὐτόν, εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ, δι' αὐτοῦ εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. Of the many interpretations of τὰ πάντα, verse 20, the most common have been a restriction to intelligent beings, to men, or to the universal Church.⁴⁰ In line with the whole trend of thought discussed above, particularly under verse 18, τὰ πάντα is best understood in an unrestricted sense: "The whole of that which exists."⁴¹ The subject of the infinitive ἀποκαταλλάσσει evidently is ὁ θεός as in 1:19; εἰς αὐτόν is reflexive, also referring to the Father.⁴²

The crux of interpretation lies in ἀποκαταλλάσσει and εἰρηνοποιήσας. In what sense is the reconciliation universal? If universal, how can the basis be the redemptive work of Christ?

Lightfoot, while including in τὰ πάντα the whole universe and declaring that it will be restored to harmony, is reluctant to speak further:

How far this restoration of universal nature may be subjective, as involved in the changed perceptions of men thus brought into harmony with God, and how far it may have an objective and independent existence, it

⁴⁰Meyer, op. cit., p. 240.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 158.

were vain to speculate.⁴³

Indeed many speculations have twisted the passage into a vague kind of harmony between creatures or a mystic absorption of the universe into God. A danger of a different sort is the "Christian Universalism" of Cullmann, which views the Church as a "remnant," representing all humanity as well as the universe toward a new creation, just as Israel in Old Testament times represented all nations in redemptive history.⁴⁴ L. Goppelt attacks Cullmann at this point, stressing that the consummation is inevitably accompanied by the Final Judgment, when all the great and mighty of the earth will flee the wrath of the Lamb, Revelation 6:16-17.⁴⁵

The difficulty with ἀποκαταλλάσσω is that it is used also in verse 22 in the sense of reconciling those to God who have been estranged through their evil deeds. But must the meaning of ἀποκαταλλάσσω always have this meaning, following the strict usage of καταλλάσσω in 2 Corinthians 5:19? Friedrich Büchsel finds the third (and final) occurrence of ἀποκαταλλάσσω, Ephesians 2:16, particularly valuable for shedding light on Colossians 1:20,

Kol. 1:15 redet von der Gnadenabsicht, die Gott bewiesen

⁴³Ibid., p. 157.

⁴⁴Cullmann, Christ and Time, pp. 116-7; 177-84.

⁴⁵Goppelt, op. cit., col. 517.

hat (*εὐδοκῆσαι*), die ganze Welt mit sich zu versöhnen, nicht von einer schon abgeschlossenen Weltversöhnung. *ἀποκαταλλάξαι* kann nicht nur die Aufhebung des Schuldverhältnisses durch Gott bedeuten, da es deutlich als Friedensstiftung, Kol. 1:20; Eph. 2:16 und als Neuschöpfung, Eph. 2:15 erläutert wird, also nichts nur Einseitiges ist und den Gesamtlebensstand des Menschen umfasst, nicht nur ein Schuldverhältnis Gott gegenüber.⁴⁶

The use of the term in Ephesians 2:16 seems to indicate that *ἀποκαταλλάξω* is not always used in the particular sense of 2 Corinthians 5:19. Since *ἀποκαταλλάξω* is found only three times in the New Testament and not at all in the Septuagint, there can be little argument against the possibility of a somewhat special use of the term in a context which speaks in universal terms.

A reconsideration of the full context strengthens this view. As the universe was created in Christ and subsists in Him, so also through Him it will reach consummation. As it exists for Christ, verse 16, so through the Son will the estranged world be reconciled to the Father. Christ's entrance into complete lordship, His destruction of all enemies leads to the final act of restoring the redeemed and judged world to the Father, 1 Corinthians 15:28. The question concerning the role of evil angels and the damned in the total reconciliation is probably best answered here, in the casting down of all opposition, a nullification (*καταρῆξις*) of the forces insofar as they relate to God, so that they

⁴⁶Kittel, op. cit., I, 259.

are irrevocably excluded from the New Creation.

The reconciliation will take place through the establishment of peace by the cross of Christ, for the redemptive work sealed by the resurrection involves the whole groaning creation and assures its final deliverance together with the sons of God, Romans 8:21. There is no room here for a mystic pacification of the elements in the universe. As Goppelt puts it, reconciliation of all is simply "die Eschatologische Wiedervereinigung der Schöpfung mit Gott,"⁴⁷ as described in Revelation 5:13:

And I heard every living creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever."

Beyond this we cannot see. As Heim writes concerning the mystery of the New Creation where God will be all in all, 1 Corinthians 15:28,

Wir können wohl sagen was das Neue, das Gott schafft, nicht ist. Wir können aber nicht sagen, was es ist. Wir müssen nur glauben, ohne zu schauen, sondern auch, ohne das Geglaubte vorstellen zu können.⁴⁸

Then will appear in full clarity and scope what now we see dimly, in miniature:

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever. Revelation 11:15.

⁴⁷Goppelt, op. cit., col. 517.

⁴⁸Heim, op. cit., p. 222.

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